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CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中國日報 WEDNESDAY, JUNE 7, 2023



President Xi Jinping, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, learns about local efforts in tackling desertification during an inspection tour in Bayannur in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region on Monday. YAN YAN / XINHUA

Xi highlights ecological security

President stresses need to strengthen efforts in nation's campaign against desertification

By XU WEI
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President Xi Jinping has highlighted the significance of strengthening desertification control and prevention to develop an even stronger green shield in the nation's northern regions and secure greater outcomes in building a beautiful China.

Speaking during a meeting with officials on Tuesday in Bayannur in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region, Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, called for sustained efforts to create new miracles in

tackling desertification. The strengthening of efforts to fight desertification and move forward with key ecological projects such as the Three-North Shelter Forest Program is a matter related to China's ecological security, the building of a strong nation and the sustained development of the Chinese nation, he said.

Xi spoke after hearing from Wang Guanghua, minister of natural resources, Sun Shaocheng, Party secretary of the Inner Mongolia autonomous region, Hu Changsheng, Party secretary of Gansu province, and Liang Yanshun, Party secretary of the Ningxia Hui autonomous region. Xi emphasized that China has

attained tremendous outcomes in its anti-desertification efforts over the past four decades through the launching of the Three-North program, the Grain for Green program and a project to tackle sandstorms in Beijing and Tianjin.

However, he pointed out that desertification remains a major global ecological problem threatening the very survival and development of mankind, with China among the hardest-hit countries in the world.

The majority of China's desertification took place in North, Northwest and Northeast China, and in less-developed areas and regions populated by ethnic minority groups, Xi said.

While recognizing the positive momentum in tackling desertification and land degradation in recent years, Xi stressed that China is still

faced with a large area, wide geographical distribution and high level of desertification.

The frequency of sandstorms in northern China has increased in recent years due to climate change, he added.

The president highlighted the period from 2021 to 2030, the sixth phase of the Three-North program, as the key phase for consolidating and expanding achievements in fighting desertification.

He reiterated the need to adopt a holistic approach to conserving mountains, rivers, forests, farmland, lakes, grasslands and deserts, and to prioritize the prevention and control of desertification, as part of broader steps to build up the shield for ecological security in northern China.

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Trade with China supports over 1 million jobs in US

By ZHAO HUANXIN in Washington
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China is the only country outside of the Americas whose purchases of goods and services from the United States support more than 1 million jobs in the world's largest economy, which is part of the reason policymakers should value the "stabilizing and beneficial" role of trade for both countries, according to the head of a US commerce association.

In 2021, an estimated 1.06 million US jobs were supported by the nation's exports of goods and services to China, ranking China alongside Canada and Mexico in the 1-million-job provider club, according to the latest US Exports to China report released last week by the US-China Business Council.

The report noted that 2021 is the latest year for which the employment data are available. During that period, US goods exports to China increased 22 percent year-on-year, and services exports increased slightly, creating an overall healthy environment for export-supported employment in the US.

USCBC President Craig Allen said the report on US exports to China again shows that China's purchases support US businesses and livelihoods, including farmers and ranchers in the heartland, entrepreneurs and innovators in and beyond Silicon Valley, and leaders in the semiconductor sector and manufacturers across the country.

"Every state and congressional district has a unique economic and trade relationship with China," Allen said.

"As policymakers in the United States and China each consider decisions related to the future of the bilateral relationship, it is important that they take into account the stabilizing and beneficial role of trade for both countries," he said.

Figures released by the US Department of Commerce in early February also showed that China maintained its position as the third-largest trading partner of the US for goods in 2022, accounting for 13 percent of total trade, following Canada and Mexico, at 14.9 percent and 14.7 percent, respectively.

The USCBC's annual report noted that China is one of the top five markets for all but three states in the US, and that its purchases supported nearly 500,000 more US jobs than the next highest country, the United Kingdom.

The report includes detailed information on exports to China from every US state and congressional district, and the resulting job creation.

For example, it listed California as the winner in terms of export-supported jobs, with more than 122,400 in 2021, an increase of 15 percent year-on-year.

In contrast, tourism-dependent states, such as Hawaii, saw the number of jobs supported by exports to China shrink by 69 percent, a loss of an estimated 1,900 jobs, according to the report.

As policymakers in the United States and China each consider decisions related to the future of the bilateral relationship, it is important that they take into account the stabilizing and beneficial role of trade for both countries."

Craig Allen, president of the US-China Business Council

In 2022, US goods exports to China increased 1.2 percent year-on-year, led by oilseeds, grains and pharmaceuticals, which saw double-digit growth from the previous year, but the semiconductor and energy sectors saw double-digit contractions, according to the report.

The USCBC report noted that US export controls on advanced semiconductors and semiconductor manufacturing equipment, which took effect in October 2022, inhibited exports to China.

"The more frequent use of export controls over the last few years has led Chinese customers to deprioritize American products when there are viable domestic and third-country suppliers," the report said.

On May 25, during a meeting in Washington with US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo, Chinese Commerce Minister Wang Wentao raised concerns over US policies on trade with China, as well as issues concerning semiconductors, export controls and a review of outbound investments.

Meanwhile, China has remained the largest source of international students at US campuses, with California, New York and Massachusetts benefiting the most — each seeing a more than \$1 billion contribution from hosting Chinese students in 2021, according to the report.

But it also noted that Chinese students are coming to study in lower numbers than before, citing uncertainties related to COVID-19 and travel as the likely chief reasons for a lower economic contribution from Chinese students in 2020 and 2021.

Other possible reasons include worsening geopolitical tensions between the US and China, US visa policies, personal safety considerations and increased competition from UK, Canadian, Australian, Singaporean and Chinese universities.

"These dynamics predate the pandemic and are likely to endure even if travel bounces back," the report stated.

Country offers distinct non-Western model of development

WORLD WATCH
By Dato' Abdul Majid Ahmad Khan

urbanization and the rise of capitalism. These developments propelled Western nations to positions of global power and influence as they became leaders in industrial production, trade and colonial expansion.

The spread of Western modernization also disseminated Western ideas, philosophies and innovations, which have had a worldwide impact through processes such as globalization, media dissemination and cultural exchanges. But Western modernization has its shortcomings. The Western-centric narrative of modernization sometimes overlooks the contribution of non-Western societies and their distinct paths of development.

One distinct non-Western development path that we are witnessing today is that of China's modernization.

See *Path*, page 3

STUDENTS TAKE TO THE ROAD TO BROADEN THEIR KNOWLEDGE

Learning tours prove popular with primary, secondary school pupils

By YANG FEIYUE
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Zhang Wanling recently learned a lot more about bridges.

The primary school student from Anshun, Guizhou province, toured the Balinghe Bridge in the city's Guanling Bouyei and Miao autonomous county. She saw various sections of this massive steel structure and learned how physics, chemistry and geology play roles in allowing suspension bridges to be built in mountainous areas.

"By studying the Balinghe Bridge, I learned about the differences among beam, arch, cable-stayed and suspension bridges," Zhang said. "The engineers



responsible for such constructions are truly remarkable."

With its deck standing at a height of 370 meters, the Balinghe Bridge is one of the tallest nationwide. Visitors strolling among the clouds along a sightseeing pathway on the bridge appreciate the mountain valley scenery and the convergence of nature and modern technology.

Policy incentives, diverse experiences and improved services are fueling such student learning trips.

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Game changer



Visitors gather around Apple Vision Pro headsets that were unveiled on Monday during the tech giant's annual developers conference on its Cupertino campus in California, the United States. It will sell for \$3,500 once it is released early next year. JEFF CHIU / AP See story, page 8

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Europe faces tough choices
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PAGE TWO

Trips: Educational destinations on the rise

From page 1

A recent report from the China Tourism Academy showed that a rising number of tours offer learning experiences for students.

More than 6 million people embarked on study tours last year, more than the pre-pandemic total of 4.8 million in 2019, data from the National People's Congress' Education, Science, Culture and Public Health Committee show.

Reservations for such trips more than doubled for the May Day holiday, domestic online travel agency Trip.com Group reported, and as summer approaches, inquiries about such tours continue to grow.

Wu Ning, an official at the bridge science museum situated next to the Balinghe Bridge, said, "We have developed study programs for children of different ages, from elementary to middle and high schools."

The museum showcases the history, technical innovation and craftsmanship of the numerous bridges in the province. It also displays model bridges and the components required for building bridges.

Wu said the Balinghe Bridge study tour helps students improve their understanding of bridge construction, while stimulating their imaginations and creativity.

Since last year, the museum has been visited by more than 600 schools for educational activities. On campuses with a total of some 50,000 teachers and students, it has also introduced over 100 activities themed on the science involved in building bridges.

"We've received very positive reviews from our visitors," Wu said.

The bridge is among the growing number of educational tourism hot spots across the country.

In Shanghai, Wang Xingyu has seen his business, which integrates education with rural experiences, surge this year.

"The pandemic is over and everyone wants to get out to commune with nature again," Wang said.

In 2017, he started Beyond the City, a company that arranges for middle and high school students to experience rural life.

Discussing the reasons for starting his business, Wang said, "I found that each village has its own distinctive culture and history, which can complement the knowledge imparted to students in the classroom."

"It's like moving training from the classroom to the grand auditorium of nature — enabling students to commune with rural culture."

Popular destinations

Wang has arranged for 20,000 students from major cities to study literature, social research, opera and architectural design during their stay in villagers' homes. The cities include Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen and Guangzhou, Guangdong province, Chengdu, Sichuan province, and Hangzhou, Zhejiang province.

Ganzi Tibetan autonomous prefecture in Sichuan and the terraced farmlands of Yunnan province are among the most popular destinations for students.

In Heze, Shandong province, students enjoy interacting with traditional rural arts troupes, while in Aoluguya, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, they meet members of the ethnic Ewenki community, Wang said.



Families stay at a resort in Beijing's suburban Miyun district, which integrates scientific exploration with natural and arts education in a rural setting. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Left and top right: Families take study tours in suburban Beijing.

Bottom right: Students visit the bridge science museum next to the Balinghe Bridge in Anshun, Guizhou province. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

“It's like moving training from the classroom to the grand auditorium of nature — enabling students to commune with rural culture.”

Wang Xingyu, founder of Beyond the City, a Shanghai company that arranges for students to experience rural life

Farming work is also arranged for students to better appreciate the value of labor. Each program, which typically lasts five to seven days, aims to enrich students' overall knowledge.

Wang attributes the success of his business to the introduction of the "double reduction" policy by the central authorities in 2021, which aims to reduce the burden of excessive homework and tuition on young students.

"This focus on quality education will boost learning outside the classroom," he said, adding that improved village environments as a result of the nation's rural revitalization policy are also crucial for meeting the requirements of learning tours.

"We've already contacted many international and private schools, and an increasing number of public schools have approached us," Wang said.

Fully booked

Li Junman, who has run the Hi Ma Ma resort in Beizhuang village, Miyun district, northeastern Beijing, since 2021, said, "Our summer camps this year are already fully booked."

The resort, situated on the site of a former textile factory, provides happy educational experiences for children and their parents during their stay.

"We mainly target primary and secondary school students, who have shown an increasing need for immer-

sive programs, rather than sightseeing and travel," Li said.

The resort, which integrates scientific exploration with natural and arts education in a rural setting, offers modern accommodations and catering services.

Li, whose business was not affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, said, "Over the past few years, schools and families have sought to enrich children's learning experiences outside the classroom, especially during weekends and major holidays."

"When cross-provincial travel was not advised, we received many students from Beijing."

With COVID controls lifted, Li has started to receive students from neighboring Hebei province.

To complement the school curriculum, he and his team have also diversified their programs, including those combining science and farming, as well as laboratory operations.

Li said he has been approached by many primary and middle schools in Beijing, and cooperation agreements have been signed for students to attend extracurricular programs at the resort.

Wang Yao, director of the social sciences division at Nanning Academy of Social Sciences in Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, said policy incentives have been the main contributor to the success of learning tours.

Earlier this year, the Ministry of Education and 12 other government departments issued a guideline to improve a cooperative mechanism comprising schools, families and communities to nurture the development of morality, intelligence, sports, art and a hardworking spirit among students.

Schools are also encouraged to make good use of resources, communicate with educational centers, organize field trips to teach students social responsibility and practical skills, and instill an innovative spirit, the guideline states.

It also requires communities to hold extracurricular activities for primary and secondary school students, and for museums, educational and cultural centers, sports, parks and arts venues to be open to primary school and preschool pupils for free, or at a discount.

Wang Yao said the "double reduction" policy has reduced the burden of homework and off-campus tuition on students taking compulsory education.

The policy also requires schools to design courses and homework more scientifically and reasonably to meet the comprehensive development needs of primary and secondary school students.

The main responsibility of family education has been standardized in the form of law. In promoting school-family and social collaboration, the focus of education has widened from textbook learning to embrace high moral standards,

physical fitness, life skills, cultural cultivation, and behavioral habits.

"As a result, the popularity of off-campus study trips has increased significantly in the past two years," Wang Yao said.

Guideline issued

In 2016, the Ministry of Education and 10 related departments issued a guideline for promoting study trips for primary and secondary schools. The guideline states that such trips are aimed at improving educational quality through experiential learning and study based on research, mainly for such students.

In the following years, many regions started to introduce their own policies to boost the study tourism market.

Guangdong, Yunnan, Henan and Hainan provinces, along with Beijing, have proposed arranging study practices for primary and secondary school students.

In the first four months of this year, thousands of study tours took place nationwide, including those in Huangshan, Anhui province, and Mianyang, Sichuan.

More than 600 primary and secondary school research and practice education bases were chosen by the Ministry of Education from 2016-2020, and over 6,300 research and practice courses and 7,300 high-quality routes were developed.

Dai Bin, president of the Chinese Tourism Academy, said the development of educational tourism promotes social education among primary and secondary school students, and also plays an important role in blending culture and tourism.

China should establish campsites for study travel in areas of natural beauty and rich cultural heritage, Dai suggested.

At the China Tourism Academy's industry division, Zhang Yang has been paying close attention to changes in the study tour market.

"In 2021 and last year, the number of companies engaged in the study tour business continued to grow," Zhang said.

Construction of national study tour camps is expanding, and there are now many more camps themed on sports, culture, industry and other fields, Zhang added.

Luo Shugang, director of the National People's Congress' Education, Science, Culture and Public Health Committee, said at a forum in March that the key difference between study travel and other tourism products is that the former focuses on learning while traveling.

Study travel in China dates to the Song (960-1279) and Ming dynasties (1368-1644), when ancient poets wrote of their experiences on such trips, Luo said.

"Through reform and opening-up, a study travel industry formed in China, which has seen rapid development in the past decade," he said, adding that primary and middle school students are the main participants in educational tourism.

Luo stressed that study tours must be closely integrated with the curricula for primary and secondary school students, and well linked to their learning ability, interests and hobbies.

He called for more efforts to help maintain the industry's development momentum, while forming and implementing requirements or standards to tighten supervision of the market.

"The essence of experiential learning travel is to give primary and secondary school students hands-on, interactive and engaging experiences, rather than just sightseeing and touring," Luo said.

"This is a unique feature that distinguishes such travel from traditional classroom teaching," he added.



Students from major cities across China pose for a photograph during a study tour in Huaihua, Hunan province, on which they took courses and experienced rural life. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

TOP NEWS

First China-built large cruise ship undocks

Construction of massive vessel hailed as marking nation's transition into major shipbuilding power

By WANG YING in Shanghai
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China's first domestically built large cruise ship, *Adora Magic City*, completed its undocking in Shanghai on Tuesday, bringing it a step closer to its long-awaited delivery by the end of 2023.

A ceremony was held on Tuesday to celebrate the vessel's complete transition to the dock mooring debugging stage. The cruise ship is scheduled to make its first trial voyage in July, and a second one will take place in August, according to its builder Shanghai Waigaoqiao Shipbuilding Co, a subsidiary of China State Shipbuilding Corporation.

"This is a new milestone in China's cruise ship manufacturing. Building large cruise ships is a symbolic accomplishment in China's shipbuilding industry, marking its transition from a large shipbuilding nation into a major shipbuilding power," said Chen Gang, general manager of Waigaoqiao Shipbuilding and the chief designer of the shipyard's large cruise ship project.

In what was a gigantic engineering project, the construction of the 323.6-meter-long and 37.2-meter-wide cruise ship required 12 million man-hours of labor. The mammoth cruise ship consists of 136 systems, more than 20,000 sets of equipment, 25 million components and parts, 4,200 kilometers of cable, 350 km of pipelines and 450 km of air pipes sourced from more than 500 global suppliers, according to CSSC.

"The first China-made cruise ship has overcome many challenges in its construction, and entered a new stage in accordance with the schedule," said Lin Guolong, director of Shanghai Maritime University's



China's first domestically built large cruise ship, *Adora Magic City*, completes its undocking process in Shanghai on Tuesday. Measuring 323.6 meters in length and 37.2 meters in beam width, the cruise ship can accommodate 5,246 guests. LONG WEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Logistics Research Center.

According to Lin, building large cruise vessels is seen in the shipbuilding industry as one of the most challenging tasks, equivalent to building aircraft carriers and liquefied natural gas carriers.

"During the past five years, *Adora Magic City* has overcome various challenges and become a vivid and colorful representative of China's cruise industry today," said Yang Guobing, chairman of CSSC Cruise Technology Development Co.

"In order to build this 'magic city' on the sea, we have cultivated project management capabilities to deal with huge and complex systems, established an independent cruise operation team, and promoted the localization of multiple core

systems such as IT, interior decoration and cruise supply," Yang said.

Construction of the vessel, which has a gross tonnage of 135,500 tons, is 93 percent completed, and over 85 percent of the interior decoration has also been completed, according to the manufacturer.

"The successful delivery of the vessel will make China one of the few countries, including Italy, France, Germany and Finland, that can build a cruise ship on its own," said Zheng Weihang, executive vice-president and secretary-general of the China Cruise & Yacht Industry Association.

Since the launch of China's first home port cruise operation in 2006, it has been a long-awaited dream of the Chinese shipbuilding industry

to have a domestically built cruise ship, and after 17 years, that dream is about to come true, said Zheng.

The jumbo ship can accommodate a maximum of 5,246 passengers with its 2,125 guest rooms ranging from standard rooms to presidential suites, and it will have a luxury hotel, cinemas and a water park on board.

In the meantime, it has the country's largest duty-free shopping center on board an oceangoing vessel, a 5G network, and the country's first live comedy theater at sea.

Aimed at offering a cruise experience blending Eastern and Western cultures, *Adora Magic City* has chosen Shanghai as its home port for its inaugural season. It plans to operate cruises by Adora Cruises to Southeast and Northeast Asian destina-

tions before launching mid-to-long haul routes such as the "Maritime Silk Road".

Adora Cruises is a leading provider of premium cruise experiences under CSSC Carnival Cruise Shipping Ltd, a joint venture between China State Shipbuilding Corporation, the world's largest shipbuilding company, and Carnival Corp & plc, the world's largest leisure travel company.

"Building large cruise ships is a tremendous breakthrough in China's shipbuilding industry and a demonstration of the country's high-end equipment construction capabilities and comprehensive scientific and technological level," said Chen Rangfeng, managing director of CSSC Carnival, the ship's operator.

Forests: Green 'Great Wall' to extend in decade

From page 1

Xi set out a target to develop the Three-North program, which was launched in 1978 to hold back the expansion of the Gobi Desert, into an unbreakable green "Great Wall" within a time span of 10 years.

Xi emphasized the need to prioritize key areas and launch three major landmark anti-desertification initiatives, calling for an intensified fight against desertification in the middle reaches of the Yellow River and in regions such as the Maowusu Desert, the Kubuqi Desert and the Helan Mountains.

He also laid out a plan to tackle the Horqin and Hunshandake deserts, both in Inner Mongolia. The protection of natural forests and grasslands in the Qilian, Tianshan, Altay, Helan and Liupan mountains must be strengthened across the board, including steps to restore degraded forests and grasslands, to prevent desertification, he said.

The president also called for a scientific approach in tackling desertification and highlighted the need to ensure the proper use

24.02
percent

China's forest coverage rate last year, doubled from 12 percent in the early 1980s

of water resources, which he said should serve as a decisive factor in planning greening efforts, the population of regions and production.

He called for extensive international exchanges and cooperation in fulfilling China's commitments to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

The nation will actively participate in global desertification and environmental governance efforts and strengthen cooperation with neighboring countries, supporting desertification control initiatives under the Belt and Road Initiative, he said, adding that Beijing aims to lead policy dialogues and information sharing among nations to jointly respond to sandstorms.

The meeting was held after a fact-finding trip by the president to Bayannur on Monday and Tuesday, a visit that took him to a nature reserve, a forest farm and a water resources monitoring center.

China has created the world's largest planted forests after intense afforestation efforts over the past decades, with its forest coverage rate more than doubling from 12 percent in the early 1980s to 24.02 percent last year.

Path: Malaysia open to learning from other models

From page 1

China's journey of modernization began in the late 1970s with the implementation of economic reforms and the policy of opening-up. This period marked a shift from a centrally planned economy to a more market-oriented system, unleashing the country's economic potential.

