

Seeking harmony

Thai projects aim to stop elephants' encroachment by restoring habitats

WORLD, PAGE 6



Opening-up to be highlighted at services trade fair

BUSINESS, PAGE 8



Exploring planet's past

Expedition to glacier returns with essential samples of ancient ice

LIFE, PAGE 14

CHINA DAILY

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President eyes closer ties with South Africa

Xi hails 'brotherly sentiments' shared by the two nations amid changing international landscape

By CAO DESHENG in Johannesburg caodesheng@chindaily.com.cn

President Xi Jinping has called for China and South Africa to be pacesetters for solidarity and cooperation, inheritors of China-Africa friendship and champions of common interests, saying that the countries' ties have gone beyond the bilateral scope and carry increasingly important global influence.

Xi made the remarks in an article that he wrote for South African media, which was published on Monday, as he started a state visit to the nation and is due to attend the 15th BRICS Summit to be held in Johannesburg from Tuesday to Thursday.

While commending China-South Africa ties, Xi also expressed China's readiness to work with its BRICS partners — Brazil, Russia, India and South Africa — to act on the BRICS spirit of openness, inclusiveness and win-win cooperation, build consensus on important issues, carry forward the tradition of independent diplomacy, and resolutely uphold international equity and justice.

This is Xi's sixth visit to South Africa. "Each of my visits to South Africa gave me new impressions. But the deepest is invariably the brotherly sentiments we have toward each other," Xi said in the article published by The Star, Cape Times and The Mercury newspapers as well as Independent Online, South Africa's leading multimedia platform.

He described China-South Africa relations as one of the most vibrant bilateral relationships in the developing world. "Our relationship has entered a 'golden era', enjoying broad prospects and a promising future," Xi said in the article.

In recent years, strategic mutual trust between China and South Africa has been deepening steadily while cooperation in various fields has been

Inside

- See more, pages 2-3
- Editorial & Comment, pages 11-13

constantly enhanced. The two nations have offered each other firm support on issues involving their respective core interests and major concerns, and maintain coordination on major international and regional issues.

"We work together to practice true multilateralism and push for the building of a more just and equitable international order," Xi said.

South Africa was the first African country to sign a Belt and Road cooperation document with China. It has been China's biggest trading partner in Africa for 13 years in a row, as well as one of the African countries with the largest amount of Chinese investment.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of diplomatic ties between China and South Africa. Xi said that he will use this visit to work with South African President Cyril Ramaphosa to "chart the plan for a new chapter of our comprehensive strategic partnership".

"We need to increase our experience sharing on governance, and firmly support each other in independently exploring a path to modernization that suits our respective national conditions," he said.

"We should fear no hegemony, and work with each other as real partners to push forward our relations amid the changing international landscape."

In terms of bilateral cooperation, Xi called on the two countries to further synergize their development strategies, promote stronger cooperation in infrastructure, digital economy, scientific and technological innovation and energy transition, and ensure that more people from the two countries will benefit from the development outcomes.



Giant panda Xiao Qi Ji, or "Little Miracle", enjoys a specially made fruitsicle for his third birthday at the Smithsonian's National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute in Washington DC on Monday. It was Xiao Qi Ji's last birthday party at the zoo, as the giant panda, along with his parents, will leave for China by December. ZHAO HUANXIN / CHINA DAILY

Bittersweet: All 3 giant pandas to leave DC

By ZHAO HUANXIN in Washington huanxinzhao@chindailyusa.com

All the giant pandas in Washington — the parents who arrived in 2000 and their 3-year-old son — are scheduled to leave for China by December, leaving a trail of fond memories for the National Zoo keepers and patrons, who said they expect more such bears will arrive in the future.

While announcing the departure news on Monday, the Smithsonian's National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute threw a "sweet" birthday party for Xiao Qi Ji, or "Little Miracle", treating him with a multi-tiered cake and a "3" topper using frozen diluted apple and pineapple juices.

When Xiao Qi Ji ambled over to his fruitsicle, sniffing before munching, a large crowd that had been gathering since early morning sang

Happy Birthday.

The 3-year-old looked up, paused for a while, or perhaps granting a photo-op, and then continued to savor the frozen delicacy.

To the cheers of the audience, Xiao Qi Ji put aside his icy treat and headed over to a fallen tree. He sat there and then eventually went to sleep on his back, providing a bel-liful of his vigor and naughtiness.

For zoo Director Brandie Smith, the birth of Xiao Qi Ji to his older parents — in their 20s — was really a miracle, given that he was conceived and born during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I think this whole giant panda program has been one miracle after the other: the birth of this incredible animal, the success of the collaboration, and the fact that we're saving an endangered species one giant panda at a time," Smith told China Daily.

But in about three months, the zoo will experience another break when

there is not one giant panda. The last time there was a hiatus lasted for about a year since late 1999, with the death of Hsing Hsing, one of the first pair of pandas who arrived at the zoo on April 20, 1972, following then-US president Richard Nixon's historic visit to China, according to Smith.

In 2000, China and the US signed a Giant Panda Cooperative Research and Breeding Agreement for the second pair of giant pandas, Mei Xiang and Tian Tian, to stay at the zoo for a decade since Dec 6 that year.

The loan pact was renewed twice, each time for a five-year extension until Dec 7, 2020. It was then extended for another three years until December this year.

"We're already having some conversations about what the future of the panda program is going to look like. But I don't have any answers," Smith said.

In an interview last August, Smith said that the zoo expected the

conversations and negotiations with Chinese partners to lead to the same agreement as previously inked.

"I am always optimistic. We very much hope even if we don't have pandas here, we can continue to tell the story of the animals, of the conservation success," she said on Monday. "And my dream is that we will have pandas here in the future."

With more than 2 million visitors every year at the zoo, and giant pandas tops on their wish and watch list, Smith said the absence of the bears may mean that the other animals will get "a little extra" attention.

For Bryan Amaral, senior curator of mammals at the National Zoo, giant pandas have become synonymous with the zoo, and Xiao Qi Ji is just a lot of fun, a bubbly guy, who is always active and "always keeps us on our toes".

See Pandas, page 7



A woman walks past a banner advertising the 15th BRICS Summit at the Sandton Convention Center in Johannesburg, South Africa, on Sunday. JEMAL COUNTLESS / NEWS.COM

GREEN FOREIGN TRADE TO FUEL INNOVATION-LED EXPANSION

Party education campaign tipped to boost China's supply capacity

By ZHONG NAN zhongnan@chindaily.com.cn

A team of drivers is busy loading new energy vehicles, or NEVs, onto a 14-deck vessel at Nansha Port in Guangzhou, the capital of Guangdong province.

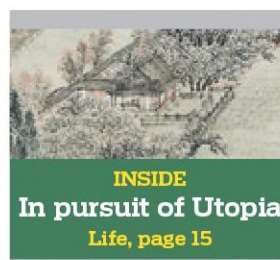
The ship boasts about 7,600 parking places, with about 540 such spots on each deck.



These vehicles, produced by domestic automakers such as BYD, Guangzhou Automobile Group Co and Xpeng, will be driven on the roads of Thailand, Israel, Germany, Australia and Brazil, among other countries, later this year.

China's foreign trade is undergoing a green transformation, with traditional export categories such as clothing, household appliances and furniture giving way to a new wave of tech-intensive, environmentally friendly products as the nation transitions to a new era of green and innovation-led growth.

See Trade, page 4



INSIDE In pursuit of Utopia Life, page 15 www.chinadailyglobal.com Member of ANN China Daily Global ©2023 All Rights Reserved

Solid foundation set for Global South development

Before hosting its first BRICS Summit in 2013, South Africa held the initial BRICS Think Tank Council meeting, which prepared a long-term strategy for BRICS, the grouping of the major emerging economies of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

The five pillars of the strategy are cooperation on economic growth and development; peace and security; social justice, sustainable development and quality of life; political and economic governance; and progress through knowledge and innovation sharing.

The year 2013 was also the year in which China proposed the Belt and Road Initiative. Over the past 10 years, we have witnessed a certain



synergy between BRICS' long-term strategy and the Belt and Road, with respect to the developing and emerging economies of the Global South.

China is developing its own foundational focus for the Belt and Road that resonates with the five pillars of BRICS' long-term strategy. The foundational principles for China's focus rest on three other initiatives proposed by China: the Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative and Global Civilization Initiative. All three are in

accordance with the five pillars of the BRICS strategy.

As South Africa prepares to host the 15th BRICS Summit in Johannesburg from Tuesday to Thursday, perhaps it is time to briefly evaluate the progress made in implementing the long-term strategy of BRICS and the three Chinese initiatives focusing on multilateralism, trade, finance and development, and peace and security.

The first pillar of the BRICS long-term strategy is about promoting cooperation for economic growth and development, a principle that resonates with China's Global Development Initiative. Over the past nine years, the BRICS countries have made progress in consoli-

dating their cooperation programs for economic growth and development. BRICS launched the New Development Bank and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement, and as part of the Belt and Road Initiative, China launched the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. Both banks continue to play a significant role in infrastructure investment in the BRICS countries and Asia.

Trade within the BRICS group and with the countries in Asia and Eurasia has always been limited by foreign exchange constraints imposed by the domination of the US dollar and the. In recent years, there has been a concerted effort among the BRICS economies and countries in Asia to move toward using their own

currencies for trade, making the nations less dependent on foreign exchange volatility and balance of payments constraints.

Both the long-term BRICS strategy and the three global initiatives depend on peace, security and justice to achieve the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

The 15th BRICS Summit is an occasion to not only evaluate the five pillars of its long-term strategy, but also to assess the impact of the three China-proposed global initiatives.

Discussion of BRICS membership for other countries of the Global South is also expected at the summit. Can BRICS and China expand beyond their current multilateral nexus and move toward a more multilateral development paradigm as envisioned in China's new approach within BRICS and in Asia, Eurasia and Africa? For South-South cooper-

ation to be meaningful, it has to address the future trajectory and impact on developing and emerging economies with respect to the policy objectives of full employment, social justice and the struggle against poverty and inequality.

However, for BRICS, the Belt and Road Initiative and China's strategy to have a meaningful impact on the Global South, the multilateral dimension of the new development model should promote the harmonious and sustainable growth and development of BRICS, China and its developing and emerging partners for mutual benefits.

The author is an adjunct professor at the University of Venda in South Africa and an adviser on South Africa at the China-Africa Center at Zhejiang University. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

XI'S VISIT

Fruitful results seen in health cooperation

Tackling of TB, COVID-19 among BRICS countries boosts universal healthcare

By WANG XIAOYU
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Cooperation between BRICS nations on health issues has yielded positive outcomes in tackling virus outbreaks and promoting exchanges of medical expertise in recent years, with collaboration including boosting universal healthcare and stepping up pandemic preparedness, said health authorities of the grouping.

"Over the years, BRICS countries have established a research network for tuberculosis, which has greatly promoted communication among policymakers and scientists and contributed to the global drive of ending TB," the National Health Commission, China's top health authority, said recently.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the BRICS Vaccine Research and Development Center was set up with a commitment to advance cooperation in creating vaccines and boosting their equitable access.

"The initiative is also aimed at helping protect healthcare systems, to aid economic recovery and tackle future pandemics," the commission said in a statement to China Daily.

Another highlight is the launch of a health journal issued jointly by the BRICS countries — Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

"The publication has offered a professional platform for BRICS and BRICS Plus countries to share research results and experiences in the fields of COVID-19 management and vaccination, digital health, antibiotic resistance, TB prevention and control, and maternal and child health," it said.

Health emerged as a major sector for BRICS cooperation in 2011 when the first meeting of health ministers from the five countries was held.

"Since then, health cooperation under the BRICS framework has been multilevel, all-around and wide-ranging, and shows broad promise," the commission said.

The 13th and latest meeting between health ministers was held in Durban, South Africa from Aug 1 to 4, ahead of the 15th

BRICS Summit to be held in the country's capital Johannesburg this week.

The meeting discussed issues such as universal healthcare coverage, regulation of medical products, health emergency responses, TB prevention and control, and nuclear medicine and traditional medicine, according to a release on the commission's official website.

Joe Phaahla, South Africa's health minister, said the event looked into ways to strengthen early warning and information sharing systems to better handle future pandemics and the expansion of healthcare coverage through boosting access to medicines and diagnostics.

As South Africa works toward the goal of achieving universal healthcare by 2030, he said that it is worthwhile drawing on the experiences of the four other nations — all of which have a larger population than his country, including the two most populous countries in the world.

"What we are looking at here is sharing experiences in their systems of health delivery services in these countries," he said during an interview with *Newroom Africa*, a television program in South Africa.

"The systems will be different as the political systems are also different. But there is something in common regarding the access tools to affordable medicines and medical technologies, health information systems, and digital record systems that help roll out universal access to health services."

Sergey Glagolev, Russia's deputy minister of health, said during an interview with SABC News that it is essential to apply and expand health solutions created by BRICS countries to tackle the most urgent challenges such as preparing for new pandemics and addressing the threats of non-communicable diseases.

"These countries possess significant competence in these areas," he said.

Among these are the experiences of South Africa and Russia in developing new vaccines, and shortening the time from the detection of a new pathogen to developing a treatment, he added.



Students attempt Chinese calligraphy at the Confucius Institute in Johannesburg, South Africa, during a United Nations Chinese Language Day event on April 19. ZHANG YUDONG / XINHUA

Foreign students relish life, opportunities in China

By ZOU SHUO
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In recent years, China has welcomed a growing number of students from overseas, especially from the BRICS countries, in part due to the five nations' close economic and trade cooperation and international exchanges.

With its long history, rich culture and warm and friendly people, studying in China provides a great opportunity for personal development, according to Brazilian Igor Eduardo Fortes Li.

The 29-year-old is a postgraduate student at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing, and has lived in China for 15 years.

"China has huge potential for development, and China's economy, in particular, has made remarkable achievements during the 40-something years of reform and opening-up," he said.

"The Belt and Road Initiative is a wise initiative to better realize a community with a shared future for mankind. It is full of the wisdom of the Chinese civilization, which is not hegemonic, and in which all are equal. We all work together to improve our lives."

Russian student Victoria Bonkaeva, 24, is an undergraduate student at Beijing Language and Culture University.

She has been learning Chinese for about nine years and her interest in the language was first piqued while watching Chinese TV shows and listening to Chinese songs.

Like many foreign students when they first come to China, Bonkaeva thought she might struggle adjusting to her new life, but her fears were quickly put to rest.

"China is developing very rapidly technologically and economically. I like the way the Alipay payment system works, you can pay electronically almost everywhere," she said.

Technology makes everyday life very easy, so you can buy tickets for an event, shop online and get anything delivered via various apps, she added.

Fellow Russian, Anastasia Kalgonova, a postgraduate student at Beijing International Studies University said she loves China and thinks the people are smart and hospitable.

"China has developed rapidly. In terms of technology, I believe China is the closest to what I've read in science fiction novels," she said.

Kalgonova, 29, said she was also impressed by China's poverty alleviation efforts, which she has seen the results of firsthand after visiting the Ningxia Hui autonomous region.

Under the Belt and Road Initiative, many international students have gained the opportunity to study in China and they have become a bridge between their home country and China, she said.

The initiative has been effective and benefited China and the world, she added.

Irina Kazak, a Russian doctoral student at Beijing Jiaotong University, decided to come to China to study because the country offers excellent educational opportunities and has become a leading global economic and technological power.

China has become a leader in artificial intelligence, electronics and information technology. This creates immense opportunities for innovation and the development of new technologies, said the 26-year-old.

She said she was particularly impressed by the development of the transportation infrastructure, especially high-speed trains and the subway, which provide fast and convenient transportation.

The BRI promotes economic cooperation among countries and the creation of a sustainable world. It also helps strengthen connections among peoples and facilitates the exchange of knowledge and experience, which are key factors in achieving peace and prosperity, she said.

BRI brings African nations benefits, not 'debt traps'

By ZHANG YUNBI
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Ten days ago on Aug 12, Algeria in northern Africa welcomed the completion of the country's East-West Highway, a landmark megaproject of the Belt and Road Initiative.

While celebrating the completion of the highway's final 84-kilometer section by China's CITIC Construction, Algerian Prime Minister Aymen Benabderrahmane hailed the "exceptional quality of work", adding that Algerian engineers and technicians had gained valuable hands-on experience from construction of the highway.

The highway is one of many successful projects achieved over the 10 years of the BRI, which have helped improve the prospects of prosperity on the African continent, rather than resulting in alleged "debt traps" as some Western observers claim, according to officials, scholars and media organizations.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said that since the Chinese company became involved in the Algerian highway project, the Chinese side had "trained nearly 10,000 local construction workers, benefited close to 40 million residents and received wide acclaim in Algeria."

"China stands ready to work with Algeria and the rest of the world to advance high-quality Belt and Road cooperation and boost world economic recovery and sustainable development," he added.

Erastus Mwencha, former deputy chairperson of the African Union Commission, said: "Africa's debt, the majority of it, is not from China. It is from other institutions like the IMF (International Monetary Fund), World Bank and European bonds."

In an interview with China News Service last month, he noted that the allegations of China setting "debt traps" for Africa is a narrative pushed by agencies and countries who do not expect to see Belt and Road programs succeed.

"That's (debt traps) a myth. A number of studies and research have been carried out to demystify that myth," he said.

"Africa's overall debt is about 56 percent of its GDP. Now, if I ask you about the debt of, say, Europe, Japan and America — it's more than 100 percent of their GDP. Who talks about debt traps in those countries?" he added.

China has been Africa's largest trading partner for 14 consecutive years. The two sides have jointly built more than 10,000 km of railways and

\$360 billion

Expected economic benefits for Nigeria from Lekki Deep Sea Port, a key BRI project in the country

nearly 100,000 km of roads, and seen a large number of infrastructure projects such as airports, docks, bridges and power stations put into use.

On July 28, President Xi Jinping met in Chengdu, Sichuan province, with Burundi President Evariste Ndayishimiye, and said that China is ready to "provide new opportunities to African countries" to help with their development.

He envisioned plans to advance Belt and Road cooperation and "achieve common development and progress". Ndayishimiye said Burundi firmly supports the BRI and his country hopes to strengthen cooperation with China to help Burundi and Africa achieve development.

Speaking of the positivity brought by the BRI to Africa, Algeria's ambassador to China Hassane Rabehi said in an earlier interview: "The results are there. There are concrete results whether in terms of roads, in terms of ports, in terms

of schools, in terms of housing. "That's why many African leaders are calling for stronger relations between their respective countries and China. The people themselves appreciate this relationship, and they look at a future fully shared with China," he said in an interview with China Daily in May.

Constructed by the China Harbor Engineering Company, Nigeria's first deep-sea port — Lekki Deep Sea Port — opened in January this year.

Lekki is the largest deep-water port in West Africa, and it is expected to create nearly \$360 billion in overall economic benefits and 170,000 jobs for Nigeria, according to Yan Yuying, Chinese consul general in Nigeria's Lagos state.

Observers noted that over the past decade, the BRI has attracted more than three-quarters of the countries across the globe and 32 international organizations, and benefited not only Africa, but also Asia, Latin America and Europe.

"The BRI has managed to stimulate nearly \$1 trillion in investment, generate more than 3,000 cooperation projects ... and lift nearly 40 million people out of poverty," Han Chunlin, Chinese ambassador to Romania, wrote in a recent article.



Workers assemble vials of COVID-19 vaccines at the Butantan Institute in the state of Sao Paulo, Brazil, last August. The institute cooperated with Chinese pharmaceutical company Sinovac in clinical trials, including a COVID-19 vaccine. XINHUA

AI to play key role in scientific collaboration

By JIANG CHENGLONG
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Scientists and researchers from BRICS countries are working together to utilize cutting-edge technologies, including artificial intelligence and high-performance computing, to address global challenges within the framework of the bloc's scientific and technological innovation cooperation.

In early July, the seventh meeting of the BRICS working group on information, communication and

technologies, and high-performance computing was held at East China Normal University in Shanghai.

According to a news release from the university, more than 30 representatives from China, Brazil, Russia, India and South Africa attended the meeting, including computer science experts and officials from science, technology and education authorities.

It said that the conference of the working group — an important think tank in the field of scientific and technological innovation for

BRICS countries — was the most important academic meeting in the field of computer science to be held before the 15th BRICS Summit in South Africa, which opens in Johannesburg on Tuesday.

The main responsibilities of the working group are to provide recommendations for flagship and general projects in the field of information and communication technology and high-performance computing for cooperation among the BRICS countries, and to provide key topics for scientific and techno-

logical cooperation for the BRICS Ministerial Meeting and the BRICS Summit.

During the two-day meeting, the working group reached a basic consensus on the candidate topics for the flagship projects of innovation cooperation among the BRICS countries, according to the news release.

AI for education has been included as a new candidate topic, which will focus on using generative AI technologies in large-scale personalized learning.

There are another three candi-

date topics awaiting approval, which are digital twin platform, digital health and digital Earth.

Zhou Aimin, the executive chief of the working group meeting and dean of the School of Computer Science and Technology at East China Normal University, told China Daily that those topics mainly refer to the use of AI technologies to address problems in various fields.

For example, digital health is mainly targeted at developing digital technology infrastructures for promoting medicine, precision medicine and clinical applications, according to Zhou.