As a result of these reforms, China has become the world's second-largest economy and a major global power. It has achieved remarkable growth rates, lifted hundreds of millions of people out of poverty and created a burgeoning middle-income group. China's outstanding economic transformation is without question a powerful testament to the Chinese leadership's successful implementation of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

China's modernization progress

is evident in its technological advancements. The country has invested heavily in research and development, leading to breakthroughs in areas such as telecommunications, high-speed railways, renewable energy and artificial intelligence. China is now at the forefront of many emerging technologies and has a growing number of innovative companies.

Indeed, China's modernization process has resulted in remarkable economic growth, technological advancement, urbanization and improvements in living standards for the Chinese people.

China's successful modernization is a challenge to the idea that modernity is a single, uniform phenomenon that unfolds in the same way across all societies. Instead, the emergence of China suggests that there are diverse paths and variations of modernity that are shaped by unique historical, cultural, social and political contexts.

China's success is in fact a criticism of the prevailing perception that modernity must assume a specific form, often associated with Western values, institutions and practices, and that non-Western societies are expected to emulate the Western model of modernity.

The rise of China as a global power shows that different societies can experience modernization and develop their own distinctive forms of modernity. Indeed, China's model shows that there is also an Asian way to realize industrialization and modernization.

In Malaysia, we also recognize that modernity is not a monolithic entity, but rather a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that can manifest differently in different societies.

In fact, Malaysia's modernization process in the early stages largely followed the Western model, as our

then newly independent country implemented policies to promote industrialization and economic diversity.

In recent decades, as the relationship between Malaysia and China has grown closer and stronger, we are also drawing valuable lessons from the Chinese model of development. The China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative, for example, is helping Malaysia to move to the next level of economic growth and industrialization.

Recently, Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim launched the concept of Malaysia Madani, a Malay-language slogan that conceptualizes six core principles — sustainability, prosperity, innovation, respect, trust and compassion — to guide Malaysia's future development and transform it into an economically equitable and culturally vibrant country. I believe President Xi Jinping's

vision of a community with a shared future for mankind is also underpinned by similar values and principles. Indeed, our two countries have much to share and learn from each other, as we take our own distinct pathways to modernization.

China's modernization journey serves as a compelling example of the diverse paths and variations of modernity that can emerge in different societies. And Malaysia, like other countries in Southeast Asia, is open to learning from different models of development, including China's model. It is by recognizing and embracing multiple modes of modernity that we can foster a more comprehensive understanding of each other, and achieve a more harmonious coexistence between world civilizations.

The author is president of the Malaysia-China Friendship Association and former Malaysian ambassador to China. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

World Bank revises up China's growth to 5.6%

By ZHAO HUANXIN in Washington
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The World Bank has predicted China's economy will grow at 5.6 percent this year, up by 1.3 percentage points from its January forecast, but has revised down projections for most economies, as it sees global growth on a precarious footing amid high interest rates.

This prospect for China is rosier than that depicted by the International Monetary Fund in April in its World Economic Outlook, which forecast the country's growth to stay at 5.2 percent in 2023, when the world is embarking on a rocky economic recovery road.

The World Bank, in its Global Economic Prospects report released Tuesday, said that economic activity in China bounced back in early 2023, spurred by the earlier-than-expected economic

reopening, which drives consumer spending, particularly on domestic services.

China has set an around-five-percent projected target for gross domestic product growth in 2023. It posted a GDP growth rate of 4.5 percent year-on-year in the first quarter, a significant hike from the 2.9 percent in the last quarter of 2022, according to the National Bureau of Statistics.

Worldwide, growth is projected to decelerate from 3.1 percent in 2022 to 2.1 percent in 2023, according to the World Bank report.

That forecast is up by 0.4 percentage points compared with the global lender's January report, as activity in major advanced economies and some emerging market and developing economies (EMDEs) did not slow as much as expected at the turn of the year.

"Notably, the rapid reopening of China's economy contributed materially to an upward revision

“Notably, the rapid reopening of China's economy contributed materially to an upward revision to this year's growth forecast.”

Global Economic Prospects report released by the World Bank on Tuesday

to this year's growth forecast," it said.

On the upside, a more vigorous consumption recovery could support growth for longer than expected in China, where inflation is expected to remain below target, allowing monetary policy to remain mildly accommodative,

according to the report.

It forecast China's growth to slow to 4.6 percent in 2024 after rebounding to 5.6 percent this year, as moderating consumption offsets a small pickup in exports.

The World Bank said the key downside risks for China's economy include continuing stress in the real estate sector, a sharper-than-anticipated slowdown in global growth and trade, and the lingering possibility of disruptive COVID-19 waves.

At present, the country's property sector has begun to emerge from a protracted slump, supported by wide-ranging policies, it said.

In addition, weak external demand will dampen growth, and while the reopening will support services trade, subdued infrastructure and manufacturing sector activity will weigh on overall trade, as services activity tends to be less trade intensive, noted

the report.

In advanced economies, growth is set to contract from 2.6 percent in 2022 to 0.7 percent this year, and remain weak in 2024, the report says.

The US economy is poised to decelerate to 0.8 percent in 2024 after growing 1.1 percent in 2023, mainly because of the lingering impact of the sharp rise in interest rates over the past year and a half, the World Bank said in a release.

The World Bank cautioned that an intensification of geopolitical tensions presents a further downside risk, as do natural disasters, both to China and the rest of the East Asia and Pacific region, as they could increase uncertainty, disrupt trade, and hold back investment.

The countries in the region are already vulnerable to heightened tensions between China and the United States, given their strong trade and financial linkages with these two economies and their extensive integration in global value chains.

As for the EMDEs, the World Bank noted that although most of them have seen only limited harm

from the recent banking stress in advanced economies, they are now sailing in dangerous waters.

With increasingly restrictive global credit conditions, one out of every four EMDEs has effectively lost access to international bond markets, and growth projections for these economies for 2023 are less than half those from a year ago, making them highly vulnerable to additional shocks.

Indermit Gill, the World Bank Group's chief economist and senior vice-president, said that in 2023 trade will grow at less than a third of its pace in the years before the pandemic, and that in the EMDEs debt pressures are growing due to higher interest rates.

"The surest way to reduce poverty and spread prosperity is through employment—and slower growth makes job creation a lot harder," said World Bank Group President Ajay Banga.

"It's important to keep in mind that growth forecasts are not destiny. We have an opportunity to turn the tide but it will take us all working together," said Banga, who officially became the 14th president of the World Bank last week.

CHINA

SARs' legal experts bring skills to GBA

Policies promote better understanding of mainland's judicial development

By CAO YIN in Shenzhen, Guangdong
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The introduction of policies meant to improve the legal development of the Greater Bay Area can help Hong Kong legal professionals gain a better understanding of the mainland's legal and judicial systems by practicing law alongside their mainland counterparts, a top barrister in Hong Kong said.

In recent years, China has issued several policies to improve the legal development of the GBA.

In 2020, the country's top legislature announced that legal practitioners from the Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions could become qualified to work in nine cities in Guangdong province after passing an exam. This plan was implemented on a trial basis, and two qualifying examinations have been held so far, with hundreds passing.

The decision by the National People's Congress Standing Committee was seen as a way to expand the role of Hong Kong and Macao professionals, and expedite the integration of the development of the rule of law in the GBA.

Winnie Tam Wan-chi, former chairwoman of the Hong Kong Bar Association, has kept a close eye on judicial protection on the mainland. Tam said she is impressed by and grateful for the inclusive culture of the legal profession in Guangdong.

As a specialist in the field of intellectual property, she said she appreciated the Guangzhou Intellectual Property Court's innovative, flexible method that it uses to deal with a rapidly growing number of disputes.

The court works with various mediation institutes so that mediators can intervene before trials, which has played a significant role in the speedy resolution of dis-

putes, said Tam, who is also a member of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the country's top political advisory.

"I would like to pay a visit to the courts to see how they work in practice and whether litigants' interests are adequately protected," she said.

In her view, the use of both mediation and litigation to solve problems has been successful and should be used to resolve other kinds of civil disputes.

She said litigation service centers established by mainland courts should also serve as models for Hong Kong courts to help them improve their practices, as such centers provide assistance to civilians who are unfamiliar with the judicial process, giving them preliminary advice in filing cases in the correct manner, and even helping them solve disputes before they get to court.

"This is a genuine people-oriented community service provided by the courts. It's a judicial innovation," she added.

With the normalization of travel between the mainland and Hong Kong at the beginning of this year, she called for more mutual visits and face-to-face exchanges among legal professionals.

"During the COVID-19 pandemic, I continued teaching and sharing my experiences online with mainland agencies such as the Shenzhen Court of International Arbitration and the Shenzhen Lawyers Association," she said.

"However, as a barrister from Hong Kong, I felt that this sharing was a one-way street. It was difficult to elicit personal responses from those listening in, which made communication less effective. By having interactive communication in person, we can create better understanding and help each other grow."

Training days



Staff transfer crested ibis from Deqing, Zhejiang province, to a training cage on Tuesday at the Yancheng Wetland Rare Birds National Nature Reserve in Jiangsu province. Ten crested ibis were transferred to be prepared for wild release, in an effort to expand the population of the endangered bird. YI FAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Woman refuses to pay Qomolangma rescue fee

By CHENG SI
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Qomolangma, lying on the border of China and Nepal, and known as Mount Everest in the West, has trended on social media after a female mountaineer refused to pay the full cost of her rescue after being left for dead at over 8,000 meters by her Sherpa guide on the Nepal side of the mountain last month.

The 50-something was found by Fan Jiangtao, leader of a mountain-climbing team from Hunan province, at around 8 pm at the altitude of 8,450 meters on his way to the summit, at 8,848.86 meters, on May 18, reported Shangyou News, a media outlet of Chongqing Media Group.

The woman had been abandoned by her Sherpa after she was unable to carry on and her guide believed it too difficult to save her at an altitude of over 8,000 meters.

The Qomolangma "death zone" begins at a height of 8,000 meters. At that altitude and higher, there is not enough oxygen for humans to breathe and cells in the human body begin to die of oxygen deprivation.

Fan told Shangyou that he and other members of the team asked her whether she would join them before their departure but she refused. "We never thought that she would make it alone."

Fan said that he and another team member named Xie Ruxiang decided to give up their journey to the summit and rescue the woman by getting her to a base camp as soon as possible after promising a tour guide \$10,000 for helping them do it. The rescue work took them over four hours.

However, since recovering and her life saved, she has refused to repay the \$10,000 rescue cost and instead only agreed to pay \$4,000. Fan said that he and Xie had paid

the rescue fee up front, shouldering \$5,000 each, and he felt upset by the situation.

The reaction online has been visceral, with many commenters saying that the woman's actions were selfish and that she should pay for the full cost of the rescue that saved her life.

Qomolangma has two climbing periods, in spring and autumn, with moderate temperatures and softer winds. According to the Nepal Tourism Board, 12 mountaineers died and five went missing in the just-finished climbing window of late May to early June.

Unlike the dangerous journey conquering the summit, trips to Qomolangma base camp in the Tibet autonomous region are a more popular choice for travelers who can see the mountain from an altitude of around 5,200 meters.

"We saw a travel boom during the May Day holiday (April 29 to May 3) with many tourists visiting

the base camp in the region's Shigatse city," said Gyatso, a local tour guide. "Travelers needed to line up for at least half an hour or even an hour to take a picture in front of the stone marker with the altitude '5,200 meters' engraved on it."

He said travelers bound for the base camp usually depart from Lhasa, the region's capital, and stop at the urban area of Shigatse for sightseeing. They then travel to a town in the city's Dingri county and take a 50-minute sightseeing bus trip from the town to the base camp.

"The base camp we usually mention is for travelers while the mountain climbers have their base camp eight kilometers away. As far as I know, the mountain climbers should take at least one month of training before starting their journey to the Qomolangma summit and the training costs from 500,000 yuan (\$70,300) to even one million yuan," he said.

Grain in Ear



Villagers carry rice seedlings in a field in Yangwu town, Danzhai, Guizhou province, on Tuesday, or Grain in Ear, one of the 24 Chinese solar terms. The arrival of Grain in Ear signifies the ripening of crops such as barley and wheat. HUANG XIAOHAI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Xinjiang investigates forced shopping on group tours

By CHENG SI

The Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region is investigating several cases of travelers' rights being infringed upon during irrationally low-priced group tours or through forced shopping requirements.

According to a release from the region's culture and tourism department, several travel agencies in Shanghai and Wenzhou, Zhejiang province lured travelers with irrationally low-priced tours to Xinjiang from mid-April.

The agencies then outsourced local services for the group tours to two tourism companies in the region — Xiongle International Tourism and Xinjiang Juncheng International Tourism.

However, the two companies refused to offer services if travelers' spent less than expected at designated shopping stops.

The companies' improper and illegal behaviors damaged the interests and rights of 270 travelers from Shanghai, and Hangzhou

and Wenzhou of Zhejiang province, the department said.

Another 2,000 travelers from Shanghai and six other cities in three provinces — Zhejiang, Jiangsu and Anhui — experienced such treatment from the two companies after joining low-priced group tours to Xinjiang in mid-May.

According to the department, the tours to Xinjiang were offered for only 1,980 yuan (\$280) for an 18-day tour with accommodation, including a buy one get one free deal. However, the regular price for such tours is over 4,000 yuan per person.

The cases are still under investigation.

"It's a more attractive 'swindle' for old people, who have time for travel but are always frugal in life. My uncle, my father's older brother aged 67 this year, once booked a group tour to Sanya, Hainan province, with an amazingly low price — 888 yuan for four days and three nights. He said the salesper-

son of the travel agency told him it was a round trip including flights, which is irrational in reality as the single flight trip from Changsha to Sanya usually costs over 600 yuan," said Tan Zexin, a 28-year-old from Changsha, Hunan province.

He said his uncle paid a 500-yuan deposit, but didn't go as his family found something wrong with the trip and the company.

"My father heard that one of our neighbors had been cheated into buying fake jade, spending 5,000 yuan on another group tour to Yunnan organized by the company, so he stopped my uncle. It was a hoax to attract the elderly with low tour prices while luring them to make purchases at some designated stops during the trips."

Qi Chunguang, vice-president of the travel portal Tuniu, said, "We suggest travelers choose a regular or standard travel agency or tourism platform to book products and sign official contracts with the tour service providers to

consciously avoid irrationally low-priced tours."

He said travelers should improve their awareness of security during trips and keep evidence to make complaints whenever they experience improper treatment from tour guides or tourism companies, such as changing tour schedules without notice or forced shopping requirements.

To better regulate the tourism market, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism recently released a notice clarifying that irrationally low-priced tours are a "malignant tumor" on the market that severely hamper the high-quality development of the industry.

It requires local authorities to step up efforts to crack down on such tours and improper behaviors of touting products to travelers or forcing travelers to shop.

The ministry will publish the names of companies and tourism workers violating the regulation and enhance supervision over the market.

Pioneer Chinese scientist Lu Yuanjiu dies at 103

By ZHAO LEI
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Distinguished scientist Lu Yuanjiu, a recipient of the July 1 Medal, the Communist Party of China's highest honor, died on Tuesday in Beijing. He was 103.

Lu was one of the most decorated scientists in China and one of the founders of the nation's space industry.

He was an expert on automatic control, gyroscope and inertial navigation technology.

Born in January 1920 in Lai'an county, Anhui province, Lu was a

diligent student. He was admitted to the department of aeronautical engineering at the National Central University in Chongqing in 1937 and graduated four years later.

In 1945, he went to the United States to research inertial navigation at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology under the direction of Charles Stark Draper, known as the "father of inertial navigation", who played a key role in the Apollo lunar landing missions.

After receiving his doctorate at MIT, Lu continued his research in the US until 1956.

Due to the political atmosphere at the time, many scientists and students of Chinese origin working and studying in the US were prevented from traveling or returning to China.

The official reason was matters of confidentiality, but eventually Lu was able to overcome the US government's objections and returned with his family to China.

Soon after his return, Lu was tasked with helping to establish the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Institute of Automation, later being named its deputy director.

At the institute, he took part in

the planning and design work for the country's sounding rockets — one- or two-stage solid-propellant rockets used for probing the upper atmosphere and for space research — and satellites.

He also led the research and development of inertial navigation technology in China.

A host of equipment and technologies developed by Lu and his fellow researchers were used in the design and construction of the country's first satellite, which was lifted into orbit in April 1970.

From 1978 to 1983, Lu was director of the Beijing Institute of



Lu Yuanjiu

Aerospace Control Devices and also chief engineer at the ministry of astronautics.

Under his guidance, many achievements were made in research on inertial navigation and control technologies, laying a solid foundation for the development of new carrier rockets and spacecraft.

His academic accomplishments led to him being elected as an academician of the Chinese Academy of Sciences in 1980, an academician of the International Academy of Astronautics in 1985 and an aca-

demician of the Chinese Academy of Engineering in 1994.

He was a senior adviser to China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp and China Aerospace Science and Industry Corp, two leading space contractors.

In recognition of his service and contribution to the nation and the Communist Party of China, Lu was one of 29 Party members awarded the July 1 Medal, the Party's highest honor, by President Xi Jinping, who is also general secretary of the CPC Central Committee, at a ceremony at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing in June 2021.

The medal was conferred for the first time that year as part of the celebrations of the centenary of the CPC's founding.

POLICY REVIEW

Elective surgery requires better control

Strengthening supervision key to promoting healthy, safe growth of booming sector

By YANG ZEKUN
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Authorities have tightened supervision of the medical cosmetology industry and will use trans-departmental mechanisms to regulate its development, and protect the rights of consumers.

Eleven central departments including the State Administration for Market Regulation, the National Health Commission and the ministries of public security and commerce and the General Administration of Customs released a guideline requiring counterpart authorities to tighten supervision of the medical cosmetology industry last month.

The goal of the guideline is to maintain order in the market, protect health and safety, and encourage development of the sector.

It calls for authorities to adopt a problem-oriented approach, and to treat both the symptoms and the root causes of issues facing the industry according to the law, as well as to coordinate with each other.

It also tasked authorities with optimizing management of the medical cosmetology market, strengthening supervision both during and after treatment, deepening cross-departmental supervision, and adapting the regulatory system to the sector's development, to ensure that its growth is healthy.

Prominent issues such as illegal medical practices, counterfeit products, misleading publicity and excessive pricing have come to light as a result of the sector's rapid development, and have seriously endangered the health and interests of consumers according to an anonymous official from the State Administration for Market Regulation.

Between September and February, the State Administration for Market Regulation and 10 other central departments ran a special operation to deal with the most prominent problems.

Illegal institutions and violators were punished, a number of typical cases were investigated, and multiple long-term mechanisms were created, which helped curb ambient disorder in the sector, according to the SAMR.

However, supervision still faces challenges, and the industry still experiences occasional periods of chaos. Therefore, further improvements to the cross-departmental supervision mechanism are needed to raise regulatory efficiency and maintain a sense of order during diagnosis and treatment, as well as in the market, to protect health and lives, the official said.

According to the document, market regulation departments should oversee the scope of business medical cosmetology applicants seek, and ensure applicants make a written commitment not to engage in prohibited projects before they are given approval to operate. These commitments will be published publicly via the National Enterprise Credit Information Publicity System.

Authorities are also to improve the qualification examination, and any medical cosmetology services related directly to medical activities, as well as institutions without



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

the necessary health administration permits issued, are banned from providing further services.

To do so, health departments must refine the examination and approval standards and process, and control entry to the industry by new applicants. Details of every institution will be published after they have been licensed to practice by health departments.

In addition, market supervision departments and health administrations will share information regarding medical cosmetology institutions.

The documents tasks provincial departments with identifying concerns in their own medical cosmetology sector, and with placing matters such as diagnosis and treatment, marketing, drugs and medical devices on their list of regulatory priorities, and with updating that list regularly.

Health departments, other regulatory departments and judicial organs shall, in accordance with their respective duties, report risks uncovered in the sector, and estab-

lish a mechanism to better discover and handle them in order to properly and rapidly crack down on illegal behavior.

Unlicensed institutions, or those which employ staff without the necessary medical qualifications or abilities, may not engage in consultation, guidance or even use the internet to publish information about cosmetology, popular science or any other kind of professional information.

Illegal behavior such as making promises that do not conform to the law or to medical norms during consultation, commercial bribery or the shilling of drugs shall be severely penalized.

Supervision of training is also to be tightened, and acts such as offering training to staff lacking medical qualifications, or promises to issue "professional" certificates will be strictly penalized.

The document requires that in addition to strengthening the supervision of the medical cosmetology industry an intensive crackdown on disorder within the sector is to be maintained in order to remove insti-

tutions, doctors, medicines and medical facilities that do not conform to the law, and mandates the introduction of regulations to prevent bad money from driving out good money, which will result in a fairer and more orderly market environment and healthy development, the unnamed official said.

Regulation undertaken by many departments already focuses on the medical cosmetology industry, which is a good thing, and legally registered and run institutions warmly welcome tightened supervision, said Qin Yong, general manager of Sichuan Zhongke Jingmei Hospital Investment.

"Thanks to a large population, the medical cosmetology sector, technological progress and market cultivation have greatly developed. Medical cosmetology itself is closely related to economic development," he said.