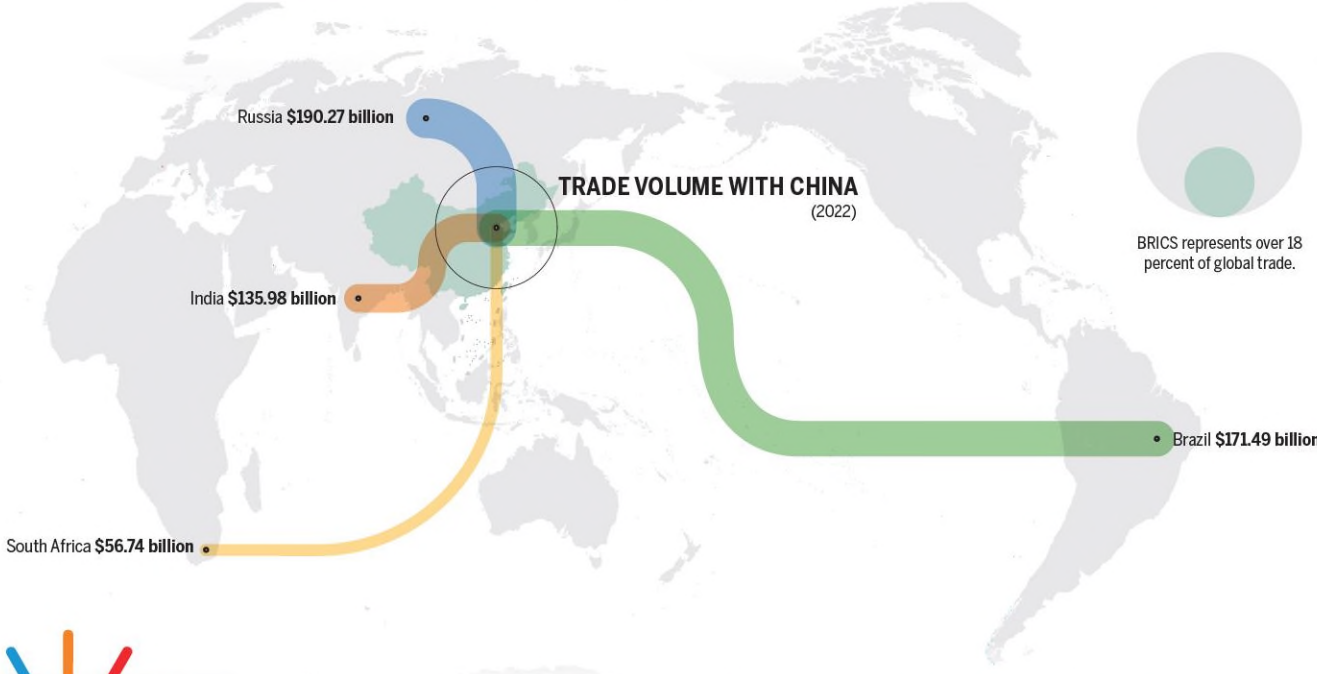
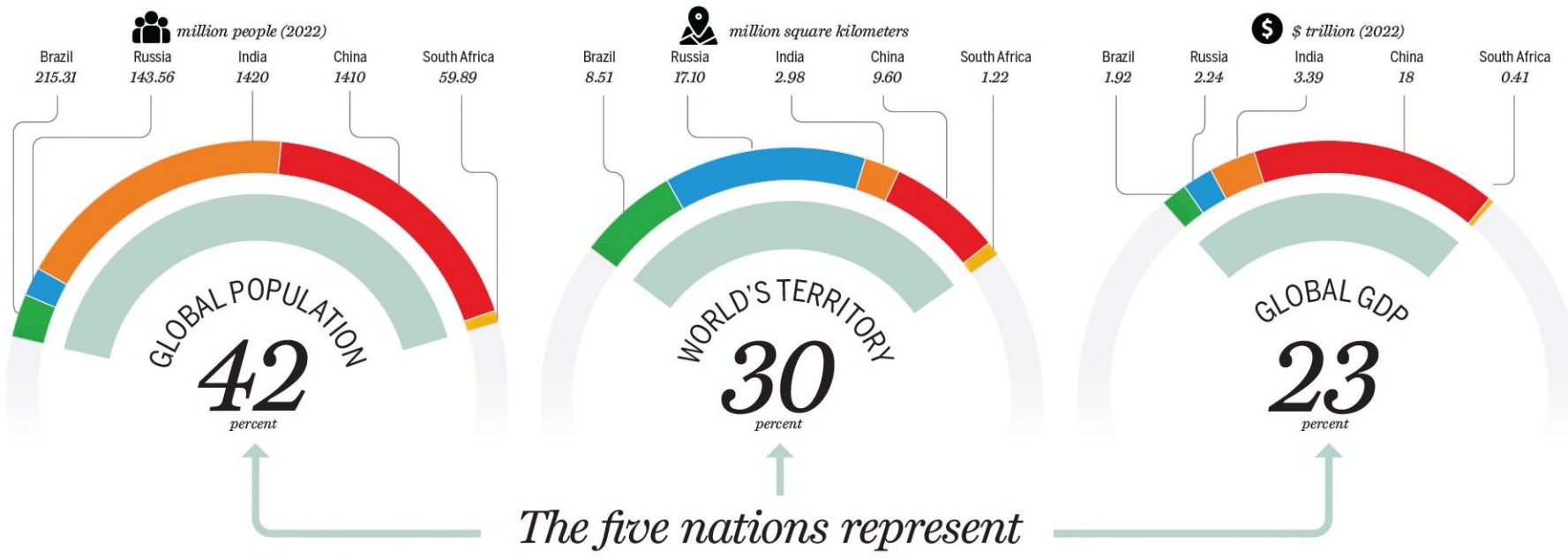
"It is quite important for scientists from these five major develop-

ing countries to discuss these relevant topics," he said. "We can work together to find solutions to the challenges we all face while sharing research results in our respective fields."

"For example, in the field of digital Earth, China has achieved relatively good results," said the expert. "So China can share its experiences and research results with other BRICS countries."

The meeting of the BRICS working group on information, communication and technologies, and high-performance computing will be held yearly, with the next meeting scheduled to be held in Russia in 2024.

BRICS 2023



PREVIOUS SUMMITS

- 1st** BRIC Summit, Yekaterinburg, Russia (June 2009)
- 2nd** Brasilia, Brazil (April 2010)
- 3rd** Sanya, China (April 2011) - Under the theme of "Broad Vision, Shared Prosperity". South Africa participated as an official member for the first time.
- 4th** New Delhi, India (March 2012) - Under the theme of "BRICS Partnership for Global Stability, Security and Prosperity"
- 5th** Durban, South Africa (March 2013) - Under the theme of "BRICS and Africa: Partnership for Development, Integration and Industrialization"
- 6th** Fortaleza, Brazil (July 2014) - Under the theme of "Inclusive Growth: Sustainable Solutions"
- 7th** Ufa, Russia (July 2015) - Under the theme of "BRICS Partnership - a Powerful Factor of Global Development"

BRICS 2023 SOUTH AFRICA

15th
Johannesburg, South Africa
Under the theme of "BRICS and Africa: Partnership for Mutually Accelerated Growth, Sustainable Development and Inclusive Multilateralism"

BRICS

BRAZIL | RUSSIA | INDIA | CHINA | SOUTH AFRICA

Around 150 meetings are held annually across the three pillars of BRICS cooperation: political and security cooperation, financial and economic cooperation, and cultural and people-to-people cooperation. Over 30 agreements and memorandums of understanding provide a legal foundation for cooperation in areas as diverse as the Contingent Reserve Arrangement, customs, taxes, interbank cooperation, culture, science, technology and innovation, agricultural research, energy efficiency, competition policy and diplomatic academies.

PRIORITIES FOR 2023

- Developing a partnership toward an equitable just transition
- Transforming education and skills development for the future
- Unlocking opportunities through the African Continental Free Trade Area
- Strengthening post-pandemic socioeconomic recovery and the attainment of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development
- Strengthening multilateralism, including working toward real reform of global governance institutions and strengthening the meaningful participation of women in peace processes

- 14th** Held virtually. Hosted by China. Under the theme of "Foster High-quality BRICS Partnership, Usher in a New Era for Global Development" (June 2022)
- 13th** Held virtually. Hosted by India. Under the theme of "BRICS @ 15: Intra-BRICS Cooperation for Continuity, Consolidation and Consensus" (September 2021)
- 12th** Held virtually. Hosted by Russia. Under the theme of "BRICS Partnership for Global Stability, Shared Security, and Innovative Growth" (November 2020)
- 11th** Brasilia, Brazil. Under the theme of "BRICS: Economic Growth for an Innovative Future" (November 2019)

- 10th** Johannesburg, South Africa. Under the theme of "BRICS in Africa: Collaboration for Inclusive Growth and Shared Prosperity in the Fourth Industrial Revolution" (July 2018)
- 9th** Xiamen, China. Under the theme of "BRICS: Stronger Partnership for a Brighter Future" (September 2017)
- 8th** Goa, India. Under the theme of "Building Responsive, Inclusive, and Collective Solutions" (October 2016)

Sources: World Bank, Chinese Foreign Ministry, www.brics2023.gov.za

JORGE CORTES / CHINA DAILY

INDEPTH

Trade: Series of tailored measures drawn up

From page 1

Exports of China's "new three" products — NEVs, lithium batteries and solar cells — witnessed a combined 61.6 percent year-on-year growth in the first half of this year, increasing overall export expansion by 1.8 percentage points, data from the General Administration of Customs, or GAC, show.

Highlighting a trajectory aimed at setting China firmly on the path to modernization, government officials and market observers said the Communist Party of China's ongoing thematic education campaign will further strengthen the nation's robust supply capacity and its firmly established industrial chain.

Launched in April, the education campaign enables members to equip themselves with the Party's new theories, helps the entire Party achieve unity in thought, will and action, and ultimately ensures that it strengthens its solidarity and better leads the Chinese people in forging ahead on a new journey.

As part of the campaign, the Party launched a research and fact-finding drive, with the aim of solving new problems and serving scientific decision-making.

Zhang Ke, deputy head of the GAC's Guangdong sub-administration, which is responsible for coordinating customs work with a total of 14 southern, central and south-western regions of the country, said that to implement the education campaign effectively, customs authorities in Guangdong are primarily aiming to help the people and businesses.

After conducting comprehensive research and making productive visits to key export-oriented companies, several business operational issues and suggestions raised by exporters were promptly resolved, Zhang said.

He added that by adopting a meticulous approach, tailored measures were drawn up, with the main aim of bolstering the expansion of exports of the "new three" products from Guangdong. These strategic measures have resulted in substantial improvements to the overall export situation.

For example, the GAC's Guangdong sub-administration has coordinated with local customs branches to implement a number of practical assistance measures for exporters. It has guided companies in standardizing their customs declarations, and appointed specialized auditing personnel to significantly reduce the time cargo spends in transit at ports in Guangdong.

The sub-administration has also used the advantages of China-Europe freight train services to lower customs clearance costs and provide optimal clearance for NEV exports, Zhang said.

For example, Xinsha Customs, a branch of Huangpu Customs, has implemented a 365-day, around-the-clock appointment-based clearance model for roll-on, roll-off vessels carrying vehicles, reducing the average quarantine and inspection time to within one hour. This has greatly enhanced turnover efficiency at terminals and reduced operational costs for shipping companies.

Earlier this year, the GAC launched a project to use opportunities arising from the thematic education campaign to address unnecessary inland river freight charges levied on imported goods. This issue was raised by domestic companies.

Relevant policies were drawn up based on comprehensive research, analysis and assessment. These policies specify that when companies are unable to provide documentation after transporting their goods from coastal ports to destinations on inland rivers, data meeting specific criteria can serve as the basis for deduction claims.

Wang Yinghui, a division head at the GAC's duty collection department, said this policy has been implemented effectively at ports in the Yangtze River Economic Belt.

"The policy of deducting inland river freight charges will be extended to the entire inland river basin in China, including the Pearl River and Minjiang River, benefiting more than 1,000 import companies. It is projected to save importers more than 67 million yuan (\$9.3 million) on an annual basis," she said.

Despite facing challenges posed



Above: Containers are loaded onto a cargo vessel in Qinzhou Port, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, a transit point on the New International Land-Sea Trade Corridor.

ZHANG AILIN / XINHUA

Left: A train leaves Chongqing to follow the trade corridor toward Yunnan province.

TANG YI / XINHUA

Right: New energy vehicles are produced at the Guangzhou Automobile Group Co factory in Guangzhou, Guangdong province.

DENG HUA / XINHUA



by a complex global environment, China's foreign trade reached 20.1 trillion yuan in the first half of this year, a 2.1 percent year-on-year rise. It was the first time the nation's foreign trade value had exceeded 20 trillion yuan during a half-year period, GAC data showed.

Early this month, the GAC unveiled 15 policy measures to support growth of the New International Land-Sea Trade Corridor in an attempt to boost China's trade with fellow signatories of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, or RCEP, agreement and expand interaction with trading partners worldwide.

Wu Haiping, director-general of the GAC's general operations department, said the new measures include better linking the land-sea trade corridor with booming China-Europe freight train services and the Yangtze River Economic Belt. They also help domestic companies to benefit fully from the RCEP agreement by further fostering smoother and more efficient trade routes connecting western China with key seaports and rail hubs in the Asia-Pacific region and Europe.

Launched in 2017, the land-sea trade corridor is a trade and logistics passage jointly established by provincial-level regions in western China and member economies of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. It is also one of the key projects of the Belt and Road Initiative.

Li Dongyu, deputy head of the GAC's ideological and political affairs office, said a leadership group with six sub-working groups has been established to urge all Party members to comprehensively study and promote high-quality development and advance Chinese modernization through the thematic education campaign. The sub-groups include those covering documentation, publicity, rectification and improvement.

The leadership group had held several high-level meetings and conducted numerous field research trips and study activities nationwide by the end of July, to improve the GAC's governance capacity in advancing toward the goal of national rejuvenation through the Chinese path toward modernization.

Chen Jianqi, a professor at the Party School of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (National Academy of Governance), said the Party's 20th National Congress in October drew up a blueprint

for comprehensively building a modern socialist country. However, achieving this objective remains a challenging task for the Party and the nation.

As a result, it is vital for CPC officials to adeptly comprehend the principles of the Party's novel theories, Chen said, adding that such comprehension is essential to strengthen the officials' ability to effectively respond to the population's pressing needs and overcome complex challenges that need resolving.

Revised measures

Extensive fact-finding activities are a key part of the thematic education campaign. Officials from the Ministry of Commerce have held roundtable meetings with foreign companies, set up task forces for key foreign-invested projects, and introduced new policy measures to shore up economic growth and push for continuous progress in deepening reforms and expanding opening-up.

In July, the ministry said the government would revise administrative measures for strategic foreign investment in listed companies. The move is aimed at encouraging overseas companies to invest in the Chinese stock market.

Guo Tingting, vice-minister of commerce, said that given the slowdown in global economic recovery and decline in cross-border investment, China will continue to shorten the negative list for foreign investment and offer overseas companies prompt assistance in solving their problems.

To encourage foreign companies to play a bigger role in the Chinese market, senior officials from the

Ministry of Commerce have held a number of roundtable conferences and meetings this year with top corporate executives and heads of foreign business associations from Japan, Germany, the Netherlands, Singapore and the United States.

The officials said overseas companies could expect more growth opportunities, as China is progressing with domestic modernization in an all-around manner and unwaveringly advancing high-standard opening-up.

Zhu Bing, director-general of the ministry's foreign investment administration department, said the arrangements for roundtable and regular meetings will further expand channels for gathering feedback on foreign companies' operational difficulties. This will help address their concerns promptly, in addition to assisting their stable development in China.

"Apart from effectively implementing existing policies, the government will give priority to addressing common concerns raised by foreign companies, including fair competition and investment facilitation," he said, adding that new measures will be introduced in the second half of this year to boost foreign investors' confidence in China.

The nation's massive market, well-developed industrial system and strong supply chain

competitiveness were highlighted by Francis Liekens, vice-president for China at Atlas Copco Group, the Swedish industrial equipment manufacturer.

He said China remains one of the world's most dynamic markets. The country has witnessed persistent growth despite geopolitical changes and challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. This trend will continue in coming years, Liekens added.

China is transitioning from being the "world's factory" to a high-end manufacturer as domestic consumption grows, Liekens said. The trend toward localization has fueled growth in many sectors over the past seven years, including electronics, semiconductors, automotive, petrochemicals, transportation, aerospace, and green energy. Atlas Copco will work with all industries in the country, but particularly with these sectors, Liekens said.

"We are benefiting from this favorable climate because we have invested a lot in innovation to develop and extend our local products and solutions," he said. "You have to develop, transform and be innovative to stay relevant in China, where competition is getting stronger and market needs change at the speed of light."

Similar action has been taken by Thyssenkrupp, a German industrial engineering

conglomerate. Late last month, the company announced that one of its subsidiaries from the high-end manufacturing sector had launched a new production line with investment of 500 million yuan to produce seamless rolled rings for large megawatt wind turbines at its plant in Xuzhou, Jiangsu province.

It is the fourth time the company has invested in the factory since the plant was established in 2005. The new investment will boost the factory's production capacity by 150,000 metric tons.

Winfried Schulte, CEO of Thyssenkrupp Rothe Erde, a Thyssenkrupp subsidiary that supplies bearings and seamless rolled rings for various industrial applications, said: "China is one of the most important markets for our business. Wind turbines are designed gradually with a larger size and more megawatts. Seamless rolled rings of high quality are one of the key factors for safe operation."

In Beijing, Zhao Ping, vice-dean of the academy at the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade, said that as well as benefiting from the nation's technological advances, many foreign companies see China as a gateway to the broader Asia-Pacific region. They also view investing in China as a means of gaining access to the country's vast network of supply chains and distribution channels.

This view is supported by the latest data from the Ministry of Commerce, which show that in the first half of this year, the number of newly established foreign-invested enterprises in China reached 24,000, a year-on-year rise of 35.7 percent.



Cargo arriving at Qinzhou Port, Guangxi, is loaded onto trucks before being transported nationwide. ZHANG AILIN / XINHUA

WORLD

Drumming concert



Drummers perform in the 10th Florianopolis Drum Orchestra event in Florianopolis downtown, Santa Catarina state, Brazil, on Sunday. A total of 350 drummers gathered at the event, which is considered the largest meeting of drummers in the Americas, according to the organizers. EDUARDO VALENTE / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Africa looks at yuan as alternative

Move helps banks dilute concentrated dollar and euro portfolio, experts say

By EDITH MUTETHYA
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With the global prominence of yuan amid the devaluation of African currencies against the dollar, the continent could consider increasing yuan in their basket of reserve currencies for diversification purposes, observers say.

Li Xiuzhu, head of Global Markets China, corporate and investment banking at the Standard Bank, said such a move would help central banks in the continent to dilute a heavily concentrated US dollar, euro, and British pound sterling portfolio.

According to the International Monetary Fund, sub-Saharan Africa experienced a currency depreciation of 8 percent against the US dollar in 2022, with Ghana's cedi and Sierra Leone's leone depreciating by more than 45 percent.

The currency depreciation is frustrating efforts by African countries to curb inflation given that the region depends on imports with a significant share of them invoiced in the US dollar.

Li said increasing yuan in their reserves would enhance and consolidate the continent's trade ties



Li Xiuzhu

with China by providing transactional, trade and financing solutions.

"Many Africa-based importers who are now able to accept and pay against a yuan invoice have expanded their exposure to a wider network of Chinese suppliers, consequently elevating trade activities," he said.

Li said having the capability to deal in yuan would elevate trade, as it would open new business and trading relations between importers and exporters.

Currently, China is Africa's largest trade partner. Trade between China and Africa hit \$282 billion in 2022, an 11 percent year-on-year increase, according to the Chinese customs authorities.

Between January and April 2023, the figure reached \$94.4 billion, an 8.9 percent increase compared to the same period last year.

By increasing yuan in their reserves, Li said African countries with extensive ties to China could hedge potential supply-side risks by establishing the required infra-

structure and enhancing yuan clearing capabilities.

This, he said, would help in case any country experiences financial sanctions from the West as it happened to Russia.

Meanwhile, Li noted there has been an increasing uptake in using yuan across African markets, predominantly driven by private sector business incentives, facilitated by commercial financial institutions. Notably, Nigeria and South Africa have had swap agreements with China.

In response to the devaluation of African currencies against the US dollar, some countries have proposed a single currency in the continent, an idea Li said is bold and very risky.

'Mammoth task'

"I believe it is a mammoth of a task to create a monetary union in Africa like that of the European Union," he said.

Li said almost 24 years after the EU was established, its intention was not successfully achieved with failed economies like Greece that almost destroyed the union in 2008.

Unlike Europe, goods with value additions in African countries are minimal mainly due to the relatively underdeveloped manufacturing capabilities on the continent, he said.

Li is of the view that African countries should trade a lot more with each other as well as ensure the countries have settlement capabilities within each other to allow exchanges of their currencies.

This will ensure the continent is interlinked, after which the one currency will make sense.

He said the Common Monetary Area, or CMA, for instance, in Africa can sustain itself due to its reliance on a dominant economic power in a region like South Africa. Established in 1974, the CMA is a monetary union that includes South Africa, Namibia, Lesotho and Eswatini.

While each country issues its own currency, all four currencies are governed by the South African Reserve Bank and are valued and exchanged at par with the South African rand.

Li commended ongoing developments to promote intra-Africa trade in the continent like the Pan-African Payment and Settlement System.

Launched in January 2022, the settlement system is a cross-border, financial market infrastructure enabling payment transactions across Africa.

It allows companies in Africa to pay for intra-African trade transactions in their local currency. Currently, Africa has approximately 42 individual currencies.

federal court.

When Trump arrives at the Fulton County jail for processing, he is expected to spend no more than a few hours inside the facility. The other defendants in the election interference case — which include Trump's former chief of staff Mark Meadows and his one-time personal attorney Rudy Giuliani — will likely encounter a straightforward fingerprinting and mugshot process, according to former Georgia prosecutor Chris Timmons.

"Unless somebody tells me differently, we are following our normal practices, and so [it] doesn't matter your status, we got mugshots ready for you," Fulton County Sheriff Pat Labat said earlier this month about the planned processing.

The defendants are then likely to be released on their signatures, known as an "own bond," meaning they will likely not have to put down money or property given their relatively low flight risk, Timmons said.

Last month, the US Justice Department announced an investigation into the conditions at the jail.

"The recent allegations of filthy housing teeming with insects, rampant violence resulting in death and injuries, and officers using excessive force are cause for grave concern and warrant a thorough investigation," said Ryan Buchanan, US attorney for the Northern District of Georgia.

ABC News reported that last year 15 inmates died inside the jail; this year, seven have died.

RIDING BRI OPPORTUNITIES

Kyrgyzstan hopes to cement role as bridge through BRI

By WANG QINGYUN
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Central Asia hopes to further consolidate its role as a bridge connecting China and Europe and strengthen its status as a logistics hub by participating in the Belt and Road Initiative, said Djoomart Otorbaev, former prime minister of Kyrgyzstan.

Otorbaev said he expects to see Central Asia, once a key passage of the ancient Silk Road, build a "new great silk road" that will bring the region back "onto the map of the world".

The former prime minister said during a recent interview in Beijing that he hopes that through BRI cooperation, especially the construction of a railway linking Kyrgyzstan with China on the east and Uzbekistan on the west, Kyrgyzstan will transform itself from a landlocked country into a land-linked one.

The railway project is one focus of cooperation between China and Kyrgyzstan.

During his talks with visiting Kyrgyz President Sadyr Japarov on the sidelines of the China-Central Asia Summit in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, in May, Chinese President Xi Jinping called for an early start of the construction of the railway.

In a joint declaration that the leaders signed after the talks, the two countries agreed to speed up work on the railway to further tap into Central Asia's potential for cross-border transportation, and said they will promote BRI cooperation in trade, infrastructure and other fields.

Otorbaev said the railway construction will not be easy in his country, but the success of the Kunming-Vientiane Railway linking China with Laos, a landlocked and mountainous country like Kyrgyzstan, gives him confidence.

"China has state-of-the-art technology to build a railroad in mountainous conditions (and) to drill tunnels. We can see it in the Kunming-Vientiane railroad," he said.

Once completed, the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway will boost trade and investment in Kyrgyzstan, Otorbaev said, pointing out that the railway will allow his country to better benefit from the enormous rail traffic between China and Europe.

In March 2011, a freight train embarked on a trip from Southwest China's Chongqing to Duisburg, Germany, making it the first train trip of the China-Europe Railway Express.

By the end of last year, a total of 65,000 trips had been made on the railway express, with 6 million TEUs of freight worth \$300 billion shipped, official statistics show.

In the past decade since the BRI was launched in 2013, the railway has become an artery for BRI cooperation. Currently, there are 82 train routes for the express, and nearly 80 percent of its train trips run through Central Asia, People's Daily reported.

Otorbaev said the completion of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway will further shorten the distance and time needed for trains to travel between Chinese and European cities, which will also benefit the inland regions of China.

Kyrgyzstan was among the first countries to have supported and participated in the joint construction of the Belt and Road.

Otorbaev said the fact that more than 150 countries and international organizations have joined the BRI is a demonstration of the "enormous success" of the initiative.

The world, which is becoming more divided over the past decade, needs dialogue to remain open and connected, Otorbaev said. "The Belt and Road Initiative is about dialogue and win-win (cooperation)," he said.