According to data from Qichacha, a leading platform that provides data and analytics on private and public companies, there are 97,800 medical cosmetology-related companies in China, among which

28,500 were registered in 2021, a 225.7 percent increase on the previous year.

Last year, a further 33,400 companies were registered. In the first quarter of this year, 9103 new companies were registered, up 33.5 percent year-on-year.

Strong demand lies behind this explosive growth. The number of Chinese users of medical cosmetology is expected to reach 23.54 million this year, according to data released by Soyong, a medical aesthetics platform.

There are tens of thousands of registered medical cosmetology institutions in the country, and according to Qin, there are almost as many unregistered institutions in operation, as well.

He added that in the past, people did not view medical cosmetology as medical intervention, and excessive commercialization led to disorder in the sector.

The guidelines have made it explicit that medical cosmetology is medical intervention, which should help standardize the sector, he said.

Policy Digest

Farm machines mobilized as winter wheat ripening

With the wheat harvest in full swing, some 600,000 combine harvesters are expected to be in use this season, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs said.

Around 75 million mu (5 million hectares) of winter wheat has already been harvested, accounting for more than 20 percent of winter wheat planted in the country, the ministry noted in an online statement, adding that agricultural authorities are working with transport and meteorological authorities and oil companies to guarantee the smooth movement and operation of harvesters.

Continuous rainfall has been affecting Huanghuai, a major wheat producing area between the Yellow River and the Huai River, since late May, just as winter wheat crops were beginning to ripen.

In some places, humidity has resulted in mildew and caused the wheat to sprout, and wet soil has made it difficult for harvesters to operate.

Affected areas have been speeding up harvests by dispatching more farm machines, draining farmland, extending the working hours for harvesters and running grain drying facilities at full capacity, the ministry said.

It added that it is instructing local authorities to take advantage of the intervals between rain to speed up harvesting.

Screening for cervical, breast cancer is enhanced

Some 180 million tests for cervical cancer and 100 million tests for breast cancer have been conducted free of charge since the launch of a national program to promote screening for the two cancers in 2009, according to an official at the National Health Commission.

Screening has taken place in 2,600 counties, districts and cities across the country, said Song Li, head of the commission's Department of Maternal and Child Health at a news conference on May 31.

A tertiary prevention strategy will be enacted to further lower the threat of cervical and breast cancer, according to Song, and the country will push ahead with inoculations against HPV, and implement health education campaigns to increase women's awareness of the importance of self care in preventing cervical and breast cancer.

More regions will be encouraged to provide early screening, and efforts will be made to improve the abilities of medical workers, especially at the grassroots level, so that more patients are diagnosed and treated at an early stage, and so recover as quickly as possible.

New national standards for civilian drones released

The State Administration for Market Regulation has issued mandatory national safety standards for civilian drones, which will take effect on June 1, 2024.

The standards will serve as a guide for developing, testing and using civilian drones, the administration said in a statement issued on Friday.

Civilian drones, which are used extensively in a number of fields, including agriculture, forestry and meteorology, are easily converted for use in unlicensed or illegal flights, posing a potential risk to national and public security, according to the administration.

It added that some products developed by a small number of companies are poorly designed, potentially posing a risk to lives and property.

WANG QINGYUN

Authorities join forces to iron out wrinkles in medical cosmetology

By YANG ZEKUN

Administrative and judicial authorities are intensifying the fight against illegal activities in the field of medical cosmetology to ensure the healthy development of the sector.

Last month, eleven central departments issued a guideline on strengthening supervision of medical cosmetology to regulate the sector's development and protect consumer rights, which grew out of the findings of a nationwide operation conducted between September and February.

As early as 2017, multi-department crackdowns were already being

undertaken to regulate the sector.

Between May 2017 and April 2018, seven central departments including the health department, public security and medical product administration carried out an operation targeting problems in the sector ranging from operations to the injection of substances such as sodium hyaluronate, collagen and botulinum toxin, as well as breaches of training and advertising. Some illegal medical devices, products and forms of plastic surgery were also targeted and suppressed.

Then between June 2021 and December 2021, eight central departments launched another nationwide

operation to crack down on illegal services and the illegal manufacture and sale of drugs and medical devices, and investigated advertising and internet promotional material that also contravened the law.

In one typical case, part of the most recent operation, police in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, found that suspects had bought freeze-dried powder, bottle caps, fake packaging materials, labels and instructions, and then had teams packing and producing counterfeit versions of well-known brands of Botulinum Toxin, a substance widely used in medical cosmetology. They also hired agents and arranged for sales through institu-

tions such as beauty salons. The police filed a case for investigation in September, and have since apprehended 20 suspects and seized over 500 bottles of counterfeit drugs and 1,000 examples of counterfeit packaging materials worth around 32 million yuan (\$4.5 million). The case is currently under further investigation.

The State Taxation Administration, the Supreme People's Court and the Supreme People's Procuratorate have joined efforts for the first time to regulate the industry, according to a guideline issued last month.

Qin Yong, general manager of Sichuan Zhongke Jingmei Hospital Investment, said that as governance

of industry may include tax and criminal investigations, it was reasonable to include the three departments in the document.

The SPP and the SPC were already ruling on problems in the medical cosmetology industry before the guideline was issued. According to the SPP, procuratorates approved the arrest of 306 people for alleged criminal offenses, officially charged 381 and filed 838 public interest litigation cases between September and the end of March.

Procuratorates have also issued 465 procuratorial suggestions to administrative authorities since then to push forward the resolution of

prominent issues affecting the public's rights and interests, the SPP said.

One typical case of consumer rights protection issued by the SPC on March 15 clarified that the Law on the Protection of Consumers' Rights and Interests can be applied to cases of medical cosmetology infringement.

In late April, the State Administration for Market Regulation issued a sample text for a Medical Cosmetology Consumer Service Contract to standardize the practice. It urged institutions to regulate marketing behavior and not create "appearance anxiety" through publicity materials.

The sample text reminds consumers of the complexity and uncertainty of medical cosmetology and encourages them to have balanced expectations for its effects.

WORLD

Sino-Thai ties set to pick up momentum

Relations will be maintained no matter who leads next government, experts say

By YANG WANLI in Bangkok
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The long-term friendship between China and Thailand and their well-maintained strategic partnership will be maintained no matter who is to lead the next government of Thailand after the major general election, said Thai experts.

The opposition parties secured majority seats in the lower house of parliament with the Move Forward Party, or MFP, with 151 seats and Pheu Thai with 141 seats in the Thai general election on May 14. The winning was labeled by media as "cutting the edge" as MFP, the young and new party, stormed the Thai electoral arena.

"The winning is a start of a new chapter for Thailand, which may have the third way out from the monopoly of the traditional power," said Suthiphand Chirathivat, emeritus professor of economics and executive director of the ASEAN Studies Center at Chulalongkorn University.

However, recent remarks from MFP leader Pita Limjaroenrat on his party's foreign policy triggered speculation on a possible turning of the country's diplomatic attitude toward China, as he said the party's foreign policy would be based on a "rule-based world order" with less focus on "bamboo diplomacy".

"I don't think that reveals any negative attitude, because the bamboo is a symbolic item of 'flexibility', which is the nature of diplomatic policy implementation in line with the superpowers that played a role at that time," said Suthiphand.

Given the long friendship between the two countries and their deep connection covering a wide range of areas, including trade, education and person-to-person communication, he said the new government and its leader will not be likely to lead a crucial change in current Sino-Thai relations.

"What he really meant is that there will be no longer 'silence' on some diplomatic issues under the leadership of MFP," he said. "Thailand plays an important role among ASEAN members and it also serves as a bridge connecting China and other ASEAN states."

His point is echoed by Peerasit Kamnuansilpa, dean of College of Local Administration at Khon Kaen University, who believes that Thailand will not make any changes in its foreign policy toward China.

"Thailand is very careful about its relations with China, no matter who becomes the next prime minister," he said. "The Cold War period is long over. There is no longer the fear of a takeover by a major power and

Thailand will build its relationships with any country based on its state interests."

In late May, MFP and its seven allies signed a memorandum of understanding, agreeing to the policies of the government they plan to form together.

Geographical advantage

"In terms of several major areas, there's great potential for cooperation between Thailand and China as the two countries enjoy geographic advantages and a historically long friendship," said Chang Cheng, a scholar from Thailand's Siam Think Tank. Particularly with its great experiences in innovative technology, agriculture, and green development, he said China will be a good partner for Thailand.

The election of the Thai prime minister will be on schedule in two months. The MFP still has another difficult task ahead of forming a coalition government, which is reflected in its recent tussle with Pheu Thai over who should secure the House Speaker's post.

The MFP has many draft laws in store which need to be pushed through for parliamentary debate with the help of the House Speaker. Having a speaker who is a member of the MFP would ensure this happens, according to the party. However, critics say it lacks experienced personnel for the job and should make way for its coalition partner, as it can hardly hope to take office without Pheu Thai's help.

Peerasit said Pita will still face tough challenges as some of the existing powers see him as too radical. "But the positive thing is Pita has made it clear which direction and what achievements the public can expect from his party and from himself," he added.

However, Pita himself was recently trapped in the shareholding violation complaints, calling into question his status as an MP and as the future prime minister as he is reported to hold 42,000 shares in iTV, an independent broadcaster founded in the 1990s.

According to Thai election law, a candidate is constitutionally barred from contesting an election if he or she owns a stake in a media company. The Election Commission has started a probe into the complaints and the result is yet to be released.

Phichai Ratmatilaka Na Bhuket, program director for politics and development strategy at the National Institute of Development Administration, said if the MFP fails to form a coalition government, the country will be rocked by divisions and conflict.

Rare return



Several silver objects looted during the Nazi era are displayed at the Bavarian National Museum on Monday. This is the first time the museum in Munich has returned the looted objects to Jewish descendants of the owners in Israel. CHRISTINA STORZ / ASSOCIATED PRESS



People walk past France's Mont-Saint-Michel in Normandy on Monday. LUDOVIC MARIN / AFP

Beloved abbey celebrates 1,000th birthday

PARIS — France's beloved abbey of Mont-Saint-Michel has reached a ripe old age. It's been 1,000 years since the laying of its first stone.

The millennial of the UNESCO World Heritage site and key Normandy tourism magnet is being celebrated until November with exhibits, dance shows and concerts. And now a presidential visit.

French President Emmanuel Macron went there Monday and delivered a speech in which he called on the French to "push themselves further" in global and existential challenges like that of climate change. He drew a comparison with the abbey that has stood strong over time and embodies the "French spirit" of "resilience" and "resistance". It was veiled rhetoric, coming one day before another protest against his contested pension reform law that has been passed.

Ever since former president Francois Mitterrand in 1983, France's leaders have flocked to this symbolically important site to

send out political messages. In 2007, former president Nicolas Sarkozy even launched his presidential campaign there.

Macron's presidential advisers had said of this visit that the "walls and the eternity of the Mount" seem to carry "the notions of resistance and resilience" of the D-Day landings that are being commemorated this week in the same region.

New exhibit

Macron also visited a new exhibit tracing the Romanesque abbey's history via 30 objects and pieces, including a restored statue of Saint Michael. Legend has it that the archangel Michael appeared in 708, duly instructing the bishop of nearby Avranches to build him a church on the rocky outcrop.

The exhibit, two years in the making, opened last month. It covers the complex process of building what is considered an architectural jewel on a rocky island linked to the mainland only

by a narrow causeway at high tide.

Four crypts were constructed on the granite tip along with a church on top. The exhibit explains how the original structure, built in 966, became too small for pilgrims, spurring on the builders to create the 11th-century abbey that stands to this day.

France has spent more than 32 million euros (\$34 million) over 15 years to restore the building, and the work is nearing completion. Authorities have also tried in recent years to protect the monument's surrounding environment from the impact of mass tourism.

One of the most popular French destinations outside Paris, Mont-Saint-Michel island attracted 2.8 million visitors last year, including 1.3 million for the abbey. It was not closed to visitors for the presidential visit, but local authorities were taking measures to make it go as smoothly as possible.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Soviet-era dam breached in Kherson

MOSCOW/KYIV — A major Soviet-era dam in the Kherson region was breached on Tuesday, unleashing floodwaters in what both Russia and Ukraine said was an intentional attack by the other's forces.

Unverified videos on social media showed water surging through the remains of the dam with bystanders expressing their shock. Water levels raced up by meters in a matter of hours.

The Kremlin on Tuesday said the attack on the Kakhovka dam was "deliberate sabotage" by Kyiv, which wanted to cut off Crimea from water.

Russian news agencies said the dam, now controlled by Russian forces, had been destroyed in shelling while an official said it was a terrorist attack.

The extent of destruction is very serious and restoring it will be comparable to building it from scratch, head of the local administration Vladimir Leontyev said.

The evacuation of areas near the Kakhovka region in southern Ukraine has begun, the governor of the Kherson region said on Tuesday.

"Within five hours the water will reach a critical level," regional governor Oleksandr Prokudin said on Telegram.

Russia's TASS state news agency cited emergency services as saying that some 80 settlements in the area may be affected by the destruction of the Kakhovka dam.

Ukraine, however, accused Russia of blowing up the Kakhovka hydroelectric plant. Mykhailo Pod-



An overview of Kakhovka dam on May 28, 2022. AFP

olyak, a senior adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, said that "a global ecological disaster is playing out now".

The dam, 30 meters tall and 3.2 kilometers long and which holds water equal to the Great Salt Lake in the US state of Utah, was built in 1956 on the Dnipro River as part of the Kakhovka hydroelectric power plant.

It also supplies water to the Crimean Peninsula, and to the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant, which gets cooling water from the reservoir.

The International Atomic Energy Agency said there was no immediate nuclear safety risk to the plant due to the dam failure but that it was monitoring the situation closely. The head of the plant also said there was no current threat to the station.

Russia's state nuclear energy cor-

poration Rosatom said on Tuesday that the breach did not pose a threat to the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant for now where it said the situation was being monitored.

Yury Chernichuk, director of the power station, said in a statement on the Telegram messaging app that the situation at the nuclear plant was stable.

"At the moment, there are no threats to the safety of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant," he said.

The dam breach came as Ukraine is preparing to launch its long-awaited counteroffensive. Russia said it had thwarted another Ukrainian attack in eastern Donetsk and inflicted heavy losses. It also launched a fresh wave of overnight airstrikes on Kyiv.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

French protests show signs of fatigue

By JULIAN SHEA in London
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France witnessed another day of nationwide protests on Tuesday in the latest show of dissent against President Emmanuel Macron's pension reforms. Despite still pulling large crowds, estimated numbers were expected to be less than half the total who took to the streets as recently as March.

The latest protest was the 14th day of action this year against the reforms of the welfare system that will see many people having to work up until the age of 64, not 62, as is the case now.

In March, the government used a special constitutional tool to pass the reforms without the need for a vote in Parliament, which angered many people, a feeling that has not gone away, but the smaller number of protesters than before suggests that the protest movement may be running out of steam.

"Protests have been going on for six months, it's unprecedented," Sophie Binet, leader of the hard-line CGT union, told 24-hour news television channel BFM TV. But, she added "there's a lot of anger but also fatigue".

'The last days'

Laurent Berger, leader of the more moderate CFDT union, appealed to radio station Europe 1 that "this is likely to be one of the last days of protests against the reform", and that instead, unions must translate their anger into what he called a "show of strength" in future talks with the government.

A bloc of left-wing parties in the National Assembly had called for a ruling to be made on whether Parliament could vote to overrule the decision, and had pleaded with the nominally neutral speaker of the house Yael Braun-pivet, a member of Macron's ruling party, to allow it, but the move looked unlikely to succeed.

"For our fellow citizens, a new denial of democracy will only lead to increased disaffection for our institutions, which is already manifesting itself in the form of growing abstentionism, and even an increase in anger and violence," said an opinion piece written by leading left-wing figures, published in Le Monde newspaper.

Although some schools were closed by strike action, and one-third of flights out of Paris-Orly airport were canceled, national railway operator SNCF said it hoped to run 9 out of 10 services, and the metro system was not likely to suffer significant disruption.

Macron, who was reelected president just over a year ago, but whose party did not see his personal success repeated in the subsequent parliamentary elections, has been the target of much public anger during the dispute, but has insisted that reform of the system is necessary for the long-term economic health of the country.

He now seems to have weathered the political storm, with his opinion poll ratings, while still not being particularly high, having risen, something he hopes will be bolstered by an improvement of the country's inflationary situation.

WHO launches digital health partnership with EU

By CHINA DAILY

The World Health Organization and the European Commission announced on Monday the launch of a digital health partnership that will expand the use of the European Union's system of digital COVID-19 certification.

According to the WHO's news release on Monday, the global health agency will adopt the EU's COVID-19 digital certification program from this month, and build a global digital health certification

network based on the principles and open technologies of the EU legacy.

The EU's COVID-19 certificates started in June 2021 to facilitate safe travel for citizens across the bloc at a time when countries issued border restrictions to curb the spread of the virus.

Travelers' vaccination and test results are shown on the documents to prove their health status.

The partnership means the current EU digital certificates, set to expire this summer, will be

extended for global use. It will also be used for the control of other pathologies, and possibly other pandemics.

Additional features, such as digitized international routine vaccination cards, may also be included in the network.

A total of 51 countries across four continents have been involved in the system, the European Commission said on its website.

"The WHO aims to offer all WHO member states access to an open-source digital health tool, which is

based on the principles of equity, innovation, transparency and data protection and privacy," Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the WHO's director-general, was quoted as saying.

The network will not allow access to people's underlying personal data, the WHO said.

Thierry Breton, the bloc's commissioner for internal market, said the EU has set a global standard.

Zheng Wanyin in London contributed to this story.

WORLD US

Shooting protested



Protesters confront Marion County sheriff's deputies at the Marion County Courthouse on Tuesday in Ocala, Florida. Authorities came under pressure to bring charges against a white woman who killed Aijke Owens, a 35-year-old mother of four, a black neighbor, on her front doorstep, as they navigated Florida's stand your ground law that provides considerable leeway to the suspect in making a claim of self-defense. JOHN RAOUX / AP

Oklahoma board approves state-funded religious school

By AIHEPING in New York
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An Oklahoma state board has approved what would be the country's first taxpayer-funded, religious charter school, despite a state law prohibiting such schools. A legal challenge to the approval could reach the US Supreme Court, and test the US Constitution's concept of separation of church and state.

On Monday, Oklahoma's Statewide Virtual Charter School Board approved the plan to create the St. Isidore of Seville Catholic Virtual School, in a three to two vote. The board is a state entity that considers applications for charter schools -- publicly funded but independently run -- which operate virtually in Oklahoma.

The board approved the school in defiance of an Oklahoma state law requiring public schools to be free of control from any religious sect. Oklahoma Attorney General Gentner Drummond warned the board that its approval was unconstitutional and would create a "slippery slope" toward state-funded religion.

He said in a statement shortly after the board's vote: "It's extremely disappointing that board members violated their oath in order to fund religious schools with our tax dollars. In doing so, these members have exposed

themselves and the state to potential legal action that could be costly."

The school would open in 2024, serving students in kindergarten through grade 12 across the state. The school's application said it aimed "to educate the entire child: soul, heart, intellect and body". It was anticipated that \$23.3 million in state funding would be required over the school's first five years.

Charter schools are publicly funded, independently run schools established under the terms of a charter with a local or national authority. There are two dozen charter schools across Oklahoma, according to the state's Department of Education.

Any future court battle over St. Isidore could test the scope of the US Constitution's First Amendment "establishment clause," which restricts government officials from endorsing any one religion or promoting religion over nonreligion.

But advocates for St. Isidore of Seville said recent Supreme Court rulings state that a private entity can't be excluded from public programs, including a state's education system, on religious grounds.

The concept of a religious charter school has gained support from other Republican leaders in the state, including Oklahoma Governor Kevin Stitt and state schools Superintendent Ryan Walters.

"This is a win for religious liberty and education freedom in our great state, and I am encouraged by these efforts to give parents more options when it comes to their child's education," he said.

"Politicians in Oklahoma and some of these other states want this. They see the Supreme Court moving in that direction," said Preston Green, an education and law professor at the University of Connecticut who has written about the possibility of religious charter schools. "It has major implications nationwide."

In April, the board rejected an application for the school over concerns with its structure of governance, its plan for special education students and its ability to keep private and public funds separate. The archdiocese adjusted and resubmitted a 400-page application, prompting Monday's vote.

During Monday's three-hour meeting, board members debated the constitutionality of approving the decision, but decided to move.

John Meiser, managing director for domestic litigation at the University of Notre Dame's Religious Liberty Clinic, said there is precedent that the school should be approved even with its religious affiliation.

"The Supreme Court has repeatedly made clear, three times in the last six years alone, that programs

just like this cannot exclude religious organizations from participating. That is just fundamental First Amendment federal constitutional law," said Meiser, who assisted in the application for the school.

Archdiocese officials have said that the school will promote the Catholic faith and operate according to church doctrine, including its views on sexual orientation and gender identity, raising questions as to whether St. Isidore of Seville would abide by all federal non-discrimination requirements.

Americans United for Separation of Church and State criticized the board's approval.