Seine swim contest called off over poor water quality

By CHEN WEIHUA in Brussels
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The swimming contest in Seine River, part of a triathlon test event ahead of the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris, was canceled on Sunday, the third such cancellation this month, due to the high level of E. coli bacteria in the water, raising concerns for the city's ambition to make the waterway safe for swimming next summer.

A para triathlon swimming test event was canceled on Saturday while the 2023 Open Water Swimming World Cup was called off two weeks ago after heavy rains caused overflows of sewage into the Seine.

"As a precautionary measure and to protect the health of the athletes, the decision has once again been taken to cancel all the swimming races scheduled for today," the organizers said in a statement on Sunday.

The cause of high levels of bacteria in the Seine over the weekend is still being investigated. "To date, we have not yet found an explanation," said Paris Deputy Mayor Pierre Rabadan who is in charge of sport, the Seine and the 2024 Olympics.

Athletes were testing out the water last week to get used to the river currents.

The Paris 2024 Olympics organizers said open water swimming events can and will go ahead in the Seine during next year's Games. They said there is no Plan B, except a contingency plan that will allow swimming events to be postponed for a

few days if water quality does not meet standards. "There is no solution to move the event. The triathlon and open water swimming will be held in the Seine next year," said Tony Estanguet, head of the Paris 2024 organizing committee and a three-time Olympic canoe champion.

"The objective was to make the Seine swimmable in 2024."

Back in 1990, Paris mayor Jacques Chirac, who later became the French president, pledged to restore water quality, but the Seine was still not safe for swimming despite all efforts.

The efforts to stage next year's Olympic and Paralympic swimming races in the Seine represent the city government's latest ambition to cleanse the river. For now, heavy rain still poses the biggest risk because it can cause the sewage system in Paris to overflow into the river, polluting it with fecal bacteria.

"We still have a lot of work ahead for the year 2024... to be able to face exceptional water like what we have known at the end of July and beginning of August," said Christophe Noel du Payrat, chief of staff of the Paris region authority.

A 1.4 billion euro (\$1.5 billion) investment in wastewater management from the state and local governments has made "significant progress" in past years and polluted water overflow into the Seine has been reduced, according to the 2024 Olympics organizers.

Agencies contributed to the story.

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WORLD

Editor's note: A project in eastern Thailand has been striving to strike a balance between wildlife and human communities. This page reviews how the initiative uses technology and traditional knowledge to protect the ecosystem inhabited by nearly 600 wild elephants, while crafting innovative solutions to mitigate conflict between these creatures and villagers.



A general view shows a meadow in the Khao Ang Rue Nai Wildlife Sanctuary in Chachoengsao Province, Thailand. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Staff members of the Friends of the Asian Elephant hospital inspect an injured elephant in Lampang, northern Thailand, on Aug 6 last year. WANG TENG / XINHUA

By YANG WANLI in Bangkok
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Hidden in the forest of Chachoengsao Province in eastern Thailand, a compound of several single-story houses is being guarded by crews of security guards. In one of these houses, Piyawan Unaha is closely watching the monitors for the appearance of Asian elephants.

Piyawan works at the Bajrasudha Gajanurak Command Center, an advance warning project to detect the activities of wild elephants in five eastern Thai provinces, namely Chachoengsao, Chon Buri, Rayong, Chanthaburi and Sa Kaeo. The provinces are home to nearly 600 wild elephants.

The project, initiated by the Thai royal family, aims to ease the conflict between local communities and wild elephants as the animals encroach upon farmland and houses to forage for food.

Limited food sources have forced wild elephants into such behavioral patterns, posing risks to both elephants and humans.

"The name of the project literally means 'an elixir that strengthens elephants to be as strong as diamonds,'" Piyawan said. "It equally focuses on the welfare of both wild elephants and humans alike and strikes that delicate balance where both species can comfortably exist side by side."

The Thai king and queen have made personal contributions to establish the Gajanurak Fund, which supports the purchase of elephant surveillance equipment, alarm systems, radio communications systems and flashlights for volunteers tasked with alerting the villagers of any possible elephant confrontations, she said.

Forests in the five provinces are equipped with comprehensive elephant surveillance systems, helping to track and monitor elephant movements via automated cameras.

"When the surveillance system detects elephants, an alert signal will be sent via the Line chat app to local villagers and the volunteer team, tasked with returning the wild elephants to their natural habitat," Piyawan said.

The system currently involves pilot projects in eight villages, with an additional 43 villages within the network. All 51 villages in the network are affected by foraging wild elephants.

Statistics from Thailand's Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation show that the country now has about 3,000 to 5,000 wild elephants.

The elephant population has increased over the past decade, Thai nonprofit Human and Elephant Voices Network said.

However, problems such as habitat loss and degradation due to the increase in the human population and agricultural encroachment

Thais see 'elixir' as solution to human-elephant conflict

Authorities start project to restore natural habitats of the gentle giants, hoping it will stop them from going to farmland and houses to forage for food



A 3-year-old Asian elephant tries to lift a vehicle used to deter it from disturbing tourists in Khao Yai National Park, 120 kilometers northeast of Bangkok, in January 2017. CHALIT SAPHAPAK VIA SOLENT NEWS

have also emerged, a trend also seen in other countries.

In China's Yunnan province, the population of wild Asian elephants has increased from about 150 in the 1980s to more than 300 last year due to protection measures, according to statistics from the National Forestry and Grassland Administration, or NFGA.

With the growth in the elephant population, conflicts between humans and elephants have become more frequent. To cope with the growing problem, Yunnan has introduced a commercial insurance model into its compensation mechanism.

Over the past decade, the province has paid out nearly 200 million yuan (\$27.44 million) for losses caused by elephants.

"As long as humans and elephants live on the same land, such conflict

will inevitably occur," Ahimsa Campos-Areiz, elephant expert and researcher from the Megafauna Ecology and Conservation Group at the Xishuangbanna Tropical Botanical Garden under the Chinese Academy of Sciences, said. "The essence of it is the competition for resources, which has existed since ancient times."

As humans have appropriated more and more natural resources, he said human factors have prevailed. "Human-elephant conflict is directly due to the loss of natural habitat," he said.

In Yunnan, such conflict even resulted in a rare phenomenon. In 2021, 15 wild Asian elephants in the province traveled 500 kilometers from their habitat, becoming a hot topic on the internet and in the media all over the world.

"The fundamental way to allevi-

ate human-elephant conflict is to create more suitable habitats for elephants," Chen Fei, director of the Asian Elephant Research Center under the NFGA, said.

"In addition, ecological corridors can also be built to connect habitats."

He said China is exploring ways to further restore the habitat of Asian elephants by building national parks.

Protecting ecosystems

The parks will prioritize the protection of ecosystems rather than the utilization of natural resources. The strongest protection in the parks will occur within "red line" zones, a key government strategy that places designated areas under mandatory state protection.

Yunnan is currently pooling ideas from experts both at home and abroad to build a more science-based management system for the

Asian Elephant National Park before its official launch.

Similar to the management principle of China's national parks, the Bajrasudha Gajanurak Project has adopted a system to meet the needs of three different zones — forest conservation zones, buffer zones and community zones.

Forest conservation zones are mainly for the elephants. Designated water sources are provided to dissuade elephants from venturing out of their natural habitat in search of food.

The project plans to build a total of 60 water sources of different sizes, with a combined capacity of approximately 1.8 million cubic meters. A total of 23 water sources have been established so far.

General Chalermchai Sithisad, privy councilor and executive chair of the Gajanurak Fund, said refore-

station is also an important part of the conservation zones, which helps replenish natural food sources for wild elephants.

He said other suitable food crops and edible flora have been carefully planted for the wild elephants and other animals. These include bamboo, mangoes, bananas, as well as artificial salt licks.

In buffer zones, corridors connecting different ecosystems serve as temporary dwelling places for wild elephants, preventing them from venturing out to forage in local communities.

Buffer zones offer moist, grassy meadows and food sources for wild elephants and other animals.

"Some community forests have even been converted into buffer zones as they host a wide range of biodiversity and crop species, useful for both humans and wildlife," Chalermchai said.

In addition, medicinal plants such as red galangal, pepper, cardamom and water tubes have been included in buffer zones for household use.

"Strongly scented plants that elephants find repugnant, such as climbing wattle and cassia, are also cleverly added at the boundary of the zones as a natural perimeter to deter elephants from straying into local communities and damaging homes," he said.

Raising awareness

In community zones, the focus is on community development, raising awareness and creating understanding among local villagers about the behavior of wild elephants.

In addition, community zones support training for volunteers to learn how to properly rehabilitate wild elephants back to their habitat.

"The project aims to create a natural setting where local folks and the pachyderms can share resources in nearby habitats through safe, lasting and practical solutions that can be maintained by the communities themselves," Rungnapar Pattanavibool, deputy director-general of Thailand's Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation, said.

"And the zoning approach creates a sustainable solution for coexistence between humans and wildlife."

Rungnapar said the Bajrasudha Gajanurak Project has so far made progress in all aspects as it seeks to solve problems at the root. Nevertheless, since the conflict between elephants and local communities has been a long-standing issue, it will take time to change elephant behavior and assist their return to the forest.

"Brewing an elixir that works is never easy," Rungnapar said. "Hopefully, the current success of the Bajrasudha Gajanurak Project will inspire many more on the quest for their own magic potion that will make a difference."

Initiative to help foster symphony of coexistence

By YANG WANLI in Bangkok

Thailand enjoys great animal diversity, with more than 200 protected areas of national parks, wildlife sanctuaries and wildlife non-hunting areas, which cover 17 percent of Thailand's total area, said the Wildlife Conservation Society in New York.

The country is well known for the Asian elephant, the largest land mammal in the world, which can also be found in countries including Bangladesh, Sri Lanka,

Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and China.

The shoulder height of an adult Asian elephant is about 2.5 meters, and they weigh on average about 4 metric tons. Elephants can live for 60 to 70 years.

Asian elephants live in various habitats, from open grasslands to deep evergreen forests. They spend most of their time eating, and an adult elephant can consume 150 to 200 kilograms of food each day.

Asian elephants play an important role as "engineers" of the rain-

forest, said Chen Fei, director of the Asian Elephant Research Center under China's National Forestry and Grassland Administration.

"Their migration can accelerate the replacement of forest ecosystems along the way, while elephant dung not only remains a delicacy for insects but also attracts insectivorous birds, allowing plant seeds to spread," Chen said.

Elephants, as both umbrella and flagship species in conservation, ensure protection for other wildlife species within their habitat when

they are safeguarded, Chen said.

To further protect Asian elephants, a flagship species in the rainforest, Thailand's National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation Department has drawn up a 10-year action plan to mitigate human-elephant conflicts that have occurred wherever elephants and locals share the same habitat and compete for the same resources.

The 2020-29 plan strives to provide elephants in protected forest zones with food and water, enhance their habitat and promote

elephant awareness in neighboring communities.

These efforts are expected to enhance local villagers' comprehension of nature conservation and living harmoniously with wildlife.

Some pilot projects also equip villagers with skills to better their living conditions and manage village funds.

Alongside empowering local communities, pilot projects have also been launched to secure water sources for local consumption and agricultural needs, thereby sustaining livelihoods, said Chalermchai Sithisad, privy councilor and executive chair of the Gajanurak Fund that supports local conservation endeavors.

These efforts have united villagers in solidarity, enabling them to share knowledge on a variety of alternative livelihoods, such as transitioning from single-crop farming to multiple-crop farming, he said.

As a result, local villagers have established 33 groups or associations to assist one another in earning income from different sources, such as medicinal herbs, basketry and food processing.

"The approach enhances local communities' quality of life while offering them peace of mind and protection from wild animals through the use of alert and surveillance systems," Chalermchai said.