The advocacy group's president and CEO Rachel Laser said in a statement that the decision violates the religious freedom of Oklahoma taxpayers and public-school communities. Laser said the group will work with state and national partners to pursue possible legal action against the decision.

"State and federal law are clear: Charter schools are public schools that must be secular and open to all students," Laser told USA TODAY in a statement. "No public school family should fear that their child will be required by charter schools to take theology classes or be expelled for failing to conform to religious doctrines."

Agencies contributed to this story.

Africa mulls alternatives to US dollar

Experts moot single payment system within continent to facilitate trading

By EDITH MUTETHYA
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A question on whether African countries should ditch the United States dollar and seek alternatives as the continental currencies continue to weaken against the dollar and worsen the cost of living, has received mixed reactions from both leaders and experts.

On Monday, Kenya's President William Ruto called on African leaders to move toward ditching the US dollar by signing up to a Pan-African Payment and Settlement System to facilitate and boost intra-African trade.

The payment system is an African Union infrastructure developed in collaboration with the African Export-Import Bank to complement trading under the African Continental Free Trade Area.

Banks and payment providers could plug directly to the system to enable secure and instant payments in local currencies, to reduce or eliminate the challenges of cross-border payment, Ruto said.

"All our businessmen and traders are struggling to make payments for goods and services from one country to another because of differences in currencies. And in the middle of all these, we are all subjected to a dollar environment."

Xn Iraki, associate professor at the University of Nairobi's Faculty of Business and Management Sciences, said ditching the dollar will not be easy, and the US might fight back because most of the debts and trade are dominated in dollars.

African government and policymakers would have to solve the riddle of the currency that will replace the dollar, whether multiplicity of currencies could make matters worse and whether trade would flow if a more stable currency replaces the dollar, he said. "It's not clear which currency will replace the dollar. Euro? RMB? I foresee a multiplicity of currencies before a dominant one arises."

Innovations such as Bitcoins could make another dominant currency unnecessary, Iraki said.

Meanwhile, signing up to a Pan-African Payment and Settlement System would make trade easier, he said.

African countries should go farther and get a single African currency to facilitate trade within the continent, he said.

"But remember, currency is not the only hindrance to trade. Poor infrastructure, conflicts and ties to colonial powers stand in the way."

If the dollar is dropped, it would attenuate the US influence, Iraki said, noting the dollar's status as the world's reserve currency gives Washington uneven amount of influence over other economies, such as the ability to impose sanctions to achieve its foreign policy goals.

Aly-Khan Satchu, a leading African investment banker in Kenya, said Africa is yet to arrive at the "dollar-ditching" moment.

Following global trends

"This is way too premature. However, there is no reason why intra-Africa trade flows and cross-continent African trade cannot escape the guardrails of the dollar system and follow the trends we are witnessing globally," he said.

"For example, the Chinese yuan is now 5 percent of global trade from 1 percent. Therefore, I think we are at the beginning of a trend rather than a regime-change moment."

Recent dollar shortages in African countries, the African Continental Free Trade Area and other global geoeconomics developments all indicate that the Pan-African Payment and Settlement System momentum is heaving into view.

The decision by US authorities to sanction Russia's reserves, which also the Europeans apparently are considering doing, was a singularly suboptimal move with respect to the dollar, Satchu said.

The scenario made countries across the globe start to aggressively look for mitigation measures, he said.

"We have already witnessed a sharp slide in dollar reserves, which fell from 55 percent in 2021 to 47 percent in 2022, which is an unprecedented 8-percentage-point drop in a single year."

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

Vol. 38 - No. 1105

US ex-V-P Pence to seek GOP nomination, to face Trump

By AIHEPING in New York

Former US vice-president Mike Pence -- the once-loyal deputy to Donald Trump who ended his bid to cling to the presidency -- is joining the race for the Republican presidential nomination Wednesday, forcing him to navigate competition -- and confrontation -- with his former boss.

Pence on Monday filed the paperwork for his bid for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, and will formally announce his candidacy in Des Moines, Iowa, which holds the first caucus on the Republican primary calendar.

Republicans are aiming to hold their Iowa caucuses in mid-January, but that remains unsettled. Pence's kickoff event will be on the same day of his 64th birthday.

Republicans face a crowded field, with the candidate list growing to more than half a dozen this week. Former New Jersey governor Chris Christie, who also ran in 2016 and has become one of Trump's chief Republican critics, is poised to join the race Tuesday evening at a town hall event in New Hampshire. North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum is expected to announce on June 7 in Fargo.

Iowa has played a winnowing role in nominations fights for both Republicans and Democrats, helping some candidates while killing the hopes of the rest. It will be the first testing ground for how Pence and others seeking the GOP presidential nomination



US Republican presidential candidate and former vice-president Mike Pence looks on at the "Roast and Ride" event hosted by US Senator Joni Ernst while campaigning in Des Moines, Iowa, on Saturday. DAVE KAUP / REUTERS

will try to distance themselves from Trump, the party's most popular figure, while trying to win the backing of his supporters without alienating them, and even those Republicans open to someone else but who still like Trump.

Trump still has a firm grip on conservative voters, and Florida Governor Ron DeSantis -- who announced his candidacy last month -- is seen as the only real threat to Trump.

Pence served as a member of the House of Representatives between 2001 and 2013, and as Indiana's governor between 2013 and 2017 and was Trump's runningmate in 2016.

So far, Pence has polled in the single

digits in every public survey taken.

In a hypothetical matchup, a May 25-30 YouGov/Yahoo News poll found DeSantis would lose to Trump by approximately 24 points in a one-on-one primary, while Pence would lose to Trump by nearly 60 percentage points.

Every announced candidate for the GOP nomination has one target: Trump. But Pence perhaps faces the biggest challenge of all of them. He needs to redefine himself to Republican voters and emerge from being in Trump's shadow for four years, and from being an exceedingly loyal vice-president.

"This campaign is going to reintroduce Mike Pence to the country as his

own man, not as vice-president, but as a true economic, social, and national security conservative -- a Reagan conservative," Scott Reed, a co-chair for Pence's Committed to America Super PAC, told reporters in May.

"For four years, we had a close working relationship. It did not end well," Pence wrote in his book, "So Help Me God."

It ended on January 6, 2021, when Pence refused to go along with Trump's plan to overturn the 2020 election. Trump had tried to convince Pence that he could somehow reject voters' will as he presided over the ceremonial counting of the electoral college votes, even though a vice-president has no such power.

Prior to the count that day, Trump has said: "I hope our great vice president comes through for us. He's a great guy. Of course, if he doesn't come through, I won't like him very much."

As the count was underway at the Capitol, a violent mob of Trump's supporters stormed the building, smashing through windows, assailing police officers and sending Pence, his family and his staff racing for cover as members of the mob chanted, "Hang Mike Pence!" Trump said at the time that Pence didn't have the "courage" to act.

Pence has said Trump's "reckless words" endangered his family and everyone else who was at the Capitol that day. He has said that "history will hold Donald Trump accountable."

With the red meat Republican base voters, they think he betrayed Trump

on January 6," said Gunner Ramer, the political director of the Republican Accountability Project, an anti-Trump GOP group that isn't affiliated with any candidate. "The Never Trump Republicans don't like him because he worked for Trump."

Though Pence has consistently praised the record of the Trump-Pence administration, he has also stressed differences between the two men, on policy and style.

Pence has unequivocally backed US support for Ukraine and said that Congress and the White House should consider cuts to Medicare and Social Security, positions at odds with those articulated by Trump and DeSantis. Another area of disagreement: abortion. Pence said that Trump wants "to relegate the issue of life to only the states". A staunch social conservative who supports federal abortion restrictions, Pence said that "more than ever, the Republican Party needs to stand unapologetically for the sanctity of life."

In Iowa, Pence will be going after the state's conservative, evangelical Christian voters who make up a substantial portion of Iowa's Republican electorate. He is an avowed social conservative. A February Monmouth poll found that 34 percent of Evangelical voters said they want Trump as the nominee, 32 percent said DeSantis, and three percent said Pence.

Agencies contributed to this story.

BUSINESS

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Apple debuts game changer AR headset

US firm's official entry into segment to motivate more Chinese peers to join in

By MA SI
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Apple Inc's augmented reality headset will help accelerate the development of the AR industrial chain in China, and push the product not only for entertainment but also as a productive tool for work, experts said.

The comments came after the US company unveiled its much-anticipated AR headset Vision Pro on Monday in Cupertino, California, which is the first major new product category Apple launched in almost a decade, and is seen by many as the future of computing.

Zhao Siqun, a senior analyst at the China branch of market research company International Data Corp, said Vision Pro has attracted much attention in the industry, with a large portion of supply chain enterprises in hardware components coming from China.

Apple's official entry into the AR market will motivate more Chinese companies to follow up and jointly promote the optimization of the domestic AR industry chain while advancing the development of new display, battery and other components for human-machine interaction, Zhao said.

Unlike rivals' headsets that need additional buttons, dials and levers for control, Apple said the Vision Pro has a fully three-dimensional user interface controlled by "the most natural and intuitive inputs possible — a user's eyes, hands and voice."

Meanwhile, Vision Pro, which resembles high-tech ski goggles, will have its own operating system — visionOS — and a dedicated App Store, and allows users to multitask across different apps in virtual displays.

At the product launch, Tim Cook, CEO of Apple, said: "Today marks the beginning of a new era for computing. Just as the Mac introduced us to personal computing, and iPhone introduced us to mobile computing, Apple Vision Pro introduces us to spatial computing."

Steve Severinghaus, an analyst at research company Insider Intelligence, said differing from Facebook-owner Meta's virtual reality devices which focus on 360-degree immersive virtual experiences, Vision Pro clearly situates the user in their real environment.

For instance, Vision Pro has an

exterior display that shows the user's eyes to people in the outside world. The exterior screen goes dark when a user is fully immersed in a virtual world. When a person approaches a user who is in full virtual mode, the headset will show both the user and the outside person to each other.

Despite Apple's optimism about the long-term development of AR, analysts said the high price tag of \$3,499 makes the first generation of Vision Pro not necessarily a device for the mass market. It is more like a version for the most dedicated Apple fans, business users and software developers, they said.

Zhao said, "Now, both global and Chinese AR and VR markets are experiencing a decline in shipments, with manufacturers slowing down their new product launches, marketing actions and pace of new content launches."

In the first quarter of this year, the Chinese AR and VR market shipped 173,000 units of devices, marking a year-on-year decrease of 37.6 percent. Among them, 150,000 units were shipped in the VR market, down 42.2 percent year-on-year, but 22,000 units were shipped in the AR market, a year-on-year increase of 35.7 percent, IDC said.

After the release of Vision Pro, most of the top Chinese device makers will also launch new AR or VR products from the end of this year to 2024. Meanwhile, manufacturers without a presence in the sector will also quickly enter the market, which will intensify competition, IDC forecasts.

In the medium to long term, spending on AR and VR in China is expected to hit \$13.1 billion by 2026, making it the world's second-largest market, IDC added.

Meanwhile, market research company Counterpoint said as artificial intelligence is essential for understanding the surrounding environment and human beings, it is of high importance to better combine AI with AR.

When it comes to the fundamental question — will VR and AR go from niche to mainstream — consultancy Deloitte said in a report that it all depends on how compelling VR and AR content become.

Well aware of the trend, Apple announced on Monday that it is partnering with Disney to bring the latter's video streaming service to its Vision Pro headsets.



A new-energy light rail train, bound for export to Argentina, rolls off the production line on Tuesday at CRRC Tangshan Co in Hebei province. MOU YU / XINHUA

CRRC marks historic achievement with Argentina light rail train order

By ZHANG YU in Shijiazhuang
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A new-energy light rail train that's to be exported to Argentina rolled off the production line on Tuesday at CRRC Tangshan Co, a major high-speed train manufacturer based in Tangshan, North China's Hebei province.

This marks the first time that China's new-energy light rail trains are to be used within a foreign country's transport system, according to its manufacturer.

The train will be used along a 43-kilometer rail line and serve the scenic spots of Quebrada de Humahuaca in Jujuy province in the South American nation.

It can run at a maximum speed of 60 kilometers per hour with a

passenger capacity ranging from 72 to 388. With electric locomotives at both ends, it allows for two-way driving, the company said.

Fully battery-powered, the train will make full use of the abundant solar energy resources in Jujuy.

"I hope that the train will help boost tourism in Jujuy province and help Argentina become a leader in green economy among Latin American countries," Zhou Junnian, chairman of the board of CRRC Tangshan Co, said during a product launch ceremony on Tuesday.

The company signed the train project with authorities of Jujuy in May last year and began making the train in October.

During the ceremony, guests from Argentina took a test ride on

the new train and gave it high praises, including those on its wide open views and intelligent systems.

The appearance of the train is designed for the sporting features of the spectacular valley in the scenic area. Its windows, with wide angle sightseeing functionality, are perfectly designed for tourists during their journeys, said the Chinese company.

The train also boasts a smart perception system with multiple functions like facial recognition, remote starting, automatic detection and smart temperature adjustments.

Via a human-computer interactive terminal, passengers can look up routes, timetables, platform maps and carriage layouts, it said.

Qilu shipping cancer drug to US

By ZHENG YIRAN and LIU ZHIHUA

Amid an ongoing cancer drug shortage, the United States Food and Drug Administration has been working with Chinese drug-maker Qilu Pharmaceutical Co Ltd to import the oncological medication cisplatin.

This is the first time that a Chinese pharmaceutical enterprise has won the right to export drugs available in the Chinese market to address medicinal shortfalls in the US.

The FDA has authorized the temporary importation of cisplatin from China in an effort to ease an acute shortage of cancer drugs in the US, according to an update posted to the agency's website.

Qilu said that it "has initiated temporary export of cisplatin injections with vial and carton labels in Chinese into the US market. The cisplatin injections from Qilu are marketed and manufactured in China and are not FDA-approved," according to the FDA statement.

Qilu said in a statement on its official WeChat account that it received an urgent email from the FDA in March, calling for cisplatin supply amid US drug shortages. In a short period of time, the company went through material preparation and translation, and proposal application. Soon after, the FDA launched a quick approval process. On May 23, it approved the temporary importation of cisplatin from China. A week later,

“

... The cooperation between the two countries fully demonstrated a good market mechanism to leverage their own advantages, address patient medical needs and promote continuous innovation.”

Zhou Mi, a senior researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation in Beijing

truckloads of cisplatin were shipped to the US.

As reported by CNN, cancer treatments are among the hardest-hit as the US faces a near-record number of drug shortages. As of the end of March, about two dozen chemotherapy drugs were in active shortage, the fifth most of any drug category, said the University of Utah Drug Information Service.

Zhou Mi, a senior researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation in Beijing, said: "China and the US have extensive complementary interests in many fields, including medicine. The cooperation between the two countries fully demonstrated a good market mechanism to leverage their own advantages, address patient medical needs and promote continuous innovation."

Despite some US politicians advocating decoupling, the temporary US imports of the unapproved Chinese drug again underline the strong economic and trade ties between the two

countries, which is underpinned by China's resilient industrial and supply chains, according to Chen Jia, an independent researcher on international strategy.

"It is not the first time and will not be the last time for the US to resort to supplies from China to ease its supply and demand imbalances in the domestic market for certain goods, and China has always been acting out of principle, humanitarianism and free trade to not distort the trading or reap excessive profits," Chen said.

"The US is touting so-called de-risking while at the same time strengthening purchases of Chinese goods, which ironically contradicts its so-called decoupling attempts. The US should abandon the decoupling mindset to show respect for time-tested free trade principles, and put US people's interests, instead of political interests, in a core place of its state strategies," he added.

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HIGHER GROUND

Sony to tap Gen Z for next stage of growth

By FAN FEIFEI
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Sony Group Corp will intensify efforts to expand investments in the Chinese entertainment sector and tap the immense consumption potential of Generation Z amid a recovery in the domestic economy, a senior executive of the Japanese consumer electronics company said.

Gen Z refers to those born between the mid-1990s and the early 2010s.

The vitality of the Chinese market has been restored since the country optimized its COVID-19 response measures, said Takeshi Yoshida, president of Sony (China) Ltd.

He said Sony will focus on the segments that have recovered strongly in China, such as tourism, and launch new products, including cameras and smartphones.

The company's camera business, Yoshida said, has witnessed a robust rebound in China as the tourism industry has gathered steam, while its TV business has picked up relatively slowly due to the lukewarm property market.

The company will also strengthen promotions among online influencers and vloggers, or video bloggers, he added.

"Currently, more than half of Sony's global revenue comes from the entertainment business, which includes games, music and movies. However, hardware sales remain the major revenue contributor for Sony China," Yoshida said.

He emphasized that Sony would step up investments in the entertainment segment, which will also be its development focus in China.

According to Yoshida, the Chinese market, one of the most important ones for Sony, has undergone tremendous changes, and Gen Z has developed their own distinct personalities and ideas. So, Sony can achieve long-term and sustainable business growth in China only by satisfying their needs, he added.

Sony will reinforce the synergy between its content production and hardware products, he added. "We will give full play to the role of content, as well as promote hardware devices in combination with content, so as to form a differentiated competitiveness."

Sony has increased capital input in research and development in China. Its Sony R&D Center China focuses on entertainment such as metaverse in the short and medium term by leveraging its cutting-edge technologies in artificial intelligence, communication, sensors, robotics and 3D content production to boost its entertainment and electronics products.

Sony has established a studio for virtual cinematography in Shanghai by cooperating with Chinese partners, providing crystal light-emitting diode or LED display systems, professional cameras and monitors. In addition, the company has joined hands with Japanese carmaker Honda Motor to set up a joint venture to develop the next-generation of electric vehicles. Yoshida said Chinese automakers have made great progress in electric vehicles. "We have already begun to conduct research on what we should do," he said.

Data from the Ministry of Commerce showed that foreign direct investment in the Chinese mainland, in terms of actual use, expanded 2.2 percent year-on-year to 499.46 billion yuan (\$70.2 billion) in the first four months of the year.

Zhang Jianping, head of the center for regional economic cooperation at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, said the implementation of a new round of opening-up measures, such as the Foreign Investment Law, a shortened negative list for market entry and pilot free trade zones have created favorable conditions for foreign businesses to invest in China.



Apple CEO Tim Cook addresses the media next to the company's new Vision Pro augmented reality headset at the Apple Park campus in Cupertino, California, on Monday. AFP PHOTO

Briefly

Container throughput up in first 4 months

Container throughput at Chinese ports climbed 4.8 percent year-on-year during the first four months of 2023, official data showed. The country's ports handled some 95.43 million twenty-foot equivalent

units of containers from January to April, according to the Ministry of Transport. Total cargo throughput at China's ports stood at 5.28 billion metric tons in the same period, up 7.6 percent from the same period in 2022. Cargo throughput for foreign trade rose 8.1 percent year-on-year.

Software industry sees double-digit growth

China's software and information technology service industry reported double-digit growth in revenue and profits in the first four months of the year, data from the Ministry of Industry

and Information Technology showed. Profits expanded 13.8 percent year-on-year to 367.4 billion yuan (\$51.77 billion) in the period, while revenue rose 12.8 percent from a year ago to 3.32 trillion yuan, the data showed. Revenue from software products increased by 11.1 per-

cent year-on-year to 818.3 billion yuan in the period. Revenue from industrial software products expanded to 81.48 billion yuan, a year-on-year increase of 15.1 percent, according to the data.

XINHUA — CHINA DAILY

BUSINESS

Swire bullish on mainland biz

Commercial developer sees 'huge potential' in market, to scale up investment

By WANG KEJU
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Swire Properties, a Hong Kong-based commercial and retail developer, said that the Chinese mainland's robust economic recovery, specifically its strong consumption momentum, has shored up market confidence. Therefore, the company will scale up its investment, focusing on its retail-led projects to better meet the growing needs of local consumers, said its CEO.

The company plans to double its gross floor area on the Chinese mainland over the next decade, investing HK\$50 billion (\$6.4 billion) to develop retail-led commercial investment projects in first-tier and emerging first-tier cities, said Tim Blackburn, CEO of Swire Properties, in an exclusive interview with China Daily.

"We see huge market potential in the Chinese mainland market. Following the relaxation of the COVID-19 control policy, we are pleased to see a turnaround in terms of footfall and retail sales across all six of our malls. The rebound, supported by strong pent-up demand, was rapid," he said.

A healthy footfall level is defined as returning to pre-pandemic levels. In particular, Taikoo Li in Chengdu, Sichuan province, and Taikoo Hui in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, achieved record-high quarterly sales performance in the first quarter of this year, with the luxury, food and beverage, and lifestyle sectors recording a significant pick-up, data from the company showed.

Despite the negative impacts induced by the pandemic, by the end of 2022, Taikoo Li in Chengdu bucked the downward trend and welcomed 85 brands, such as Louis Vuitton, Balenciaga and Ralph Lauren, in



Pedestrians are seen at Taikoo Li, a shopping area developed by Swire Properties, in Beijing in April. SHU XIAOJIAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

total open new stores or upgraded established ones.

China set a growth target of around 5 percent this year, but major economic indicators in the first quarter grew at a better-than-expected clip. Such a sharp rebound has boosted the company's confidence in higher GDP growth in some of the cities where it operates and robust consumer spending will help drive footfall and sales, he said.

"We are confident that this growth trend will continue, and more broadly that the Chinese retail market will be a driver for retailers' growth. Major international brands, including those from the luxury segment, are very keen to expand their presence in the Chinese mainland market, with many visiting the region to scout retail locations soon after the borders reopened," he said.

As the Chinese mainland acts as a major contributor to the company's revenue growth, along with the gov-

ernment's continuous efforts to promote high-level opening-up and fostering a world-class business environment that is market-oriented, law-based and internationalized, the company plans to scale up its investments in the region by leveraging its long-term placemaking strategy.

Last year, Swire Properties already committed about HK\$17 billion to several major investments including a boutique luxury project in Xi'an, Shaanxi province and a resort-style, retail-led project in Sanya, Hainan province, he added.

"Meanwhile, we are focused on growing our footprint in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area given its strategic role in the nation's economic development," Blackburn said, adding that the company has already held a strong presence in Hong Kong and Guangzhou.

At the end of 2022, the total eco-

nomical output of the GBA neared 13 trillion yuan (\$1.85 trillion), which sharpened its comprehensive strength. With such promising prospects in the region, the company will no doubt seize new development opportunities, he said.

The company has potential projects in the pipeline and is making steady progress to materialize its projects at a faster pace in Guangzhou and Shenzhen in Guangdong province, he added.

In its latest development, the company extended a three-year contract with Tsinghua University and provided 15 million yuan for their collaborative project to promote building energy efficiency and sustainability, which started in 2011, according to Swire Properties.

Their joint efforts helped the building meet its energy savings and environmental impact goals and more importantly, is in line with China's dual carbon goals, he said.

Action plan to boost imports in Shanghai

By SHI JING in Shanghai
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Shanghai's Huaihai Xintiandi will facilitate more imports as part of a latest action plan, local government officials and company executives said.

Huaihai Xintiandi, which spans 1.41 square kilometers in central Shanghai, will be the headquarters for a greater number of companies, lead new consumption trends and introduce more innovative service models by 2027, according to an action plan jointly released by the Shanghai Municipal Commission of Commerce, Shanghai Customs and the Huangpu district government on Monday.

As per the plan, Huaihai Xintiandi will be further developed as an innovative demonstration area for imports, with the annual import value expected to exceed 100 billion yuan (\$14 billion) and annual sales revenue of goods touching 200 billion yuan by the end of 2027.

Consumer goods retailers with a minimum annual turnover of 20 million yuan are expected to make up for at least 30 percent of all companies registered in Huaihai Xintiandi, the action plan has outlined.

The plan is in line with a decision by the Ministry of Commerce in November to add 29 national-level import demonstration zones, including Huaihai Xintiandi, in China.

According to Wang Nai, deputy director of the local government of Huangpu district, Huaihai Xintiandi is a snapshot of Huangpu, which is characterized by a large number of world-renowned landmarks and business activities such as Hermes Maison Shanghai and Shanghai Fashion Week.

These make Huaihai Xintiandi a key portal to showcase imported goods and expand trade, Wang said.

More than 3,500 companies have registered in the district, and

100 billion yuan

targeted annual import value of Huaihai Xintiandi, a major import demonstration zone, in Shanghai, by 2027

have hired nearly 80,000 people, data provided by the Huangpu district government showed.

Of the 98.2 billion yuan in import value realized in Huangpu last year, the Huaihai Xintiandi area contributed nearly 47 percent.

During the first four months of this year, Huangpu's total import value spiked 97.4 percent year-on-year to exceed 48.8 billion yuan, overtaking all the other areas in Shanghai.

Huaihai Xintiandi took much of the credit for that achievement, according to officials from the district.

The demonstration area will further facilitate, and lower the cost of, imports for companies, said He Yifan, senior vice-president of film technology company IMAX in China.

Since Huaihai Xintiandi is located in the heart of Shanghai, it is already conducive to high-end cultural and tourism demand. IMAX will combine more content creation, frontier technologies and immersive experiences to foster innovative consumption experiences, she said.

Shen Weihua, deputy director of the Shanghai Municipal Commission of Commerce, said Shanghai is the only Chinese city with three national-level import demonstration zones.

Waigaoqiao Bonded Area, located in eastern Shanghai, is the first import demonstration zone of its kind, while Shanghai Hongqiao International Central Business District, which is adjacent to the venue of the China International Import Expo annual pageant, is another synchronized demonstration zone set to extend the spillover effect of the Expo, Shen said.

IFC, Fosun to improve healthcare access in Africa

By ZHOU WENTING in Shanghai
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To support stronger healthcare delivery and outcomes in West Africa, Shanghai Fosun Pharmaceutical (Group) Co Ltd announced its partnership with the International Finance Corp (IFC) on Tuesday to help build a pharmaceutical production facility and distribution hub in the Republic of Cote d'Ivoire.

Under the partnership, IFC, a member of the World Bank Group and the largest global development institution focusing on the private sector of emerging markets, will provide subsidiaries of Fosun Pharma with loans totaling 50 million euros (\$53.58 million) to support the construction of a manufacturing site near Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, that will produce anti-malaria drugs and antibacterial medicines.

The project, which was launched in November 2022, will take place in three phases and is expected to have

“IFC's partnership with Fosun will increase Africa's ability to manufacture essential drugs locally, helping patients more easily access high-quality, affordable medicines.”

Wu Yifang, chairman of Fosun Pharma

a capacity of 5 billion medicine tablets annually after the completion of phase three.

The project will improve access to quality, affordable life-saving medicines across West Africa, contributing to better health outcomes in a region that contends

with heavy loads of infectious and other diseases, Fosun Pharma said.

The project will also facilitate the transfer of medical and manufacturing knowledge to Africa, supporting the long-term growth and strength of the wider region's health sector, according to the company.

The World Health Organization data show that sub-Saharan Africa accounts for more than 95 percent of global malaria cases and deaths. Children under five years old accounted for about 80 percent of all malaria deaths in the region. The region is also facing the task of mitigating the impacts of COVID-19 while addressing other public health challenges.

"We're glad to be supported by IFC to localize pharmaceutical manufacturing and distribution in Africa," said Wu Yifang, chairman of Fosun Pharma.

Since 2006, IFC has repeatedly provided financial and advisory support to Fosun Pharma, which is

committed to ensuring the accessibility and affordability of pharmaceutical products and improving the healthcare supply chain resilience in the region, he said.

"Strengthening Africa's healthcare infrastructure and capabilities is absolutely essential for the continent's future social and economic development, especially in the wake of COVID-19," said Sergio Pimenta, IFC vice-president for Africa.

"IFC's partnership with Fosun will increase Africa's ability to manufacture essential drugs locally, helping patients more easily access high-quality, affordable medicines," he said.

As the first Chinese drug brand widely recognized in Africa, Artesun (Artesunate for Injection), independently developed and manufactured by Fosun Pharma, has treated over 56 million patients with severe malaria worldwide. It has become an example of innovative medicinal products developed in China that serve the world.

New metro underway



Employees of China Railway 24th Bureau Group Corp Ltd work on the Shanghai Rail Transit Link Airport Express. Shouldering the construction of the first bid of the 68.6-kilometer urban rail project, the China Railway Construction Corp unit said the project started rail laying last week. The Airport Express starts from the Hongqiao transportation hub, passes through Pudong International Airport and extends to Shanghai East Railway Station. Upon completion, the commute time between the two airports in the metropolis, which is around 90 minutes if taking the city's metro service, will be shortened to less than 40 minutes. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Special meals for kids gain traction at QSR chains

By WANG ZHUOQIONG
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Children's meals at quick service restaurants (QSR), such as KFC, have proved a hit, with toys of beloved animated and cartoon characters gifted to them on special occasions helping drive sales and attract young consumers.

Sales of take-away children's meals increased by 300 percent year-on-year in 2022, while they climbed 144 percent in the first four months of 2023 from the same period last year, food delivery platform Meituan said. In terms of consumption of children's meals, Beijing, Chongqing, Chengdu in Sichuan province and Wuhan in Hubei province topped the list, with about 46 percent of families ordering food separately for adults and children, Meituan said.

KFC tied up with Sanrio, the

designer of Hello Kitty, My Melody, and Kuromi, among others, to launch a special children's meal earlier this month.

Consumers who purchased the children's meal received a Sanrio co-branded toy, distributed at random. This proved to be an effective and innovative marketing tool to boost sales.

"KFC has specialized in intellectual property collaboration and cross-sector marketing," said Zhu Danpeng, a food and beverages analyst based in Guangzhou, Guangdong province.

"Since the fast food sector has become highly competitive, innovations in marketing and differentiation such as children's meals with beloved IPs have brought more family consumers into their stores."

KFC's move is expected to significantly drive sales at its Chinese outlets, Zhu said. KFC China operates



Diners are seen at a KFC store in Huaian, Jiangsu province, in January. ZHOU CHANGGUO / FOR CHINA DAILY

over 9,000 QSR outlets in the country. According to media reports, KFC prepared around 3 million Children's Day meals this year, a 25 percent increase from 2022.

On June 1, many KFC restaurants in Shanghai sold out all Children's Day meals within a matter of hours.

This reflects the increasing popu-

larity of children's meals, with many kids showing particular interest in the toys that are given out along with the meals, said Zhu, adding that there are toy collectors who have collected KFC toys for over 10 years.

As China's consumption recovered during the first few months of 2023, leading dining brands are leveraging innovative marketing campaigns around public holidays and festivals to drive sales and attract new and younger customers.

China's catering sector saw sales rise to 4.7 trillion yuan (\$661 billion) in 2019 from 2.9 trillion yuan in 2014, an annual aggregated rate of 10.1 percent on average. If 10 percent of this constitutes children's meals, the market scale of the category is nearly 470 billion yuan, the China Chain Store & Franchise Association said.

Xibei, a leading Chinese restaurant chain, has worked with Tina Tony, an animation series released by online video platform Youku in April, to compete in the children's catering sector.

In 2022, the restaurant chain invited a team of 20 top chefs to prepare children's meal menus and selected food materials that were child-friendly, along with specially designed services at the outlets.

From 2019 to 2022, Xibei's revenues from children's meals grew 415 percent, which was even more visible in its takeout orders. Last summer, young visitors to its stores were more than 1.59 million in number, according to research conducted by the China Chain Store & Franchise Association.

Tastien, a burger maker based in Fuzhou, Fujian province, has teamed up with Balala the Fairies, a Chinese fantasy series created by Guangdong Alpha Group Co Ltd, to unveil pink and fairy-themed restaurants and burgers in May to attract more younger female consumers.

Between May and June, Haidilao, a leading hot pot brand, rolled out 200,000 sets of children's meals, priced at 39 yuan each, with a complementary Miffy rabbit mini bag.

BUSINESSFOCUS

Belt, Road a boon for global cooperation

In wake of pandemic slowdowns, decade-old initiative plays major role in China's partnerships with other nations, regions

By ZHONG NAN
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After setting up a delivery services venture between China and Southeast Asia in 2019, Best Inc of Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, said it had handled only a limited number of online orders placed by Southeast Asian consumers through Chinese e-commerce platforms.

Best had hoped to expand its presence in Belt and Road Initiative-related markets. But at the time, they were new to the market and not yet widely known.

Things, however, have changed significantly. The company, which has continued to add to its infrastructure in the region, said it has experienced significant growth in recent years.

Driven by the increasing demand, Best now ships dozens of standard twenty-foot equivalent units of containers from Chinese ports to Southeast Asian countries each month. The company said its business in that category witnessed a 45 percent year-on-year surge in the first quarter of 2023.

"The tangible expansion of the BRI and its various forms of cooperation have greatly contributed to the remarkable growth of Best's sales. Among the notable impacts, our warehouses in Malaysia have experienced a significant upsurge in transportation services for large and heavy cross-border goods from China in recent months," said Zhu Jianshu, deputy general manager of Best Global, the group's international arm.

Best to date has established service branches in countries and regions such as Japan, Australia and Southeast Asia, and built a logistics network in five countries, including Vietnam and Thailand in the Asia-Pacific region.

To facilitate inclusive development through cooperative projects around the world, China proposed the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road in 2013. Known collectively as the BRI, the initiative has grown into one of the most promising platforms for international cooperation, forging a new pathway toward inclusive globalization that delivers shared benefits, officials said.

Market watchers said a series of big-ticket projects like high-speed railway projects in Indonesia, port expansion in Djibouti and a nuclear power facility in the United Kingdom are all shining examples of achievements under the initiative.

Apart from developing game-changing infrastructure projects such as railroads, hospitals, power plants, as well as bulk and container ports in countries in need, the BRI has created growth in areas such as trade in services, new foreign trade formats and digital and green development internationally, said Gao Lingyun, director of the international investment division at the Institute of World Economics and Politics, which is part of the Chinese



Employees from Power Construction Corp of China, or PowerChina, work on the construction site of a hydropower station in Nepal in December. XINHUA

Academy of Social Sciences.

With steady progress in advancing high-quality Belt and Road cooperation, the initiative is expected to continue to make emerging economies stronger and shorten the growth gap between landlocked and coastal areas in many parts of the world, Gao said.

State-owned Power Construction Corp of China, or PowerChina, announced in early May that it had signed an engineering, procurement and construction contract to build the Kahama photovoltaic power project, the first of its kind in Tanzania. Such contracts are common in the construction industry, officials said.

Designed with a total installed capacity of 10.33 megawatts, the project will include surveys and design, equipment purchases and construction and installation of the photovoltaic zone and a 3-kilometer power export line.

Once operational, the project will improve Tanzania's power source structure, promote the development of the country's clean energy strategy and boost its economic development, said Chen Guanfu, vice-president of PowerChina's overseas business unit.

The BRI has put the idea of globalization into practice, officials said. By connecting infrastructure, it helps to boost trade, attract investment and foster people-to-people exchanges, said Zhang Jianping, deputy director of the academic

committee of the Beijing-based Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation under the Ministry of Commerce.

In terms of advancing international production capacity cooperation and modern infrastructure projects, Chinese companies have also been working with foreign partners such as Germany's Siemens AG, France's Schneider Electric SE and Switzerland's ABB Group to develop infrastructure in economies covered by the initiative, he said.

China Energy Engineering Corp Ltd, a Beijing-based State-owned enterprise, announced in March that it had started to build a large-scale wind power project in Uzbekistan.

The project is expected to generate jobs in the Central Asian country, as well as set an example of China-Saudi Arabia third-party market cooperation in jointly developing the BRI, said Xue Danfeng, deputy board chairman of Energy China's international group.

Financing for the wind farm project in Uzbekistan is being provided by ACWA Power, a Riyadh, Saudi Arabia-based developer and operator of power generation and water desalination facilities with a presence in 10 countries, largely in the Middle East, Africa and Southeast Asia.

The Bash and Dzhankelely wind power project, located in Bukhara province, is expected to have the largest installed capacity of its kind in Central Asia. It includes the con-



Visitors check out products of Humanwell Healthcare during an expo in Shanghai in May. By investing in a pharmaceutical factory in Mali in 2015, the company has helped the African country end its dependence on imported drugs and significantly lowered market prices for certain products. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

struction of two 500-megawatt wind power plants and associated power transmission lines.

Taking full advantage of substantial prevailing winds in the region, the project, once operational, is expected to provide more than 3.5 billion kilowatt-hours of power annually, representing a reduction of 1.6 million metric tons of carbon dioxide per year, Xue said.

It is expected to help millions of people in Uzbekistan by enhancing the local power supply, improving the local power structure and transforming the energy structure in the country, he said.

By mid-February, China had signed cooperation agreements with 151 countries and 32 international organizations under the BRI, and its annual trade value with BRI-related countries and regions almost doubled from 2013 to 2022, according to the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation.

China's foreign trade has been boosted by closer business ties and complementary trade structures with many trading partners. The nation's trade with countries and regions participating in the BRI rose 16.8 percent year-on-year to 3.43

trillion yuan (\$482 billion) in the first quarter. That growth rate was 12 percentage points higher than the overall growth rate of China's foreign trade during the same period, said the General Administration of Customs.

China's exports of intermediate goods to those economies reached 1.1 trillion yuan, up 18.2 percent on a yearly basis. Intermediate goods are often used to produce a finished product. Those exports accounted for 54 percent of the country's total exports to BRI-related markets during the same period.

Many BRI-related economies are entering a new era of environmentally conscious growth and industrial upgrading. That has contributed to Chinese exports of automotive components to those markets jumping 40.5 percent year-on-year between January and March. Exports of lithium batteries to those markets surged 50.3 percent and electrical control device exports rose 23.9 percent on a yearly basis, Customs officials said.

China has emerged as a crucial contributor of global public goods and a proactive responder to uncertainties and risks, said Wang Wen, executive dean of the Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies at Renmin University of China. That is, China has become a greater contributor to global prosperity, Wang said.

Such public goods provided by China now cover a broad spectrum, ranging from anti-epidemic products to frameworks that promote international cooperation such as the BRI, Wang said, stressing that the BRI also provides Chinese solutions for reforming the global governance system.

Humanwell Healthcare (Group) Co Ltd, a Wuhan, Hubei province-based pharmaceutical company, invested in a pharmaceutical factory it put into operation in Mali in 2015. As production has expanded at the plant in subsequent years, Mali has ended its dependence on imported drugs and significantly lowered market prices for such products, while driving the growth of related industries.

Ninety percent of the factory's employees are locals, and it exports drugs to eight neighboring countries, substantially alleviating the problem of medicine shortages in West Africa.

Joerg Wuttke, president of the European Union Chamber of Commerce in China, said China will continue to play an important role, given the size of the Chinese economy and its level of integration with the global economy.

China's nonfinancial outbound direct investment rose 26.6 percent year-on-year to 289.29 billion yuan in the first four months of 2023, while its nonfinancial ODI in countries and regions participating in the BRI came in at \$7.53 billion, up 9 percent from the same period last year, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

ClearTV joins forces with SOEs to seek additional overseas biz opportunities

By LIU YUKUN
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As numerous large-scale infrastructure projects involved in the Belt and Road Initiative make progress, an increasing number of smaller-scale projects led by leading companies that focus on niche markets are joining forces with major State-owned enterprises to venture overseas.

ClearTV, also known as Qinghe Technology, a technology service provider specializing in cloud computing, big data and multimedia telecommunication products, is one such company. ClearTV has actively explored trade opportunities brought by the BRI and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership in recent years, expanding its overseas footprint to generate new growth points.

Through supplying SOEs who have overseas projects and establishing ClearTV's customer base abroad, the company's products are exported to the Middle East, South Asia and Europe, with a successful implementation in more than 20 countries and regions involved in the BRI.

The company has set up bran-

ches across multiple cities in China, and aims to build a new subsidiary in Southeast Asia to further tap trade opportunities brought by the RCEP.

"The scale and quantity of ClearTV's overseas projects have grown exponentially and achieved its first tenfold increase in terms of revenue in the past five years. Our overseas investments now reach over 50 million yuan (\$7.03 million) and more than 90 percent of our overseas projects have started operations," said Chen Xingquan, head of ClearTV's overseas business.

The company has recently installed 768 intelligent screen display terminals in the Ethiopian Sky-light Hotel in Ethiopia, empowering the five-star hotel with advanced technology to create 730 smart guest rooms.

At a hospital in Phnom Penh, capital of Cambodia, a smart patient management system was developed and installed by ClearTV in 2021, including screens that display patient information, calling patients for doctor appointments and patient profile optimization.

In the same year, it built 750 intel-

ligent screen display terminals in the Missan Oil Fields in Iraq, an energy project led by the China National Offshore Oil Corp, allowing Chinese workers in Iraq to connect with their families through video communication.

Chen said that compared with other domestic companies who provide similar products, ClearTV has made efforts to ensure product quality and technology advancement. Compared with overseas competitors, the company's products have advantages in cost-effectiveness, stability and after-sales service, which helps increase its share in the international market.

"We are aiming at the second tenfold increase in terms of revenue in the next 3-5 years," said Chen.

However, ClearTV's international expansion has not always been smooth. About a decade ago, the company attempted to enter the US market, but ultimately failed due to insufficient staffing, unfamiliarity with the market and lack of a customer base.

Afterward, ClearTV adopted a strategy of partnering with large State-owned enterprises. It began to expand its SOE resources gradu-

ally, providing comprehensive services for overseas projects. Simultaneously, the company established its customer base in international markets through referrals from other businesses and online platform promotions.

"Expanding our overseas customers is far more challenging than expected. Our team collected contacts from potential customers we met at overseas exhibitions or through advertising and reached out to them both online and offline to understand their needs precisely. In the beginning, the conversion rate was very low," Chen said.

Within five years, Chen's team grew from one person to ten, and the company's project scale increased from tens of thousands of yuan to millions of yuan. Over a dozen of ClearTV's overseas projects were completed last year.

Apart from achieving business growth and optimizing the team, this year's goals for ClearTV include establishing a subsidiary in Southeast Asia, Chen said.

"With the implementation of the RCEP, ClearTV enjoys tariff benefits in many projects in Southeast Asia, which has significantly reduced



Visitors gather at ClearTV's booth during an expo in Wuhan, Hubei province, in July. The technology service provider has actively explored trade opportunities brought by the Belt and Road Initiative and expanded its overseas footprint. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

project costs and provided the company with opportunities to participate in the expansion of more overseas markets," he said.