WORLDUS

Wading through the storm



Ronald Mendiola returns to his home through a flooded street after Tropical Storm Hilary passed Cathedral City, California, on Monday. BRYAN WOOLSTON / REUTERS

ROK opposition decries Camp David pact

By YANG HAN in Hong Kong
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The Republic of Korea's move to step up security cooperation with the United States and Japan under a trilateral pact has evoked criticism within the ROK, with opposition parties in Seoul saying the agreement is not in the ROK's interests.

"Many people see this summit as one where the national interests of the US and Japan are visible but not those of the ROK," said Park Kwang-on, floor leader of the ROK's main opposition Democratic Party.

Speaking at a party meeting on Monday, Park said the framework of the ROK-US-Japan cooperation should not be a confrontational strategy that focuses on military cooperation, but a cooperation strategic framework that promotes peace and stability in the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia.

Lee Jae-myung, head of ROK's Democratic Party, said Yoon failed to raise territory issues with Japan, as well as concerns over Japan's planned release of nuclear-contaminated water from the crippled Fukushima Daiichi power plant.

US President Joe Biden, ROK President Yoon Suk-yeol and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida agreed on Friday to a trilateral security cooperation during a summit

held at the Camp David presidential retreat in Maryland, in the United States.

A series of documents were adopted at the summit, including a "Commitment to Consult," which said the three countries committed their governments to "consult trilaterally with each other, in an expeditious manner, to coordinate our responses to regional challenges, provocations, and threats affecting our collective interests and security."

Though the documents did not use the term "military alliance", Woo Su-keun, head of the Institute of East Asian Studies of Korea in the ROK, said the trilateral meeting has laid the foundation for forming an "Asian NATO".

Real target

The real target of trilateral cooperation is China and not the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, or DPRK, because the latter is not a big threat to the US, Woo told China Daily, adding that the trilateral security cooperation may further increase tensions on the Korean Peninsula.

From the DPRK's perspective, if it feels a bigger threat to national security due to the enhanced defense cooperation among the US, the ROK and Japan, it is impossible for it to be willing to have a

friendly and peaceful dialogue with the ROK, said Woo.

"This strengthened trilateral security cooperation is for sure going to push the DPRK away from the peace process," said Lakhvinder Singh, director of the peace program at the Asia Institute, a Seoul-based think tank.

"It has brought us closer to nuclear catastrophe", Singh said, noting that what the region needs is closer cooperation among the countries.

Singh said the trilateral cooperation puts too much focus on defense, while what the ROK and Japan really need to deal with is their economic situation.

The US has taken the Russia-Ukraine conflict "as an opportunity to refurbish NATO and has forged the 'Indo-Pacific' strategy", senior international affairs writer Jung E-gil, noted in a commentary published in the ROK's newspaper Han-kyoreh on Sunday.

With the Yoon government's "generous concession" to Japan, the trilateral alliance system has been put back on track, he said. Jung quoted Haruki Wada, an emeritus professor at Tokyo University, as saying that cooperation with Japan in a confrontation with fellow Koreans in the DPRK is the wrong course for the ROK.

China slams trilateral summit statement

By WANG QINGYUN
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China is "strongly dissatisfied and firmly opposed" to the United States, Japan and the Republic of Korea interfering in its internal affairs and sowing discord between China and its neighbors, Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said.

Wang made the remarks on Monday, after leaders of the US, Japan, and the ROK met at Camp David in Maryland and issued a joint statement attacking China over the South China Sea issue and the Taiwan question.

The allies have breached basic norms guiding international relations and China has made solemn demarches to the parties involved, Wang told a news conference.

Noting the US has said its trilateral partnership with Japan and the ROK is not against anyone, Wang urged the US to honor its words with actions and stop smearing China and hurting China's interests.

Also, Washington, which has "dominated" efforts to stoke division and revive Cold War mentality in the Asia-Pacific by forming cliques such

as AUKUS and Quad, should cease creating confrontation and undermining regional peace, Wang said.

"The Asia-Pacific is a land for peaceful development and should not become a boxing ring for great power rivalry, even less a battlefield for cold or hot war," Wang said.

"We urge relevant countries not to ... try replicating bloc confrontation in the Asia-Pacific, and not to pursue selfish interest at the expense of other countries' strategic security interests and the well-being of people in the region."

Speaking of the Taiwan question, Wang said China strives for peaceful reunification with the greatest sincerity and utmost efforts, but will never allow interference in its internal affairs under the pretext of peace.

The greatest threat to peace across the Taiwan Strait is "Taiwan independence" activities and foreign connivance and support to them, Wang said.

"If relevant countries do care about cross-strait peace and stability, they should follow the one-China principle and stop conniving or supporting 'Taiwan independence' separatists or their separatist activities," the spokesman said, adding

that no one should underestimate China's will to safeguard its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Rebuking accusations over maritime issues made by the US, Japan and the ROK in their joint statement, Wang said China has indisputable sovereignty over the South China Sea islands and their adjacent waters.

"It is reasonable and lawful for China to carry out construction on its own territory and for the Chinese coast guard vessels to carry out law enforcement in waters under China's jurisdiction," Wang said.

Also, as a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, China has always faithfully followed the convention and other international laws, and does not accept or recognize the illegal award on the South China Sea arbitration, Wang said.

In recent years, the US has "done all it can" to interfere in the South China Sea issue, Wang said.

China will continue to firmly safeguard its sovereignty and security interests, and work with member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to implement the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, Wang said.

Pandas: Prepare for long DC goodbye

From page 1

"We'll miss them terribly, and I'm sure the community will, but they're going to a great place. And you know, like I said, it's bittersweet. We've been successful, which is why unfortunately we have to say goodbye," Amaral said.

The curator said he and his colleagues will talk with their Chinese partners about how best to continue

the conservation programs.

Karen Wille, who works for Pandas International, a US nonprofit organization, said Xiao Qi Ji is very special to many visitors because they just watched him grow in front of them.

"I'm sad that they're leaving, but I know that they'll have a wonderful life in China," she said. "I know they will. Because I've been to China. So I've seen the way the pandas are treated and taken care of. And they're

so good to them. But we won't be happy because they'll be gone."

Local visitor Benjy Renton said, "I really hope that we can continue to receive pandas in the near future, and continue those partnerships, not just here in DC but also with other zoos around the country."

Before the pandas leave, there will be a "Panda Palooza," a giant celebration of the five decades of the pandas' presence at the zoo.

Xi calls on youth to promote Sino-US ties

Chinese president's reply to students' association's letter warmly welcomed

By LINDA DENG in Seattle
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Ron Chow, a resident of Washington state and co-chairman of the US-China Youth and Student Exchange Association, had every reason to feel delighted recently, thanks to a letter. It was a reply from Chinese President Xi Jinping, conveyed by the Chinese Ambassador to the United States Xie Feng.

Xi had replied to the letter the association had written to him on July 25, expressing their warm wishes for the success of the FISU World University Games in Chengdu, Sichuan province, and updated Xi about the association's exchange programs after the pandemic.

In his reply, the Chinese president wrote, "As America's gateway to China and Asia, Washington State has carried out fruitful exchanges and cooperation with China over the years. My two visits to Washington State left me with beautiful memories. I recall vividly the wonderful performance by Lincoln High School students eight years ago, and cherish very much the football and jersey they gave me."

"I hope more young people from China and the US will get to know each other better, work hand in hand, and become a new generation of ambassadors of friendship to inject fresh impetus into the growth of China-US relations," he said in the letter.

Xi's letter also said he was pleased to learn about the updates and wished them greater progress.

Chow said he was "excited and honored to receive the letter." "Due to the pandemic, we had to stop many



We hope to receive more support from the Chinese government in promoting exchanges in technology, academics, culture, sports, and more for youth and students in both countries."

David Chong, founder and president of the US-China Youth and Student Exchange Association

exchange programs. This letter provided us with great encouragement, and we look forward to more cooperative and interactive programs for youth exchanges between the US and China."

David Chong, founder and president of the US-China Youth and Student Exchange Association, now in Hong Kong, said he was extremely honored to receive the response from Xi.

"I am so excited that the association's efforts to promote youth and student exchanges between China and the US since 2015 have been recognized by President Xi. In the future, we hope to receive more support from the Chinese government in promoting exchanges in technology, academics, culture, sports, and more for youth and students in both countries," he said.

"This will allow more American

youth and students to participate in our programs and help more American families to truly know and understand China," he added.

"I hope to apply what I've learned to practice and contribute to building a bridge of mutual learning and exchange between the US and China. I also hope to contribute to promoting cultural exchanges and fostering mutual trust between the two countries as a young ambassador," Chong said.

The association is now planning to establish its office in China to better promote bilateral exchanges.

In July, the association sent a high school teacher and five students from Steilacoom, Washington, and Millbrae in California to participate in the 17th Shanghai International Youth Interactive Friendship Camp.

Speaking with China Daily, Kathy Eastman, the teacher from Steilacoom High School who accompanied the students during the trip, said despite all of the duties the president has in running a country and preparing for the international games, he would still find the time to write to them.

Xi visited Washington State twice. In September 2015, he visited Lincoln High School in Tacoma, Washington. At the school auditorium, the president was captivated by songs from the Lincoln High School choir and students of Fuzhou Education College Affiliated Middle School.

The Chinese song was *In the Fields of Hope*, while the English song was *What a Wonderful World*.

One of the participating Lincoln High School students, Maurice Chong, is now pursuing higher studies at Peking University, and working with both Chinese and US youths on a tech project for the Hangzhou Asian Games, which will begin in late September.

Xinjiang embraces CIIE for more opportunities

By YUAN SHENGGAO

China International Import Expo officials credit cooperation with Xinjiang exhibitors and trading groups for boosting business and cultural communication among its participants.

The sixth CIIE is pursuing a strategy of promotion while holding a variety of events to boost matchmaking among exhibitors and buyers. The latest were held on Thursday and Friday in Urumqi, capital of Northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.

Liu Fuxue, deputy director-general of the CIIE Bureau, said at the event that the successful staging of the CIIE for five consecutive sessions is thanks to the strong support from and cooperation with various trading groups and relevant organizations.

Liu said the main purpose of holding a pre-exhibition event in Urumqi was to open channels of communication between Xinjiang enterprises and overseas enterprises, aimed at creating economic and trade cooperation platforms to assist Xinjiang in sharing its opening-up achievements with the outside world while embracing a more open economic system.

Such an activity can also accelerate the construction of a major

opening-up channel and activate international and domestic markets and resources in a bid to help the region integrate into the new development pattern, Liu added.

Several officials, including Hu Jianping, special representative of the ministry of commerce in Xi'an, and You Jialin, deputy director of Xinjiang's commerce department, spoke at the event. Seven CIIE participants in the food and agricultural exhibition area, including CP Group, Goodfarmer Fruits and Dapharm, showcased their products and services, along with 11 exhibitors in the technical equipment exhibition area and nine in the consumer goods exhibition area.

More than 180 Xinjiang buyers, including Goldwind and Yema, attended the event, negotiating with exhibitors and establishing business contacts, while multiple organizations in the industry organized buyers to watch online.

Three other pre-exhibition matchmaking activities have been held on July 6, July 26 and Aug 8, covering all six exhibition areas of the CIIE. At the Urumqi event, the CIIE Low-Carbon Energy and Environmental Protection Technology special committee held a closed-door meeting to promote low-carbon development and environmental protection technologies.

Liu said the goal of the special committee is to build a bridge between the government and enterprises, provide a window for exhibitors to propose their suggestions and promote the healthy and sustainable development of the industry.

He added the committee will constantly expand its influence and continue to gather globally renowned exhibitors to showcase low-carbon technologies and achievements.

Xinjiang has prominent advantages in natural resources, and the industry as a whole is developing toward high-quality, high-tech and low-energy consumption, Liu said.

He pointed out that such an activity will help exhibitors understand the industrial characteristics and business environment of Xinjiang, assist them in exploring the local market and promote the green and low-carbon development of local industries.