"Now an increasing number of overseas customers recognize the advantages of Chinese business

partners. Not only do Chinese companies deliver high-quality products, but they also provide comprehensive after-sales service support through overseas branches that are increasing thanks to supportive policies," Chen added.

COMMENT

Editorials

As Washington's puppet, Tokyo is betraying the role it has assumed for East Asia's integration

In his speech at a seminar held by Japan's Association for the Promotion of International Trade on June 2, Wu Jianghao, China's ambassador to Japan, said the Japanese government adding 23 items, including advanced semiconductor manufacturing equipment, to its list of regulated exports on May 23 was a "lose-lose" move.

Japan risks not only losing the huge Chinese market, but also ruining its own commercial credit and the future of its semiconductor industry. By limiting its cooperation with China in the semiconductor field, Japan is harming itself as well as China. The US is the only beneficiary of Tokyo's please-Washington decision.

By doing so, Japan is like the person in a Chinese fable that was eaten by a tiger but then as a ghost helped the tiger to find new victims.

Believing that the Japanese semiconductor industry represented by Toshiba Group and Japan's high-end manufacturing plan threatened the technological hegemony and economic interests of the US, Washington launched a "semiconductor war" against Japan's high-tech sector in the 1980s, employing sanctions, threats, and other measures as it is doing against China today.

Washington pressured Tokyo to sign the Semiconductor Agreement in 1986 that enabled the US to reduce Japan's market share and reclaim

the world's top position.

For 45 years, Japan has been a firm supporter of China's reform and opening-up process and it has benefited much from China's modernization and prosperity. Today, there are more than 30,000 Japanese enterprises in China that generate business revenue of more than \$260 billion a year.

That's why several Japanese business associations and companies expressed their concern to the Japanese government before the controls were officially adopted on May 23.

The Japanese government has on more than one occasion expressed its willingness to propel East Asian integration and the building of an East Asian community, but how can it do that when it is sacrificing East Asia's interests for the benefit of the US?

The US has become the biggest factor affecting the stable development of China-Japan relations. With Japan having been effectively chastened for its temerity in challenging the US' tech hegemony, Tokyo has become a docile puppet of Washington.

Echoing Washington's words, Tokyo has publicly identified China as "the biggest strategic challenge" Japan has ever faced, and as its latest export restrictions show, it is actively cooperating with Washington to contain China.

To be a good neighbor is a much better choice than to be a ghostly maître d' for a tiger.

Chance to ease tensions should not be wasted

The studied silence surrounding the visit to Beijing by Daniel J. Kritenbrink, US assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, and Sarah Beran, White House National Security Council's senior director for China affairs, points to the sensitivity that now characterizes Sino-US relations.

The visit of the senior US officials to China is the second by members of the Joe Biden administration since it unilaterally canceled Secretary of State Antony Blinken's planned visit to Beijing in early February, which put the brakes on the positive momentum in bilateral interactions generated by the talks between the two countries' leaders on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Bali, Indonesia, in November.

That Beijing gave the nod for the visit of Kritenbrink and Beran shows that it remains open to dialogue with Washington. But the lower level of the two visiting US officials shows that both sides know there is much groundwork to be laid if higher-level talks are not to descend into acrimonious exchanges once again.

But although the talks are at a lower level than they would have been had Blinken's visit gone ahead as planned, Kritenbrink and Beran are major contributors to policymaking in their respective fields, suggesting that both sides are

still trying to manage their rapidly souring relations.

That being said, the visit of the two US officials, which began on Sunday, provides a good opportunity for Washington to rebuild its credibility with Beijing. Their posts mean that they do not have to speak to the cameras, and they can listen as well as say their piece.

With the provocations of US battleships and warplanes becoming increasingly frequent in the Taiwan Strait and South China Sea, no one would be too surprised if there was an incident on the doorstep of China.

It is to be hoped that the talks will be able to help avert such an undesirable scenario.

Which will not be the case if the two visitors have come all the way just to try and intimidate Beijing with coercion, threats and ultimatums. If they waste the opportunity of the hard-earned meeting in this way, it will only worsen the situation.

If the two US officials have come to Beijing with the willingness to talk in good faith, they will find their hosts willing to reciprocate. But they should always bear in mind that no meaningful exchanges can take place unless the US side respects China's sovereignty and territorial integrity and core interests.

Enduring partnership of China and France

During his phone talks with Emmanuel Bonne, diplomatic advisor to French President Emmanuel Macron, Wang Yi, director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, urged the French side to "step up to implement" the consensus the two countries' leaders have reached.

Praising President Macron's recent statements on European autonomy, and expressing appreciation that an increasing number of European countries are "more actively" coming into dialogue and contact with China, Wang highlighted a shared interest in a multipolar world.

As two major forces in the process toward that goal, Wang said, China and Europe should think of each other more as cooperative partners, less as rivals. He also appealed for "concrete actions" by developed countries to support the development of the Global South, of which he said China is a member.

As a firm believer of "heads of state diplomacy", Beijing has demonstrated an unwavering dedication to reaching strategic-level agreements with leaders of foreign countries, and retained confidence in them. Amid the ongoing changes in the global geopolitical landscape, however, translating strategic-level consensus into real-world policy moves seems to be a challenging task, particularly against the backdrop of contagious China-bashing in the West.

When it comes to relations with the United States, for instance, Beijing has found it frustrating that Washington has constantly eaten its

words on stabilizing the volatile bilateral ties. Each time Chinese and US officials have met to compare notes on the matter, Chinese officials have made the request that the two sides work together to "implement the consensus the two heads of state reached during their meeting in Bali, Indonesia" on properly managing bilateral relations.

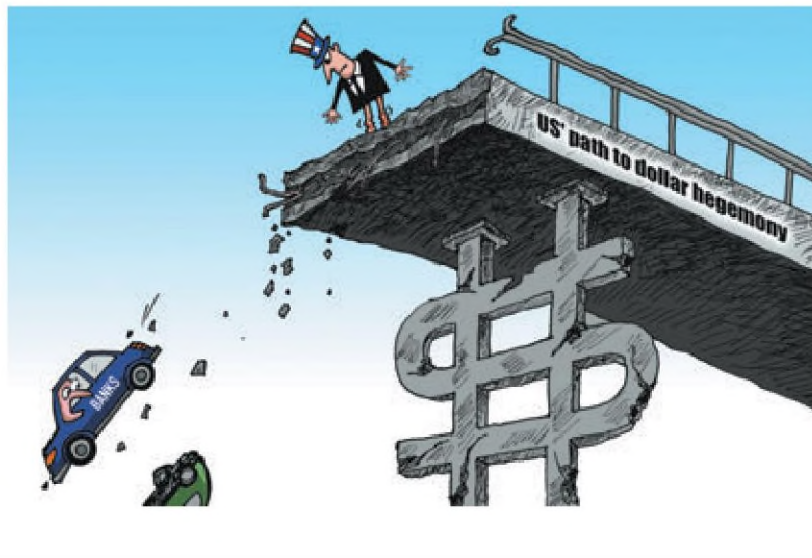
The frequent legislative moves against China by the US Congress and the increasing animosity the US government has demonstrated are in Beijing's eyes clear evidence of US insincerity. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokespeople have constantly accused the US side of "talking the talk, not walking the walk".

Institutional constraints aside, implementing what the Chinese and French leaders agreed may face less obstacles considering the long tradition of pragmatic cooperation both France and the broader Europe have with China. As Wang told Bonne, China and Europe share more common interests. And those interests are not limited to the economy and trade. The two sides have similar visions of a fairer, more just world order.

Although the EU has followed the US to identify China as a "systemic rival" in its strategy paper, European countries are keenly aware what fine relations with China mean to them. Instead of being a threat in other people's words, China is more about opportunities to them.

It is hoped that the French side will continue pursuing a rational and positive policy toward China, and play a constructive role in the healthy and stable development of China-EU relations.

Zheng Huawei



Opinion Line

Strive to build a modern and Chinese civilization

At a symposium on cultural inheritance and development he recently attended in Beijing, President Xi Jinping made comprehensive, systematic and profound statements on a series of significant theoretical and practical issues concerning the inheritance and development of Chinese culture, providing guidance for strengthening Chinese people's confidence in the country's culture, and helping them take on a new cultural mission in the new era and make solid progress facilitating the advancement of modern Chinese civilization and building a country with an appealing socialist culture.

The integration of Marxism and China's fine traditional culture can create a new type of culture that fits within Chinese modernization, and it can also expand the cultural foundation of the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

And their integration can provide a broader cultural space for theoretical and institutional inno-

vation for the future, and strengthen the cultural subjectivity of the Chinese people.

Today, the traditional Chinese culture is undergoing creative transformation and development. The influence and appeal of the Chinese civilization have been significantly enhanced, and the Party and people of all ethnic groups have become increasingly confident in their culture.

The reason for the historic achievements China has made in cultural development in the new era lies in the strong leadership of the top authorities, who have accurately grasped the trend of worldwide ideological and cultural interaction and the profound changes in Chinese social ideology, constantly deepened the understanding of cultural construction, and put forward a series of new thoughts, new viewpoints and new assertions.

Chinese modernization is a modernization in which material civilization and spiritual civilization are

coordinated, and it is deeply rooted in the fine traditional Chinese culture and represents a new form of human civilization. Only by continuing to promote cultural prosperity, building China into a country with an appealing culture and modern civilization, can it constantly meet the ever-growing spiritual and cultural needs of the people, promote all-round material enrichment and all-round human development, and steadily advance the modernization drive.

At present, China's development has entered a period where strategic opportunities, risks and challenges coexist, and uncertainties are on the rise. Therefore, Chinese people must be prepared to withstand some major tests in the times ahead, strengthen their confidence in their culture, and take on new cultural missions, to constantly enhance the spiritual strength of realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

— PEOPLE'S DAILY

Strong case for protecting personal info

Several celebrities who recently spoke out against cat-abuse videos that are viral on social networking sites have had their personal information sold online.

The Civil Code, Personal Information Protection Law, and Cybersecurity Law all have clear provisions regarding the protection of privacy and personal information of individuals. Even the privacy of celebrities, who are public figures, is protected under the law. Those maliciously exposing the celebrities' personal information are breaking the law and risk facing criminal charges.

The question is how exactly do the violators lay their hands on celebrities' personal information such as ID card details, phone num-

bers and social security numbers?

To cut off the claws of such privacy breaches, we need to closely monitor those publishing such data and plug the leak at its source. In recent years, there have been many instances of people hacking, stealing and leaking personal information. These problems need to be addressed at the root.

To crack down upon privacy breaches, we need to delve deeper into this illegal network. Privacy breaches contribute to frauds and extortions, infringing upon the property and financial security of citizens. The existence of buyers necessitates the presence of sellers.

By insisting on comprehensive governance across the entire chain,

cracking down on each step of the "theft-trading-purchasing" process, we can ensure better protection of personal information security.

Privacy protection is not only a matter for celebrities but also closely related to every individual. If criminals engaging in illegal activities are allowed to go unpunished, it may create a "broken window effect" in terms of information leak, gradually eroding the sense of security among the public.

It is hoped that the authorities will handle the information leaks with the seriousness they deserve. This will serve as a deterrent and establish robust rules and legal safeguards for personal privacy.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

White House offers choice that's no choice at all

In his Sunday address to those graduating this summer from Royal University of Law and Economics in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen cautioned the country's younger generation about the risks being created by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's expansion into the Asia-Pacific region.

The Cambodian leader warned that the geopolitical struggles among the major powers are becoming increasingly fierce, and the South China Sea in particular is emerging as a hot spot arena. Some NATO countries have announced that they will send warships to Southeast Asia, which poses a threat to regional security and the AUKUS nuclear submarine deal has triggered an arms race in the region.

To some extent, Hun Sen has voiced the common concerns of the Association of Southeast Asian

Nations, as none of its members is willing to be caught in the "competition" between Washington and Beijing in the region and beyond. At the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore last week, leaders of many Southeast Asian countries, including Indonesia and Singapore, said that they don't want to see a "new Cold War" or be forced to choose sides between China and the US.

Although the US claims it supports ASEAN's "centrality" in regional affairs, it only pays lip service to that, as the series of pacts and initiatives in trade, technology, security and development it has laid out for regional countries are just tools it is using to force them to open their markets and accept its rules.

The US does not provide any favorable, or even equitable, treatment in return. For instance, the US demands the other parties to the "Indo-Pacific" Economic Frame-

work for Prosperity open up their markets to US companies, and requires them to accept US standards and criteria in trade and technology, but it does not grant the other parties any reciprocal rights.

And if the ASEAN members display any hesitancy toward acquiescing to the US' demands they are soon shown who is the boss.

In other words, the US is forcing them to make an us-or-Beijing choice, and allowing no "strategic autonomy" or "neutrality".

Hun Sen's remarks also drive home the point that it is the US and its gang that are responsible for the militarization of the Asia-Pacific region, and make clear which country is trying to maintain its hegemony in the region at the expense of others and which country is acting to protect the common interests of the region.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

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COMMENT

Han Wenke

Resilient water, power supply needed

The impacts of climate change are becoming increasingly severe and widespread, with heat waves and droughts occurring more frequently. And many parts of China are also hit by the latest wave of heat this week.

Last summer, the Yangtze River region experienced the most severe drought and prolonged heat waves in more than 60 years, resulting in severe water shortage in the densely populated region and disruption in water and electricity supply.

Since the beginning of this summer, too, China and some neighboring countries and regions have been experiencing unusually high temperatures and localized droughts or drought-like conditions in some areas, raising fears of serious drought, and its impact on water supply and electricity generation.

Water scarcity caused by drought is basically a matter of water resources and water ecology. And addressing the water scarcity problem, like addressing water-related disasters and environmental issues, depends on the establishment of a systematically complete, safe, secure, efficient, eco-friendly, sustainable and well-regulated national water network.

China has made significant progress in this direction in recent years. Water supply security and the quality of river and lake ecosystems have greatly improved, with urban and rural water supply systems becoming more efficient and reliable. Yet given the increase in extreme weather events, it is necessary to further improve China's water supply infrastructure and make it more resilient to climate change.

Drought and extreme heat affect hydroelectric power generation. However, since the start of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) period, the storage capacity for energy has been continuously increasing, while the demand-side energy regulation has improved and the power system has become more resilient to extreme weather events.

Despite that, various measures need to be taken to ensure regular power supply or minimize power rationing when hydroelectric power generation is affected by extreme weather events or electricity demand increases drastically due to extreme heat or drought.

Also, production of renewable energy, mainly wind and solar power, is likely to increase at a faster pace this year and play a bigger role in meeting the energy demand when hydroelectricity generation is affected by extreme weather events. In 2022, China produced 1.35 trillion kilowatt-hours of hydropower and 1.19 trillion kilowatt-hours of wind and solar power, which shows solar and wind power generation is catching up with hydroelectricity production.

Besides, in the first quarter of this year, China increased the capacity of installed renewable energy, including hydropower, by 47.4 million kilowatts, up 86.5 percent year-on-year. Apart from 1.21 million kilowatts of hydroelectricity, the rest of the installed energy capacity comprised pumped storage, wind, solar and

There is also a need to implement policies that support the use of these flexible resources to meet the power demand through methods such as load aggregators or virtual power plants.

biomass power and other sources. While total renewable energy production increased by 11.4 percent year-on-year, wind and solar power production rose by 27.8 percent.

According to plans, increased wind and solar power generation will add 160 million kilowatts to the installed renewable energy capacity this year. Unless there is an exceptionally severe drought

or extreme heat events, the reduction in hydropower generation due to drought and reduced water supply can be supplemented by renewable energy such as wind and solar power.

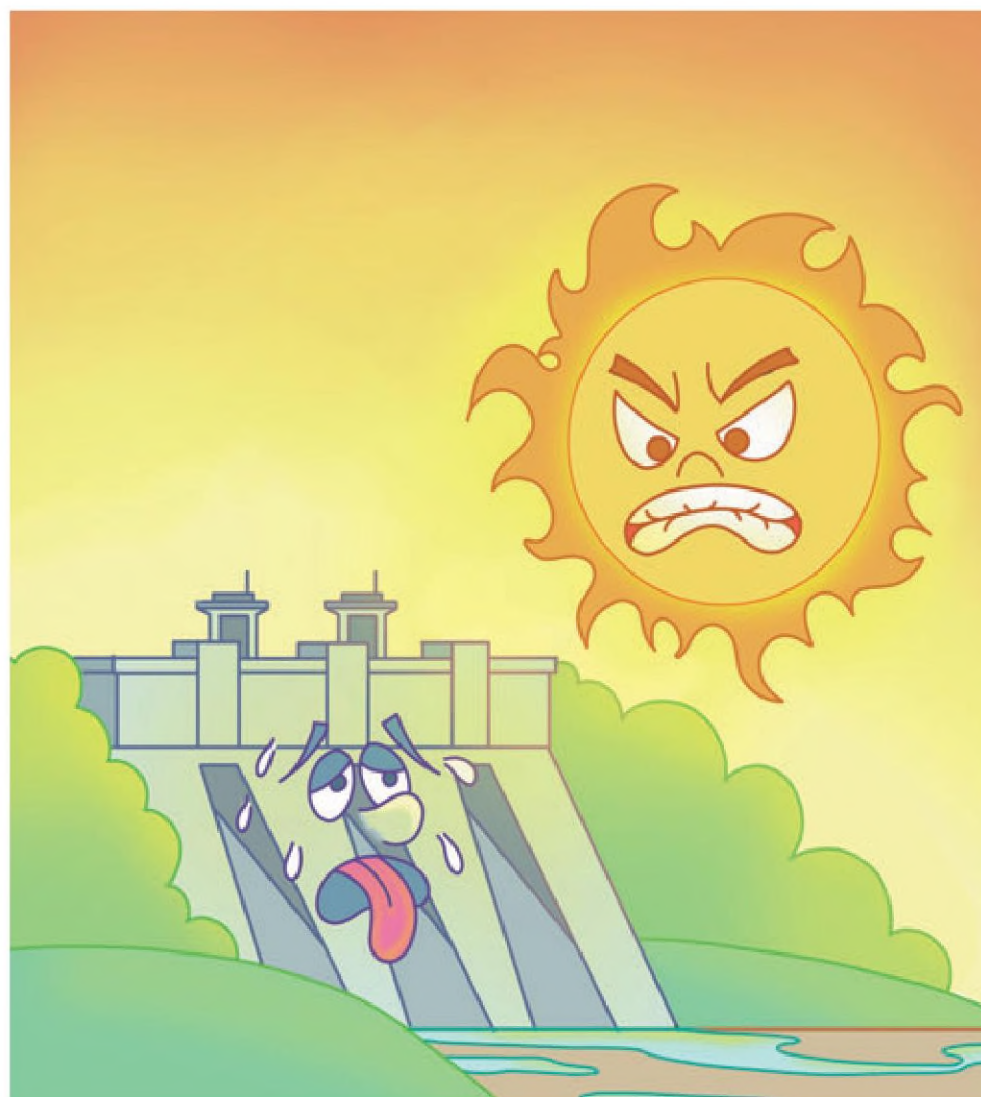
In addition, extreme heat often leads to higher demand for electricity, causing power supply shortages in certain regions. China is a large country with a massive economy, but it still faces the problem of inadequate and unbalanced regional development. As a result, some regions experience intermittent power cuts and disruptions in power supply due to reduced power production.

So apart from increasing the supply of clean power other than hydropower, it is also important to further adjust the power generation and supply system by, for instance, fully using demand-side resources such as adjustable loads including air conditioning loads, new energy storage capacity, distributed power sources and electric vehicles.

There is also a need to implement policies that support the use of these flexible resources to meet the power demand through methods such as load aggregators or virtual power plants. And these support policies should be extended to local power grids, incremental distribution networks and microgrids. It is also necessary to enhance the capability to meet any rise in power demand with significant differences in peak and off-peak electricity loads.

Moreover, such efforts should be combined with measures such as auxiliary service markets and electricity trading to share adjustable resources on a larger scale within the power grid.

The author is a senior counselor and researcher at the Institute of Energy Research, Academy of Macroeconomic Research. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

Jinith de Silva

Harmony epitomizes Chinese modernization

China has experienced many ups and downs in its development journey. Under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, the People's Republic has made remarkable achievements, especially since the launch of reform and opening-up more than four decades ago. And all through its development journey, China has attached great importance to social harmony.

In fact, China has been making efforts to narrow the income gap between the rich and the poor, rural and urban residents, and the western and eastern regions of the country in a bid to build a truly harmonious society.

As part of its strategy to build a harmonious society, the Chinese government has been advancing socialism with Chinese characteristics. In today's world, modernization comprises urbanization, industrialization and economic globalization. But for China, modernization also means improving people's livelihoods, developing whole-process people's democracy, strengthening the rule of law, and promoting harmony between humans and nature — in short, building a harmonious society.

In the 102 years since its founding, the CPC has always adhered to its original mission of serving the Chinese people and realizing the rejuvenation of the

And the Silk Road Fund and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, which China has helped establish, have already boosted the economic development of many developing countries.