Eleven participating companies from the technical equipment exhibition area, including Baker Hughes, Milliken and Accenture, participated in the Urumqi event, covering industries such as energy, environmental protection, water treatment, new materials, and automation.

During the sixth CIIE, the Low-Carbon Energy and Environmental Protection Technology special committee will continue to carry out forum activities and invite participants from government, industry, academia and research to participate.



From left: The CIIE Low-Carbon Energy and Environmental Protection Technology special committee hosts a closed-door meeting in Urumqi, capital of the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, on Friday. A business matchmaking event is held in Xinjiang on Thursday. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

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LPR not cut; market expects realty support

Experts say regulators may consider other steps to shore up troubled sector

By ZHOU LANXU
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China surprisingly kept the benchmark for mortgage rates unchanged on Monday, signaling that a policy mix that is more substantial than cutting the benchmark to address the property sector downturn is likely on the horizon, experts said.

Some of the first-tier cities (Beijing, Shanghai, and Shenzhen and Guangzhou in Guangdong province) may ease property market restrictions while commercial banks may accelerate the repricing of outstanding mortgages, they said.

The unexpected skip of a rate cut also reflects the intensified pressure on commercial banks' profit margins, they said, indicating that measures to ease banks' funding costs may follow shortly as well, with a focus on reducing the reserve requirement ratio and deposit rates.

On Monday, the over-five-year loan prime rate, a market-based lending benchmark on which lenders base their interest rates for new mortgages, came in at 4.2 percent, unchanged from July, according to the People's Bank of China.

This surprised the market as many analysts expected the over-five-year LPR to drop amid ramped-up policy support for the property sector, especially as the PBOC last week cut the interest rate on the medium-term lending facility, a key policy benchmark, a move that usually guides LPRs lower.

Experts said the move should not be misread that policymakers are paddling back policy support for the property sector. Instead, the absence of a rate cut implies that regulators may be mulling other more substantial measures, as simply cutting the mortgage rate benchmark has proven to have a limited impact on shoring up the sluggish homebuying demand.

The over-five-year LPR decreased by 10 basis points to 4.2 percent in June. Though the move helped ease homebuyers' costs, China's property sales continued to contract. The area of commercial buildings sold came in at 665.63 million square meters in the first seven months, down 6.5 percent year-on-year, compared with 5.3 percent in the first six months, according to the National Bureau of Statistics.

Wen Bin, chief economist at China Minsheng Bank, said the impact generated by the decrease in the interest rates of new mortgages seems to be limited.

"Reducing the interest rates of outstanding mortgages can better play the role of anchoring expecta-

tions, stabilizing the property sector and shoring up credit expansion," Wen said, adding that holding the over-five-year LPR unchanged will help commercial banks maintain a reasonable profit margin and reserve the scope for them to reduce the interest rates on outstanding mortgages at an early date.

At a joint meeting of the PBOC, the National Financial Regulatory Administration and the China Securities Regulatory Commission on Friday, it was decided that the prices of new and outstanding financial products should be coordinated while property credit policies should be adjusted and optimized.

"It takes the coordination and optimization of more property sector policies to promote a substantive recovery in market expectations," said a report by the China Index Academy, a real estate data and analytics provider. The report indicated a growing likelihood of the first-tier cities easing their property market restrictive measures in the short term as their areas of weekly home sales have dropped by nearly 30 percent compared with July since the beginning of August.

Potential measures include reducing down payment requirements, easing homebuying restrictions and reducing taxes and fees on home transactions, the report said.

While the over-five-year LPR was held steady on Monday, the one-year LPR, on which lenders base their short-term financing to enterprises and consumer loans, dropped by 10 basis points to 3.45 percent, the second decline this year following one in June.

The move will help spur individuals' credit demand and corporate financing needs, but more efforts are needed at an early date to reverse the worsening investor confidence and market expectations, experts said.

On Monday, the benchmark Shanghai Composite Index dropped by 1.24 percent to 3092.98 points, going below the psychological level of 3100 points and marking the lowest reading in seven months.

"Big steps in policy adjustments are needed. Otherwise, market expectations may not be able to turn around," said Gong Liutang, a member of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

Gong, also a professor of applied economics at Peking University's Guanghua School of Management, underscored the need for further easing of interest rates, boosting the scale of central government bonds and promoting consumption tax reform.

station will further tap the abundant clean energy resources in the region, and is estimated to replace about 4.63 million metric tons of standard coal once operational.

CR24 expedites railway depot

China Railway 24th Bureau Group Corp said it is expediting construction of a depot for high-speed trains stopping at Wenzhou South Railway Station in Zhejiang province. It has ramped up supplies for project teams. "It is a key project to facilitate transportation in southern parts of Zhejiang. With the new depot, Wenzhou South station will have stronger operating capacity to conduct examination and maintenance," said Lin Jianqi, general manager of the operating company under the local government, adding special support and care will continue to help on-site workers.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY



Visitors seen at an expo focusing on sports in Beijing last week, which is related to the services trade fair in the capital next month. YUAN YI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Opening-up to rank high during fair

By ZHONG NAN
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China will expedite progress in crafting both national and pilot free trade zone versions of the negative list governing cross-border trade in services, amid efforts to further advance its opening-up, government officials said on Monday.

They made the remarks ahead of the 2023 China International Fair for Trade in Services, which will be held from Sept 2 to 6 in Beijing.

Chen Chunjiang, assistant minister of commerce, said that in addition to proactively aligning with high-standard international economic and trade rules, the government will upgrade the establishment of national demonstration zones for innovative development of trade in services.

The country will also build high-standard service outsourcing demonstration cities to cultivate new forms and models of services trade in various sectors, thus creating fresh momentum in service exports, said Chen.

In contrast to goods trade, trade in services refers to the sale and delivery of intangible services, such as transportation, finance, tourism, telecommunications, construction, advertising, computing and accounting.

China's trade in services maintained growth momentum in the first half, with cumulative trade value growing 8.5 percent year-on-year to 3.14 trillion yuan (\$429.65 billion),

the Ministry of Commerce said.

Given that China's trade volume of digitally deliverable services surged 12.3 percent in the first six months, surpassing the overall growth rate of trade in services by 3.8 percentage points, the country will deploy more resources to optimize the business environment in this field, said Wang Dongtang, director-general of the department of trade in services and commercial services at the Ministry of Commerce.

The aim is to elevate the level of trade digitization and speed up the cultivation of new momentum in the digital development of trade in services, Wang said.

CIFTIS this year will further emphasize its role as a leader in technological innovation, new business models and emerging formats, said Sima Hong, Beijing's vice-mayor.

The main exhibition and nine specialized thematic exhibitions will focus on showcasing advanced achievements in specialized and emerging areas, including chip technology, quantum measurement and control, satellite remote sensing, artificial intelligence and digital healthcare, she said.

Ajlan & Bros Holding — a privately owned Saudi company — will showcase the full range of business results achieved by the group's joint ventures with its Chinese partners at its booth during CIFTIS next month.

"We are keen to strike strategic partnerships with more Chinese companies, especially in the areas we focus on, including finance, science

and technology, industrial manufacturing, tourism and healthcare," said Mohammed Al Ajlan, chairman of the Saudi-Chinese Business Council and deputy chairman of Ajlan & Bros Holding.

He said the Saudi company is committed to playing a role as a gateway to the Middle East and North Africa region as always, aiming to build a better ecosystem for China-Saudi industry cooperation to achieve win-win results.

With a conviction that trade in services will have a more substantial role in driving revenue growth, prominent Chinese retailer and e-commerce giant Suning.com is set to fortify its services prowess. Through the utilization of cloud-store solutions, the company aims to amplify the expansion of its business portfolio, including 300 flagship stores and an additional 20,000 retail outlets across China.

Ren Jun, president of Suning.com, said the company will accelerate its transformation from a retailer to a retail service provider, specifically a services-oriented retailer. This transformation will involve connecting with a more diverse array of ecological partners to serve a broader base of users and suppliers.

The Ministry of Commerce has designated 2023 as "Invest in China Year", featuring over 20 foreign investment-related events, including CIFTIS and the 23rd China International Fair for Investment and Trade, which will take place in Xiamen, Fujian province, from Sept 8 to 11.

Lin-gang to receive help on growing frontier biz

By SHI JING in Shanghai
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The 29 measures rolled out on Monday by the Shanghai municipal government for Lin-gang Special Area will facilitate the development of frontier industries and help the area further explore its role as a special economic zone by realizing more breakthroughs in institutional arrangements, said local officials.

Large scale stress tests will be conducted regarding cross-border data flow, cross-border and offshore finance, intellectual property rights protection and fair competition, according to the newly released measures.

In this sense, more pioneering supportive policies will be implemented in Lin-gang so that more successful practices can be made in this part of the China (Shanghai) Free Trade Zone. The moves will in turn help China to align with major agreements such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement, said Chen Jinshan, director of Lin-gang Special Area.

Yangshan Special Comprehensive Bonded Zone, which was unveiled in May 2020, should strengthen cooperation with markets such as Singapore, the United Kingdom and Dubai. It should further develop innovative businesses so that a better policy environment can be created for regional high-quality economic



A view of Lin-gang Special Area in Shanghai. FANG ZHE / XINHUA

development and high-standard opening-up, said Chen.

More power will be delegated to Lin-gang in terms of industrial upgrading, urban construction, talent attraction and comprehensive law enforcement, according to the new measures.

Companies specialized in low-carbon, green energy and trade in services will be better supported. Clusters of frontier industries should be able to seek faster development. To that end, the 20-billion-yuan (\$2.7 billion) technology innovation fund launched in Lin-gang in March should be better utilized, focusing on investment in smaller companies at an early stage and on key technological breakthroughs, according to the new measures.

Ruan Qing, deputy director of Shanghai Municipal Development & Reform Commission, said smart connected cars should be promoted in Lin-gang while a high-level, low-carbon green data center should be set up in the area.

Zhang Hongtao, deputy director of Shanghai Municipal Commission of Economy and Informatization, said that Lin-gang should lead the way in breakthroughs in terms of driverless

development and high-standard opening-up, said Chen.

In terms of the development of artificial intelligence, world leading algorithm innovation should be introduced in Lin-gang. Energy storage technologies featuring longer usage lives, higher safety standards, larger capacity and lower costs will be another highlight in Lin-gang. Healthcare companies should seek breakthroughs in terms of cell and gene therapy, said Zhang.

Trade in services should also seek substantial development in Lin-gang, said Shen Weihua, deputy director of the Shanghai Municipal Commission of Commerce. "Therefore, Lin-gang will be supported to build an international board at the international trading center of the Shanghai Technology Exchange. Foreign institutions will be encouraged to invest in Lin-gang-based technologically advanced companies via the qualified foreign limited partner program."

Officially included as part of the Shanghai FTZ in August 2019, Lin-gang Special Area has seen its average annual GDP growth rate stand at 21.2 percent over the past four years.

US nuke curbs unlikely to hurt, say specialists

By ZHENG XIN
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The United States' tightening control on exports to China of components required for nuclear power plants will have only a limited impact on the nation's nuclear energy sector, although it may affect the healthy development of the global nuclear industry chain, industry experts said.

China has been rapidly developing nuclear power plants in recent years amid its green energy transition, achieving substantial progress in domestic nuclear technologies, including Hualong One, the country's third-generation nuclear power tech with full intellectual property rights, said Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University.

In addition to nuclear technology like Hualong One, Lin said most of the other equipment has also been produced locally in recent years. Hualong One is one of the most widely accepted series of third-generation nuclear power reactors globally at present.

85 plus percent

localization rate of nuclear power equipment in China

While they may affect the global nuclear industry chain, export controls by the administration of US President Joe Biden will have little impact on China as domestic nuclear technology has already become the mainstay and its market share will only increase going forward, Lin said.