Chinese nation. Accordingly, the Party accorded added importance to eradicating poverty since 2012, when Xi Jinping became the general secretary of the CPC Central Committee. As a matter of fact, thanks to Xi's focus on the issue, China eradicated extreme poverty at the end of 2020.

Under the leadership of the Party with Xi Jinping at the core, China achieved the goal of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects by the time the CPC celebrated its centenary in 2021.

Now, China is on way to realizing national modernization by 2035 and then achieving the second centenary goal of becoming "a great modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmo-

nious and beautiful" by the middle of this century.

Cultural diversity and intercultural communication are important for the development of civilizations. In this regard, mutual understanding between China and the rest of the world is of particular importance. While China respects the development choices made by other countries and has been learning from their experiences, the rest of the world should also learn from China and make efforts to better understand its development goals.

The ancient Silk Road facilitated the exchange of ideas while promoting trade. Similarly, the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative is aimed at improving infrastructure connectivity and promoting the exchange of ideas. Many Chinese inventions and products, including compass, paper-making, printing technology, gunpowder, tea and silk, have enriched global civilizations. And China has learned from the development made by other countries.

Today, Chinese leaders are trying to maintain global peace and security, and promote global development. In this context, China has proposed the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative.

As for Sino-Sri Lankan relations, Chi-

na signed a trade agreement with Sri Lanka on the exchange of rice for rubber in 1952. It was the first governmental trade agreement that China signed with a country that had a different political system and with which it had no diplomatic relations at the time.

No wonder China has been reiterating that only when global resources are shared proportionately by countries can a harmonious global community be built. To achieve this goal, China has been promoting the Belt and Road Initiative for the past decade. And the Silk Road Fund and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, which China has helped establish, have already boosted the economic development of many developing countries.

As an ancient Chinese saying goes, when you reap fruit you should remember the tree, and when you drink water you should remember its source.

So the world should take note of the fact that China has vowed to continue sharing its development opportunities with other countries, in order to promote global development and help build a global community with a shared future for mankind.

The author is the president of Sri Lanka China Society. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Kong Qingjiang

China's solutions to help address governance problems

In the speech he delivered at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore on Sunday, State Councilor and Defense Minister Li Shangfu reiterated China's stance on the Taiwan question and warned foreign elements and separatist forces on the island not to make any attempts to seek "Taiwan independence". Li also elaborated on the Global Security Initiative, making clear the core concepts, principles and priorities of cooperation of the initiative.

Since security issues have evolved from political issues to international law issues today, it is all the more important for countries and regions to explore the path of cooperation that the Global Security Initiative recommends, in order to strengthen international law.

China proposed the GSI in response to the complex global security situation and the urgent need of the international community to maintain peace. The initiative envisions common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security, and calls for jointly safeguarding global peace and security. While respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of every country, the GSI rejects any interference in the internal affairs of other countries, and calls on the international community to respect the development path and social system chosen by the people of a country.

Unlike the Cold-War mentality-driven unilateralism and bloc confrontation resorted to by Western countries, the GSI embraces the principles of the United Nations Charter. Taking the reasonable security concerns of all countries into consideration, the GSI advocates building a balanced, effective and sustainable security architecture, while opposing the policy of one country or a group of countries strengthening their security at the cost of other countries.

Adhering to the principles of joint consultation, construction and sharing is essential for not only safeguarding universal security, but also implementing the GSI.

Also, the GSI proposes that differences and disputes between countries be resolved through dialogue and consultation, while disapproving of unilateral sanctions and long-arm jurisdiction. The initiative also proposes that countries adopt a holistic approach to address both traditional and non-traditional security issues such as terrorism, climate change and cybersecurity.

As Li said, the world should adhere to multilateralism with the UN at its core, hold extensive consultations, jointly contribute to and share the benefits of development, and balance development and security issues. In a nutshell, he highlighted the role of international law in international relations.

The preamble to and Articles 1 and 2 of the UN Charter underscore the purpose and principles of the UN, at the heart of which lies the maintenance of global peace and security. To this end, collective measures should be taken in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, so as to prevent and remove threats to peace, prevent acts of aggression or other breaches of peace, and settle international disputes which might lead to a breach of peace.

Article 2 of the UN Charter underlines certain principles the UN itself and its member states should abide by in pursuit of the above-mentioned purposes. The UN Charter's principles include sovereign equality of member states, peaceful resolution to bilateral and multilateral disputes, prohibiting threat or the use of force, and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. These principles, often viewed as the "peremptory law" of general international law, are not only binding on all countries but also essential to implementing the GSI.

The main organs of the UN, especially the Security Council, should be allowed to play their due roles. The Security Council is primarily responsible for maintaining peace and security around the world. It has the power to not only make clear decisions on "any threat to peace, breach of peace, or act of aggression" but also to take corrective action against them. And while regional organizations may help maintain regional peace and security, their actions, which could have an impact globally, should be in accordance with the principles of the UN and the UN Security Council.

Adhering to the principles of joint consultation, construction and sharing is essential for not only safeguarding universal security, but also implementing the GSI. In contrast, hegemony, beggar-thy-neighbor policy and the tendency to use force or unilateral sanctions against other countries are not conducive to maintaining global peace and security. To be sure, dialogue is the only way to enhance mutual trust, resolve disputes and promote security. In this regard, the Shangri-La Dialogue and other forums are expected to play their due roles.

The GSI has injected Chinese elements into the notion of global security, and offers Chinese solutions to governance problems with the aim of promoting global peace and development within the ambit of international law based on the UN Charter.

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GLOBAL VIEWS

WU GUODING

The means not the end

Renminbi's internationalization should be instrument for the rapid growth of its foreign trade and investment and financial sector, not a goal in itself

In recent years, the renminbi's internationalization has been continuously advancing. The renminbi's global payment share reached 2.3 percent in 2022, making it the fifth largest payment currency in the world. As of the end of last year, the renminbi's share in global foreign exchange reserves stood at 2.7 percent, also the fifth largest. In May 2022, the International Monetary Fund increased the weight of the renminbi in its Special Drawing Rights currency basket from 10.92 percent to 12.28 percent, giving the Chinese currency the third biggest share of the SDR basket.

At present, there are favorable conditions for China to further internationalize the renminbi.

The profitability and security of the Chinese currency has lured many countries to allocate more renminbi assets. In 2022, the 10-year treasury yield of the renminbi basically exceeded 3 percent, higher than that of treasury bond of developed countries such as the United States. The status of the renminbi in some countries' reserve assets is also rising. The Brazilian central bank announced in March that the renminbi now accounts for the second-biggest share of Brazil's international exchange reserves. In July 2022, the central bank of Belarus included the Chinese currency in its basket of foreign currencies, with a weight equivalent to the euro.

As China's engagement in regional economic and trade cooperation develops, the renminbi's internationalization within the regions encompassed by the Belt and Road Initiative and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership has been promoted. In 2021, the cross-border renminbi payments between China and countries

involved in the Belt and Road Initiative reached 5.42 trillion yuan (\$765.17 billion), accounting for 14.8 percent of the total cross-border use of the renminbi in the same period. By the end of 2021, China had signed bilateral currency swap agreements with 22 Belt and Road countries and established renminbi clearing arrangements in eight countries involved in the initiative.

The rise of China's comprehensive economic strength and the rapid growth of its foreign trade and investment and financing will further internationalize the renminbi. However, at present, due to the strong position of the US dollar, the immaturity of domestic financial markets and the renminbi offshore market, the insufficient renminbi payment and pricing functions, as well as the complex international environment, the further internationalization of the Chinese currency faces some challenges.

First, path dependence makes it difficult to shake the US dollar's position. At present, the dollar has an absolute dominance in global foreign exchange reserves, cross-border settlement and pricing, while the renminbi is much more disadvantaged. At the end of 2022, the share of the Chinese currency in global foreign exchange reserves was much lower than its weight in the IMF's SDR basket. Although significant progress has been made in the renminbi pricing and settlement of bulk commodities, the pricing power of the renminbi is still relatively weak. The share of the renminbi in global payments is not yet commensurate with China's position in global trade. In 2022, China's total import and export value exceeded 42 trillion yuan, accounting for nearly 20 percent of the global trade volume, far higher than the proportion of the renmin-

bi used in global payment (2.3 percent). These indicators reflect that there is still a significant gap between the Chinese currency and traditional international currencies such as the US dollar.

Second, the financial infrastructure and institutional arrangements needed for the renminbi's internationalization are not sound yet. As of the end of 2022, more than 1,300 domestic and foreign institutions have directly or indirectly joined the Renminbi Cross-border Interbank Payment System, or CIPS, while the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication system covers more than 200 countries and regions, providing services to over 11,000 financial institutions. In addition, the renminbi currency swap agreement is not actively used, and the actual usage accounts for only about 10 percent of the renminbi currency swap agreement.

Third, China's financial market is not mature or open enough. Its stock market and stock derivatives market are still underdeveloped, with limited varieties of bond products and frequent bond default incidents. The openness of the financial market is also relatively low. Moreover, the renminbi's internationalization will be accompanied by larger and more frequent short-term capital flows, resulting in more complex forms of financial risks, which puts higher demands on China's financial regulation.

Fourth, due to the incomplete opening of the renminbi capital account, the supply of offshore renminbi is mainly through foreign trade. However, China's large trade surplus makes it difficult for the renminbi supply to meet the demand of the offshore market. What's more, offshore renminbi financial prod-



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

market, enrich financial products, explore more investment and financing channels, and improve the liquidity in the financial market. China should launch a financial market operation system that is in line with international rules, gradually open its capital accounts, and steadily and gradually open the foreign exchange market, derivatives market and inter-bank market.

In the process of the renminbi's internationalization, the linkage between domestic and international markets will grow closer, and the cross-border flows of short-term capital will be more frequent. This requires a sound prudential

management framework for cross-border capital flows, improving the ability to detect and analyze cross-border capital flows to give early warnings and respond to short-term capital shocks, and maintain the bottom line of avoiding systemic risks.

The renminbi's internationalization requires both top-level design by the State and market-driven mechanisms and must adhere to the principles of the market and enterprises' independent choices. It can only be used as an instrument, not a goal. China should base its strategic planning on economic development and gradually raise the international status of the renminbi.

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ucts are not abundant.

Fifth, the rise of international unilateralism and trade protectionism, especially the suppression efforts of the US and some other Western countries targeting China and their "decoupling" with China, will, to a certain extent, weaken investors' confidence in China's economy and its currency.

The further development of the renminbi's internationalization depends on whether China can maintain sustained economic growth, whether it has developed domestic and offshore financial markets, and whether the financial system can be more sound and in line with international rules.

To advance the renminbi's internationalization, it is necessary to make a good institutional design and offer policy support, encourage

market entities to use the renminbi for settlement and valuation in foreign trade and investment, and further improve basic systems such as cross-border investment and financing, and transaction settlement. The renminbi is even less internationalized in the financial sector than in the trade sector, which requires it to further improve its valuation and reserve functions. At the same time, industrial upgrading should be accelerated to enhance Chinese enterprises' status in the supply and industry chains, and thereby promote the renminbi valuation function. Additionally, the renminbi offshore market should be further developed.

Efforts should be made to promote the development and opening-up of the domestic financial market, expand domestic financial

BENYAMIN POGHOSYAN

Decision time

Europe has a critical choice to make that will profoundly shape its future

The rapid development of digital technologies has transformed the way people live and interact with each other. Everything from communications via smartphones, travel by technologically powered cars and airplanes, to the supply of electricity, water, and other commodities depends on semiconductors, the internet, and other features of digital life. The digital revolution evolves alongside the transformation of the global order from a unipolar world, marked by the absolute hegemony of the United States, toward a more diverse and complex construct of world affairs. It is challenging to assess when the transition will end and what the primary features of the new order will look like. Currently, the United States is still the most influential country in the world, with the ability to project military force worldwide, an innovation-driven economy, and a worldwide network of alliances and partnerships. Meanwhile, the economic rise of other powers, most notably China, India and Brazil, creates the contours of the future diverse world order.

In this complex environment, Europe needs to rethink its role and place. Since the beginning of the 16th century, Europe has been the world's ideological, economic, and diplomatic powerhouse, serving as the source and epicenter of ideas and economic innovations, as well as tensions and devastating wars. After the end of the Cold War, Europe launched one of the most successful processes for creating a common area of peace, economic development, and prosperity in human history. The establishment of the European Union and the introduction of the common European currency have contributed to the significant increase in the living standards of hundreds of millions of Europeans, making the EU a significant actor in international relations. However, the establishment and the impressive development of the EU coincided with the start of the unipolar world, in which Europe was perceived as a junior

partner of the much stronger United States.

The transformation of the global order, the rising competition between great powers, and the launch of digital innovation have put tough questions in front of the EU. The only way to sustain economic prosperity and boost further development is access to the newest digital technologies, including artificial intelligence, data science, robotics, quantum computing, nanotechnologies, bio-informatics,

and others. Currently, the US is one of the leading powers in these spheres, and US companies, such as Apple, Alphabet, AMD, Intel, Broadcom, Qualcomm and Nvidia, dominate some key digital technologies. The US is keen to protect and preserve its position in cutting-edge technologies, and is taking steps to boost domestic manufacturing. Last year, the US adopted the CHIPS and Science Act of 2022 to strengthen US manufacturing, supply chains, and national security

and invest in research and development, science, and technology. From the US perspective, the EU should play a secondary, supportive role in the process of the digital revolution, acting as a source of human talents to be exported to the US and a market for the US technological giants.

Meanwhile, despite many European companies being pushed away by competition and rivalry, some organizations, such as Nokia and Ericsson, still play a significant

role in producing equipment for 5G networks. At the same time, Netherlands-based ASML is the world's leading producer of lithography technology, which is fundamental to mass-producing semiconductor chips.

However, Europe faces tough choices as the US accelerates its technological warfare against China, putting additional restrictions on the export of cutting-edge technologies. The US is interested in fully embracing the EU in its efforts

to prevent or at least postpone the technological development of China. This policy will not only create more complications for China but will deepen the EU's technological dependence on the US, as the European companies will lose the possibility to increase their competitiveness through partnerships with their Chinese counterparts. One of the tools of this policy was the establishment of the EU-US Trade and Technology Council. The council, a US initiative, was established in June 2021 and is the main forum for the EU and the US to coordinate approaches to critical global trade, economic and technology issues. Meetings have previously been held in Pittsburgh, Paris, and Washington DC, and the fourth meeting took place in Lulea on May 30 to 31 and was hosted by Sweden as holder of the presidency of the Council of the EU.

Europe will have to make a decision soon. Either it will transform into the technological backyard of the US, with less and less Europe-made digital technologies, or, alongside further developing economic cooperation with the US, it will continue its partnership with China on digital technologies. Chinese and EU companies may enrich each other by sharing know-how, while a presence in the Chinese digital market will boost European production. Of course, the EU and China have their differences, and these differences will continue to exist. However, it is up to Europe to choose the path of dialogue with China or join the US in its efforts to contain China. The second scenario will result in a further decline of digital technologies in Europe, which will negatively impact the living standards of Europeans and put an abrupt end to Europe's hopes for strategic autonomy.

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MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

LIFE

All about Gen Z



Liu Xuelian (far left) participates in a beach cleanup in Huizhou, Guangdong province, on Sept 17, 2022. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

“They don’t see themselves as residents of a certain city or country, but of the planet. They see all humanity as one and support the idea of coexisting with nature and other creatures. They are the ones taking action when it comes to environmental protection and battling climate change.”

Wang Miao, founder of the Better Blue NGO

Bringing tides of change

Youth across the country put their energy into ocean protection, reports **Chen Xue**.

A dwarf sperm whale was found stranded on a beach in Sanya, Hainan, in February this year. It was immediately transferred to Haichang Conservation Center for rescue. Wang Miao was part of the team. She was helping hold the whale up straight so it could get an IV with its blowhole above water. But at that moment, it suddenly stopped breathing, and there was nothing she and the team could do to revive it.

The autopsy afterward found a large amount of plastic waste in the whale’s stomach, which, according to Wang, kept it from digesting and feeding properly. The whale was also found to be pregnant, making it even weaker, she said.

“Sadly, it wasn’t a successful rescue. But it made us face the blunt reality of what plastic waste is doing to marine life,” added the 35-year-old diver and founder of the Better Blue NGO.

The United Nations has designated June 8 of every year as World Oceans Day to raise awareness of ocean protection.

“With 90 percent of big fish populations depleted, and 50 percent of coral reefs destroyed, we are taking more from the ocean than can be replenished,” writes the UN on its website. “We need to work together to create a new balance with the ocean that no longer depletes its bounty but instead restores its vibrancy and brings it new life.”

With the same purpose in mind, Wang founded Better Blue in 2017.

As of December 2022, the organization has recruited 1,011 volunteers from over 20 cities across China. They have contributed more than 9,000 hours of service protecting the ocean, including collecting over 6.5 tons of marine debris.

According to Wang, these volunteers, as well as a majority of Better Blue’s management staff, are a very young group. Part of the reason is that Better Blue recruits mostly divers, and scuba diving is a rather young sport in China.

“People won’t protect something they don’t know. Only when they build a direct connection with the ocean will they be more motivated to protect it and know better how to do it,” said Wang.

Another reason, Wang believes, is that young people today tend to have a mindset of being a “global citizen.”

“They don’t see themselves as residents of a certain city or country, but of the planet. They see all humanity as one and support the idea of coexisting with nature and other creatures. They are the ones taking action when it comes to environmental protection and battling climate change,” said Wang.

Coming together

Zhu Mingyang, 24, never learned how to swim and still can’t, even though he’s now a certified scuba diver. That’s why his contact with the sea — like a lot of people — was limited to staying above the surface with the help of a floaty and perhaps occasionally venturing a little further away from the shore before starting to panic and hastily paddling back.

“I felt like an outsider,” said Zhu, who is a second-year graduate student at Qingdao University of Technology (QUT).

After he got his scuba diving certificate in Fiji in 2018, Zhu started to observe the ocean

from a completely different angle. “You’re submerged in it. You become part of it. The creatures you see down there — the sharks, turtles and octopuses — are nothing like the dead jellyfish that you see flushed onshore,” he said.

Zhu felt closer to the sea and sought to join Better Blue as a volunteer. He soon established a student association of Better Blue in his senior year at QUT so that he could bring more of his peers together to participate in ocean protection.

Since then, every year from June to October, when the water is warm enough, Zhu goes on weekly dives with a fellow scuba diver student at the shore area around Qingdao to pick up garbage along the seabed.

“After seeing what the ocean was like in Fiji — great visibility and a great ecosystem — I was disappointed when diving here near Qingdao to find garbage, such as construction waste, tires and wine bottles. And that motivated me to keep doing what I was doing to help make the sea better here in Qingdao,” said Zhu.

For non-diver students — who make up the majority of the association — Zhu regularly takes them to the beaches to pick up garbage on land. They sometimes team up with volunteers from another local university, Qingdao University, so that they could

cover a larger area.

Better Blue now has branches at nine universities in China, including Zhu’s association. He thinks that getting college students involved in environmental protection is a smart move.

“Students have more time compared to those who go to work, allowing them to participate in more events and activities,” said Zhu. “They are also more open-minded to take in new ideas instead of holding on to old habits. And with their social connections, they can reach more people to share ideas — to their peers and maybe to their future children.”

Ocean vision

Growing up in Maoming, a coastal city in Guangdong province, Chen Lei, 24, felt close to the sea at a very young age. He would swim in the water every summer, and both his grandmothers were fishermen and would bring home fish for dinner.

That was probably part of the reason why Chen decided to join Better Blue as a volunteer in 2020 and went on to apply to become an intern last year.

Now a first-year graduate student at Macau University of Science and Technology, Chen works in his free time as a program planner at Better Blue, making educational videos and posters to promote marine knowledge. One of the video programs is Blue Knows with each episode introducing an interesting phenomenon in the ocean, such as how fish can hear without ears, how sea cucumbers poop, and what happens after a whale dies.

“I found that people, including many of my friends, know little about environmental protection, let alone ocean protection. I hope by watching our videos they can see the ocean the way divers see it — what the underwater world is like and what kind of amazing creatures live there — so they can be more aware of the importance of ocean protection,” said Chen.

As of December 2022, Blue Knows has produced more than 130 videos and garnered 16.2 million views.

Chen learned scuba diving in 2019 and has regularly gone on diving trips with his friends ever since. One of the trips was in the sea near Zhuhai, Guangdong. The diving instructor told them that the area used to be covered with corals, so abundant and colorful that the reef could be seen above the surface by a drone. Chen flew a drone that day but didn’t see anything. So they dove down

to the area, only to find that the corals were all dead, just their gray skeletons on the seabed remaining.

“We realized how bad the situation was, how fragile the Earth’s ecosystem was,” Chen said. “Great efforts need to be made to revive the ocean environment to how it used to be.”

Chen’s target job after graduation is not exactly marine related as he studies supply chain management at school, but he is determined to use whatever spare time and energy he has to help protect the ocean.

“Maybe I can be working a full-time job while also interning at Better Blue, which is what I’m truly passionate about,” said Chen. “I really think that ocean protection is a cool thing to do.”

Creating change

For people who live in inland areas, the ocean may seem a faraway place physically and, therefore, mentally — not realizing the impact their daily life choices could have on the ocean. This is also what Liu Xuelian used to believe. But what she saw on a diving trip in Semporna, Malaysia — a strip of floating marine debris stretching miles long — helped make ocean protection an area close to her heart.

“I had seen ocean garbage patches on the news before. But seeing one with my own eyes was different. I couldn’t help but notice that the garbage all looked so familiar: It came from the land, from us,” she said.

Liu, 31, now an executive at Better Blue, has been part of the organization since the very beginning in 2017.

Specializing in coral protection, Liu’s team works with international NGOs like CoralWatch and Reef Check to train divers to become coral bleaching monitors, enabling early warnings to be issued and measures to be taken by scientists to save the corals. They work with Glowing Gown, a program proposed by the United Nations Environment Programme and The Ocean Agency, to organize public events like photo exhibitions of dying corals to raise public awareness about the plight of our oceans. The team also created ways for individuals to adopt corals or to sponsor an entire tank full of corals.

“Coral adopters would sometimes visit the area and dive down to see the specific coral with their own name tag on it,” said Liu. “But for me, it’s not one single coral that excites me. It’s when I see the entire area flourishing with corals — that things are changing for the better.”

As of December 2022, Better Blue has trained more than 140 divers to become professional coral rescuers and monitors, and has grown more than 470 corals in nine research sites on the coastal seabed in Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region.

This is why when asked how she would interpret the theme of this year’s World Oceans Day — Planet Ocean: Tides Are Changing — Liu said: “It’s time to pay attention to the ocean. More and more people are already participating in ocean protection. I believe this is where the tide is going in the future.”

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Zhu Mingyang



Chen Lei



Liu Xuelian

Social Media Digest



A video of Chongqing becomes popular on TikTok. PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Chongqing’s global fame

A travel video of Chongqing in China, created by vlogger @Yasminvroom, has become a sensation on TikTok, garnering 4 million views worldwide to date.

The video captured scenes from Kuixinglou Square, which appears to be on the first floor but is actually on the 22nd floor. Internet users have been greatly impressed by the city’s architectural designs, referring to it as the “Dream City”. Responding to this comment, @Yasminvroom posted another video and praised Chongqing as a prosperous city with a rich historical heritage, vibrant nightlife, and 24-hour shops everywhere. She also mentioned that Chongqing is safe for female solo travelers without having to worry about harassment or unwanted attention.

Surprised to see sci-fi scenes seemingly appear before their eyes, many netizens world-



Grandpa Kang, an 86-year-old vlogger, is famous for his dopamine dressing video. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

wide have left comments like “Cyberpunk 2077 must have drawn inspiration from here” and “It looks like the city in Blade Runner.”

Colorful fashion

If you search the hashtag #Dopamine-Dressing on social media these days, you’ll

see people dressed in bold colors and patterns with equally colorful accessories. This new craze began to soar this season.

Dopamine is a chemical messenger in the brain that reinforces behaviors that make you feel good. That’s why it’s often called the “feel-good” hormone. The thinking behind dopamine dressing is that wearing brightly colored clothes will often boost your mood.

The trend is believed to have first emerged in China among university students. And it was soon further embraced by people from all age groups, including an 86-year-old influencer named Grandpa Kang. A video of him wearing a series of clothes with vivid colorways — from a pink tunic jacket to a green T-shirt to blue overalls — has already garnered more than 340,000 likes on the social media lifestyle platform Xiaohongshu.

WANG XINGWEI

LIFE



The monkfish, which inhabits the deep sea, has developed a rock-like appearance to disguise it from attackers. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Wave of innovation shows a world of wonder

Author inspired by creativity behind deep-sea submersible technology and the wonders it revealed, **Yang Yang** reports.

More than 20 years ago, when Gao Zhongtai was a reporter in Wuxi, East China's Jiangsu province, he started following news about the research and development of China's deep-sea manned submersibles at the China Ship Scientific Research Center.

The Wuxi-based center, China's largest ship and ocean engineering research institute, is behind the success of the country's three deep-sea manned submersibles: *Jiaolong* (Sea Dragon), *Shenhai Yongshi* (Deep Sea Warrior) and *Fendouzhe* (Striver).

Gao conducted interviews with the key scientists and engineers. However, his reporting was never going to get the story behind the story, or the intricate details about the research and development.

That is why Gao, in his 60s, wrote the book *Shengqian* (Diving Deep), published earlier this year, in which he recorded how scientists and engineers had developed the world's most advanced deep-sea manned submersibles in the last 20 years, starting from scratch.

Before *Shengqian*, Gao published nonfiction works like *Dying to Survive*, about a leukemia patient trying to save himself and other cancer patients by illegally buying generic drugs from India, and history novels set in the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC) and the late Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). He is also a TV series screenwriter.

Since *Fendouzhe*, China's most advanced deep-sea manned submersible, successfully traveled to the Mariana Trench in the western Pacific Ocean, the deepest natural frontier on Earth, in 2020, Gao has always wanted to write a book about this feat.

Although he had been following the news for decades, he still found it difficult to understand the science and technology used on deep-sea manned submersibles. He spent a great deal of time trying to figure it out. To better discuss the motivation of exploring the ocean, he also researched more about the sea.

"If you know little about these two points, it'll be very difficult to write the book," he says.

Last year, with materials and interviews accumulated over the years, Gao completed the book in three months, trying to "dive deep into three questions" — human ideas about the ocean, why China develops advanced deep-sea manned submersibles, and the key technical challenges.

"Basically, there are three technical questions: how to dive, how to ascend from the deep sea, and how to communicate with the outside world," Gao says.

Take the giant titanium spherical

The resources on land are limited. Humans have to explore the ocean, which accounts for 71 percent of the surface of our planet, and make use of it — perhaps in the future, even find a way to live in it, due to the explosive growth in the global population."

Gao Zhongtai, writer



Top: China's deep-sea manned submersible *Shenhai Yongshi*. **Middle:** Ye Cong, one of the pilots of submersible *Jiaolong*, checks equipment before a deep-sea voyage. **Above:** Xu Qi'nan, *Jiaolong*'s chief engineer, poses in front of the vehicle.

cabin for example. Ideally, it should be lightweight yet withstand the high pressure trying to crush it in the abyss, while being big enough to carry three pilots and allow them to conduct their activities.

As the vehicles dive into deeper water, the surface of the cabin will take increasing pressure, and in the Mariana Trench, the pressure is 1,100 times of that on the ground.

When Chinese scientists started developing the country's first deep-sea manned submersible *Jiaolong* in 2003, they did not even know what shape the vehicle should look like. The chief designer Xu Qi'nan, born in 1936, once worked on a submarine, and based on this experience, he estimated that the submersible should also be streamlined, says Gao.

At the start of the century, China was short of talent specializing in submersibles. Xu, a retired engineer returning from the United States, decided to nurture a research team and entrusted 12 young people with major tasks.

One of them was 24-year-old Ye Cong. At university, Ye studied ship engineering and before joining the team, his only experience with related research was his participation in the development of a submarine rescue ship that could dive to a depth of 600 meters.

Knowing nearly nothing about deep-sea manned submersibles, Ye got a vague idea about the possible contours of the vehicle by repeatedly watching Hollywood blockbuster *Titanic*.

The *Jiaolong* deep-sea submersible, with a 7,500-meter dive capacity, entered service in 2010, making China the fifth country in the world to have deep-sea exploration technology, after the United States, France, Russia and Japan. However, many of the key parts were created in foreign countries, including the metal sphere which was created in Russia.

Despite the success of *Jiaolong*, rather than directly develop a submersible that can reach the Mariana Trench, Chinese scientists decided to first create one using entirely domestic know-how that is capable of reaching a depth of 4,500 meters. Submersible *Shenhai Yongshi* was

delivered to the Chinese Academy of Sciences in late 2017, conducting intensive scientific operations.

On Nov 10, 2020, *Fendouzhe*, carrying three people, dived to a depth of 10,909 meters in Challenger Deep, an 11,000-meter chasm located at the bottom of the Mariana Trench.

Fendouzhe was a significant improvement over its predecessors in almost every respect, including descending and ascending speeds, material toughness and battery capacity.

"But there is still big space for improvement. Now Chinese researchers are working on communication networks that can facilitate accurate positioning of submersibles in the deep sea," Gao says.

Another goal is to improve the submersibles' capacities to travel greater distances and stay longer underwater. Currently, *Fendouzhe* can stay six hours in the Mariana Trench, Gao says.

Besides, Chinese scientists hope to create larger cabins so as to carry five pilots for comprehensive scientific voyages with a better living environment.

While writing the book, Gao was impressed by the "black chimneys" found on the sea bed. They are basically mini volcanoes, superheating the water as they discharge minerals, metals and gases — at temperatures ranging between 200 C and 400 C — into the bitterly cold deep ocean from below the seafloor. They are also home to many living organisms.

"It amazed me that living creatures exist in such hot water," he says. "It's like another life system. Maybe it can provide another theory about where human beings come from."

He was also deeply impressed by the courage of Wang Pinxian, an academician of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. In 2018, 82-year-old Wang took the *Jiaolong* submersible and dived to the depth of 1,400 meters in the South China Sea three times within nine days and made many important scientific discoveries.

"There are many younger scientists who would not dare to make such a dive," Gao says.

For him, to explore the ocean is vitally important for the survival and development of human beings.

"The resources on land are limited. Humans have to explore the ocean, which accounts for 71 percent of the surface of our planet, and make use of it — perhaps in the future, even find a way to live in it, due to the explosive growth in the global population," he says.

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Ceramic pillow awakens dance drama

By CHEN NAN
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For centuries, the Ding Kiln in today's Quyang county, North China's Hebei province, produced white ceramics and was considered one of ancient China's "five great kilns".

The traditional technique of the Ding Kiln thrived in the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127).

One of its most prized works from the dynasty is the baby-shaped pillow in ivory-white glaze, known as *hai'er zhen*, which is about 18.3 centimeters tall, 30 cm long and 11.8 cm wide.

It is one of the national treasures housed at the Palace Museum in Beijing.

The porcelain pillow portrays a baby boy lying on his belly, which is patterned with flowers and clouds, implying auspiciousness. The baby's back is where people rest their heads.

The pillow has become the theme of a homonymous dance drama production that will be premiered in 2024, and followed by 150 shows around the country, the China Oriental Performing Arts Group announced in Beijing on May 25.

"The new dance drama will highlight traditional cultural elements from the Song Dynasty (960-1279) and the pillow will be a major inspiration," says Jing Xiaoyong, head of the company. "The Ding kilns and their porcelain-firing technique will be introduced to the audience."

Jing adds that the company has produced and staged the dance drama, *Poetic Dance: The Journey of a Legendary Landscape Painting*, which proved to be a success. Since its premiere in Beijing in 2021, the dance drama, which was inspired by the classic painting, *A Panorama of Rivers and Mountains*, by Northern Song Dynasty artist Wang Ximeng, has seen more than 240 sold-out shows. It plans to tour nationwide, with 120 shows, later this year.

"With the success of *Poetic Dance: The Journey of a Legendary Landscape Painting*, we have seen the enthusiasm of the Chinese audience, especially the young people, who are very interested in traditional Chinese culture," says Jing.

"Their warm feedback made the dance drama a phenomenon in the country, which gave us the confidence to make another dance drama based on traditional Chinese culture."

Drama *Hai'er Zhen* will gather creative members from the company, including choreographers Li Li and Jin Miaomiao. Scholars and experts on the Ding kilns were also invited to be consultants.

According to Lyu Chenglong, a researcher at the Palace Museum in Beijing, porcelain objects from the Ding kilns had the reputation of being "thin as paper, white as jade". In 2008, the Ding Kiln porcelain firing technique was listed as an item of national intangible cultural heritage.

"The ceramics collection at the Palace Museum in Beijing is huge and has included a wide range of varieties, allowing people to see and understand a continuous development of the artifacts."



Top: The creative team of the upcoming dance drama *Hai'er Zhen*. **Above:** The ancient baby-shaped pillow in ivory-white glaze, known as *hai'er zhen*. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

“With the success of *Poetic Dance: The Journey of a Legendary Landscape Painting*, we have seen the enthusiasm of the Chinese audience, especially the young people, who are very interested in traditional Chinese culture.”



Jing Xiaoyong, head of the China Oriental Performing Arts Group

Among the major treasures, *hai'er zhen* is one of the best-known pieces of art, which displays the zenith of ancient Chinese aesthetics," says Lyu.

There are three original ceramic baby-shaped pillows made with the Ding Kiln porcelain-firing technique in existence in China now, Lyu adds: one housed at the Palace Museum in Beijing and the other two in Taipei's Palace Museum.

The technique, however, declined and disappeared in the chaos of the late Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368). In 1922, Ye Linzhi (1888-1963), a historian of Chinese ceramics, discovered the Ding Kiln site in Quyang.

"Chinese ceramics spread to the rest of the world and nurtured local styles of porcelains. Now, Chinese artists have decoded the secrets of porcelain making and created modern works to keep the technique alive," Lyu adds.

The company also announced collaboration with the popular video-sharing site, Bilibili, which is considered as one of the most popular cultural platforms for young people, to launch an online recruitment for dancers of the drama.

Two popular influencers on Bilibili have been invited to join in the dance drama: Ziyan, who has nearly 840,000 followers on the platform, and Shi Tu Guan, who has over 1.7 million followers.

"Ziyan, who is a graduate of the Beijing Dance Academy and majored in traditional Chinese dance, is known for her original dance pieces," says Zhu Chengming, deputy Party secretary of Bilibili.

"Shi Tu Guan is known for sharing videos about Chinese history and traditional Chinese culture. We invited them to participate in the dance drama's creative process, hoping to attract more young audiences," says Zhu.

The China Oriental Performing Arts Group also announced that it will launch its first reality show by working with Jiangsu TV and Tencent Video in July, featuring dancers from dance schools around the country, as part of its effort on recruiting dancers for the dance drama.

LIFE



Top left: Xiao Xin (right), 34, an electrical engineer at PowerChina Resources Ltd, is interviewed by local television at the inauguration ceremony of the Iovik Wind Farm Project in Bosnia and Herzegovina on Dec 16, 2021. **Bottom left:** Xiao (second from front left) gives a speech at the inauguration ceremony. **Right:** Xiao works at the site of the Iovik Wind Farm. **Below:** Xiao (front) has an Iftar dinner with local Pakistani staff during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan on June 7, 2018. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Where chance meets ambition

Xiao Xin's *gaokao* score takes him on an unexpected path across the world, **Wang Xingwei** reports.

The national college entrance examination, or *gaokao*, which takes place in June in China every year, is considered by many to be the turning point of a student's life. It determines the college they go to and the major they study, helping set up their future career path. One previous *gaokao* taker, Xiao Xin, is a good example of the role of *gaokao*, but in a way that you might not expect.

Xiao works for PowerChina Resources Ltd, a company that builds power plants in Belt and Road countries. The 34-year-old is the youngest project manager in the company and now leads a wind power project in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

But this is not the career path that he had in mind, at least not 15 years ago when he took *gaokao*.

Xiao initially dreamed of studying traffic and transportation at Beijing Jiaotong University — the birthplace of modern China's railway management. But he didn't score high enough in *gaokao* and was offered a place to study electrical engineering at the university instead. Frustrated, Xiao finally accepted the offer, which — not realizing at that time — opened a new door for his future.

During his undergraduate studies, Xiao gradually developed an interest in his major of electrical engineering. He decided to continue studying it through a master's

degree and published various articles. Then, a job opportunity came when China proposed the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013.

"At that time, I was job-hunting and thought what I had studied at school would be of great use on the platform of the BRI," said Xiao.

Just like that, he landed his first job as an infrastructure project builder overseas and progressed to running the local company within just ten years.

"Looking back, I can see that every cloud has a silver lining. Never lose heart even if you suffer a setback in *gaokao* because it's only temporary," he said.

The first project Xiao participated in was the Port Qasim power plant in Pakistan, a major pilot project under the BRI. It is the first implementation project and large-scale electric energy project of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

Full of ambition, Xiao headed for Pakistan after a three-month orientation for new employees in 2014. But he soon encountered a challenge: the language barrier.

"To be honest, I was confident in my English since I had won several prizes in national English-speaking competitions back in school," said Xiao. But he soon realized that he lacked experience in day-to-day English communication for his work. For example, he had difficulty interpreting legal clauses in contracts and dealing with business negotiations.

As the Chinese saying goes, those who refuse to take the easy path will succeed; those who meet challenges head-on will prevail. So Xiao decided to brush up on his English, returning to a self-study schedule just like the one of high school days.

"Every day, I would recite words and read texts to develop a good sense of the English language,"

recalled Xiao. After about a month, he was more or less used to the English communication environment in Pakistan. Then, he even started to get a grasp of Pakistan's national language, Urdu, in order to better communicate with the locals.

"Our project is not only about energy and industrial cooperation but also about people-to-people

exchanges, especially among young people," he said.

With such perseverance, Xiao and his young team from China, whose average age was 28 at that time, completed the power project in less than three years. The working experience deepened Xiao's understanding of the term "infrastructure giant" — a nickname that internet users gave to China, especially when

referring to the country's infrastructure projects overseas.

"Everyone on site had an enormous capacity for hard work, and we shared the same goal. The local colleagues were also infected by our hardworking spirit, actively promoting the project," Xiao said.

Since the Port Qasim power plant began full operations in 2018, Xiao, as a front-line staff member, saw firsthand what the power plant meant for local Pakistani people. He said that only years ago, power outages often resulted in factory or production shutdowns. But now, the new power plant helps people have access to electricity around the clock.

"People can get a fridge or a TV set at home without worrying about damaging the motors due to frequent power outages," Xiao said. "All my local colleagues are just so proud of working in the plant."

For Xiao, this job has brought him a great sense of fulfillment and broadened his horizons.

"Over the years, I have always felt lucky. Not everyone has the opportunity to work out how to make a project grow out of nothing. Besides, I can work with people from different cultural backgrounds," he said. "And I've also got to know how the Belt and Road Initiative works, which makes me very proud of China."

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What a ride

By JENNIFER HOLSTEIN

The biggest risk I've ever taken was quitting my job and biking solo across western China. I almost gave my parents a heart attack when they found out what I was doing and immediately tried to talk me out of it. "It's not safe. You're in a foreign country," they said. But I had already made up my mind. Little did I know this would turn into the greatest experience of my life.

I have lived in China for six years, mostly in the capital city of Beijing. Every day I would go to work, then hang out with my friends and start over again. Even though I lived in China, I felt like I hadn't really seen much of the country. So I decided to go on a 3-month journey to discover more.

Before traveling China by bicycle, I had never biked for more than two hours in one day. It was a huge physical challenge but I got stronger

every day, and eventually, I could easily bike for eight hours each day.

China is so safe. I never had a moment in which I felt like I was in danger. Wherever I went, there was always phone signal, and even WeChat pay.

One of the best parts of the whole experience was the people. I met people from so many different ethnic minorities across China and even got to attend a Tibetan wedding — something I never thought I would do. A local girl even gave me traditional Tibetan clothing to borrow for the day so that I would look the part. The whole event was extraordinary, full of dancing, laughter and fun.

One time I even met a group of Chinese men who were also traveling western China, but by motorcycle. They invited me to stay with them in the mountains in Yunnan. We cooked fish that we caught in the lake over a fire with wood we chopped ourselves. It felt like true

China is so safe. I never had a moment in which I felt like I was in danger. Wherever I went, there was always phone signal, and even WeChat pay."

Jennifer Holstein, US educator in China



Left: Jennifer Holstein takes a break to appreciate the coastal sights on the way to Wanning, Hainan province. **Above:** Holstein runs into a group of Chinese cyclists in their 60s and 70s on National Highway 318 in Sichuan province. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

freedom from the busy feeling of everyday life.

Another instance was when I met a group of cyclists. They were in their 60s and 70s and still cycling better than I was. It really inspired me to push myself and go farther every day. They once saved me while I was going through a 5-kilometer tunnel and I got a flat tire. They helped fix my tire and made me laugh about the whole thing.

The people were some of the best parts of the trip, but mostly each day, I was alone with nature. Throughout the rolling hills and the babbling brooks, western China is home to some of the most amazing scenery in the world. It simply took my breath away. With lush forests, icy glaciers, and serene lakes, there is so much to see in China.

The food was definitely another highlight of my journey. I got to taste local food in every place I went. My favorite was the cuisine of Sichuan, a province known for its spicy flavors and interesting dishes. No matter how much I ate, I never got sick of having different Chinese foods. There are so many different options!

Traveling by bicycle was actually much less expensive than I thought. In total, I only spent 10,000 yuan (\$1,400) on food, lodging and experiences while gone for three months. Additionally, I raised money to help support a local charity, the United Foundation for China's Health.

By the end of my journey, I wanted to keep going. I felt like I could do it forever. It was truly an experience I will never forget. If anyone has an interest in traveling, I would highly recommend going by bicycle!

Jennifer Holstein is a 28-year-old US citizen who has been living in China for six years. She started learning Chinese at the age of five and has a passion for language and culture. She is now the head of Human Resources at Pingo Space, an innovative educational institute in Beijing.

Online Watch the video by scanning the code.