His remarks came after the Bureau of Industry and Security, an arm of the US Commerce Department, recently asked exporters to obtain specific licenses to export certain generators, containers and software intended for use in nuclear plants in China.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission, a US federal agency responsible for nuclear energy safety, also requires exporters to get specific licenses to export special nuclear as well as source material.

China's National Energy Administration has said previously that the localization rate of nuclear power equipment in China is currently more than 85 percent, with a large number of technological breakthroughs and achievements in domestic equipment research and development in recent years.

Two exports to China of regulated nuclear material occurred under a general license last year, Reuters reported.

The recent US requirements are "more symbolic than substantive", nonproliferation analyst Edwin Lyman of the nonprofit group, Union of Concerned Scientists was quoted as saying by Reuters. Lyman also expressed doubt over whether China's nuclear weapons program would be meaningfully impacted.

"China firmly upholds the international nonproliferation regime" and honors its obligations under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, said Chinese embassy spokesman Liu Pengyu in Washington, without offering specific comment on the US move.

He added that China opposes "putting geopolitical interests above nuclear nonproliferation efforts".

China National Nuclear Corp and China General Nuclear Power Corp did not respond to requests for comment.

Briefly

Capital expressway gets long tunnel

Beijing Capital Highway Development Group Co Ltd, which is implementing an expressway project in Beijing, drilled a tunnel 7.4 kilometers long using the shield-tunneling method on Monday, the longest such tunnel. The three-tier east tunnel project, part of Beijing's east sixth ring road project, is designed to have a two-way six-lane expressway on the middle level, smoke vent on the upper level and evacuation and rescue routes on the lower level.

Project promises green power

China Three Gorges Corp said it started building a pumped storage power station in Northwest China's Qinghai province on Saturday. It will have the largest installed capacity of 2.4 million kilowatts as well as the largest regulated storage capacity in the world's highest ultra-high altitude area (above 3,500 meters). The

BUSINESS



Technicians undertake examination work on a Cathay Pacific aircraft at Xiaoshan International Airport in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, in June. ZHU DIFENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Cathay Pacific aims to further strengthen travel ties between Chinese mainland, HK

By ZHU WENQIAN
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Cathay Pacific Airways, the largest carrier in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, said it plans to recruit more pilots and flight attendants from the Chinese mainland, as it aims to further strengthen its connections with the mainland and meet growing travel demand.

In July, Cathay Pacific, for the first time, began hiring about 200 to 300 flight attendants from the Chinese mainland this year. So far, more than 2,000 candidates have filed applications. Starting next year, the carrier plans to hire about 400 to 500 flight attendants annually and at least 800 cadet pilots from the mainland before 2025 to further improve its services.

"The capacity of Cathay Pacific and our budget arm HK Express together has resumed to nearly 60 percent of the pre-COVID levels. Capacity is on track to rebound to 70 percent by the end of the year, with full recovery by the end of 2024," Ronald Lam, CEO of Cathay Pacific Group, said during his recent visit to Beijing.

HK Express, a low-cost carrier that Cathay Pacific acquired in 2019, has an extensive network in Asia. Benefiting from strong travel demand, the number of flights operated by the carrier has exceeded pre-pandemic levels.

Currently, Cathay Pacific operates more than 140 round-trip flights connecting Hong Kong and 15 Chinese mainland cities. It aims to bring the total number to more than 160 round-trip flights by the end of October.

By the end of October, 28 weekly round-trip flights will be added connecting Bei-

“The capacity of Cathay Pacific and our budget arm HK Express together has resumed to nearly 60 percent of the pre-COVID levels. Capacity is on track to rebound to 70 percent by the end of the year, with full recovery by the end of 2024.”

Ronald Lam, CEO of Cathay Pacific Group

jing and Hong Kong, and Cathay Pacific will operate 51 weekly round-trip flights connecting Shanghai and Hong Kong.

In the first six months, Cathay Pacific's net profit surged to HK\$4.3 billion (\$548.8 million), and the carrier's business performance realized a year-on-year turnaround from loss to profitability, as it moved past the impact of the pandemic and saw stronger passenger demand.

The airline carried 7.8 million passengers in the first half of this year, up from 335,000 passengers in the same period last year, it said.

Lam added that Cathay Pacific will continue to speed up investment in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area by expanding multimodal transportation

services via integrating sea, land and air services, and providing more convenient services for mainland passengers heading to global destinations via Hong Kong International Airport.

In September, Cathay Pacific will launch a lounge at Shekou Port in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, which will become the airline's first lounge located outside of airports.

Meanwhile, a third runway at Hong Kong International Airport is expected to start operation by the end of 2024. Cathay Pacific has full confidence in its future operations. It recently announced an order for an additional 32 Airbus single-aisle aircraft, including A321neo and A320neo, which are expected to join the fleet by 2029.

According to the Hong Kong Tourism Board, the city received 16.5 million visitors in the first seven months of this year, including 13.1 million visitors from the Chinese mainland. In July, 3.6 million visitors arrived in Hong Kong, up 31 percent over June. Among them, 2.97 million visitors came from the mainland.

The Hong Kong Tourism Board said the travel market in the city is recovering steadily. Referring to visitor origin, the Southeast Asian market recovered the fastest, followed by the Chinese mainland market, which recovered to some 70 percent of the pre-pandemic levels.

The International Air Transport Association recently reported that global consumers have indicated high levels of confidence in travel. Bookings indicate that the highest growth is foreseen in the Asia-Pacific region, the Middle East and Europe, the IATA found.

Aramco expands China presence to satisfy demand

Oil, gas giant to up downstream efforts, gain bigger role in energy security, green transition

By ZHENG XIN
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Saudi Aramco plans to continue expanding its downstream presence in China to support the country's energy security while facilitating its green transition, said a top company official.

"The scale of the industrial footprint and China's demand growth present significant opportunities for Aramco. China is strategically important to our business growth in Asia and worldwide, and we will remain a reliable source of long-term oil supply," said Mohammed Y Al Qahtani, Saudi Aramco's president of downstream business.

Aramco believes that demand for petroleum products in China is recovering robustly, especially in the transport and petrochemical sectors.

While the majority of the growth of global oil demand this year is coming from China, the country's oil demand is likely to continue rising with living standards continuing to improve, especially over the coming decade, driven by robust demand for chemicals, the company said.

"This year, China is expected to contribute more than one-third of total global economic growth. Its economic recovery is especially important in the global economic picture, particularly involving commodities. For example, more than half of the world's oil demand growth this year could come from China alone," said Al Qahtani.

Earlier this year, Aramco announced its partnership with Norinco Group and Panjin Xincheng Industrial Group to develop a major refinery and petrochemical complex in Northeast China's Liaoning province. It has also completed the acquisition of a 10 percent stake in Rongsheng Petrochemical Co Ltd in Zhejiang province.

Al Qahtani said while there is growing use of

renewable energy, demand for reliable and affordable conventional energy remains strong.

China has made substantial progress in lower-carbon energy and more efficient refining and petrochemical processes in recent years, with a focus on emissions reductions and improving energy efficiency.

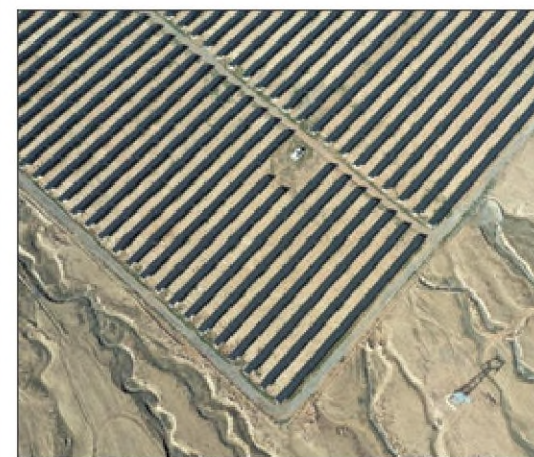
As a result, Aramco is determined to further reduce the low carbon intensity of oil production, while working on solutions such as advanced carbon capture and storage, to support China's energy and development priorities, he said.

An analyst said China's efforts in the past few years to attract more foreign capital and ensure a level playing field for both domestic and foreign companies have played a key role in encouraging foreign companies in the refining sector.

China has attracted several international companies, including ExxonMobil, BASF and Aramco, to invest in China, either through joint ventures or wholly owned projects, said Wang Lining, director at the Oil Market Research Department of the Economics and Technology Research Institute of China National Petroleum Corp.

The diversification of the domestic petrochemical market will further encourage market competition in China's high-end petrochemical products industry while international cooperation with other countries will facilitate global economic stability and development, Wang said.

Al Qahtani said that opportunities in the growing Chinese market enable Aramco to not only establish a strong foothold in the downstream sector but also capture a share of the growing energy demand with a special emphasis on highly integrated refining and petrochemical complexes.



Furnace in the sky

An overhead image taken on Aug 11 shows a solar power station built by China Energy Engineering Corp in Zhangye, Gansu province. JIN LIANGKUI / XINHUA

Known as the "king of snow mountain",
these elusive cats live 3,000 meters above sea level,
which is fragile to climate change.

If we can't control climate change, one-third of the habitat will be no longer suitable for snow leopards to survive. To protect the snow leopard, WWF is not only focusing on the species, but also the high mountains where the water resources originated.

www.wwfchina.org

© National Geographic Stock / Steve Winter / WWF

AD

BUSINESSFOCUS

Yuan marches forward in global settlements

East China's industrial hub leads way in cross-border biz transactions

By MA ZHENHUAN and QI XIAO in Yiwu, Zhejiang

Back on Dec 6, E-ter Network based in Yiwu, Zhejiang province, received a payment from a Saudi Arabian client for daily necessities such as storage boxes, water bottles and handbags.

It took less than six hours for the money to reach the company's bank account, said Wu Jiajia, a member of the company's top management, much faster than he originally expected.

"The transaction was initiated at about 5 pm Beijing time, and sometimes after 10 pm, we got a phone message notifying us of the arrival of the payment," Wu said.

"Over 1.6 million yuan (\$218,722)," he added.

The amount may seem small. During the year 2022, E-ter Network handled exports of goods worth more than 150 million yuan to Saudi Arabia.

But it was the first cross-border business transaction between Yiwu and the Middle East nation — and indeed between China and the Arab world — settled in renminbi, the Chinese currency.

"It means we can conduct more business with our clients in Saudi Arabia directly in yuan," Wu said.

A county-level city with a permanent population of a little more than 1.86 million, Yiwu, located some 140 kilometers from the provincial capital of Hangzhou, is better known as the world's capital for small commodities, selling a wide range of consumer goods, ranging from daily use items to sports-related products.

Statistics from Yiwu's commerce bureau indicate that the city now sells more than 2.1 million types of products to over 230 countries and regions, and some 65 percent of Yiwu's trade in goods is for export.

The highly export-oriented business nature and the city's close trade connections with emerging economies like the Arab world, Africa, Southeast Asia and South America, have made Yiwu a key testing ground in China's efforts to internationalize its currency.

In December 2012, Yiwu became the first Chinese city to launch a pilot reform program of cross-border renminbi settlement for individual traders and small businesses, effectively lifting restrictions on the amount of yuan settlements they were previously subject to.

Chinese businesspersons in such cities were — and are — permitted to exchange the equivalent of no more than \$50,000 in foreign currency every year, as per



Foreign consumers place orders at Yiwu International Trade Market in Yiwu, Zhejiang province, in May. QIAN XUSHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

relevant regulations.

By the end of December 2013, a year after the pilot scheme was put in place, figures from the local branch of the People's Bank of China — the country's central bank — show that 16 banks in Yiwu had opened individual cross-border trade renminbi settlement business services. They handled 12,000 transactions for 1,693 market entities, with the total amount reaching 8.6 billion yuan and covering 76 countries and regions.

Roughly a decade later, in the year 2022 alone, some 176 countries and regions conducted cross-border renminbi settlements worth 56.54 billion yuan with Yiwu traders, a year-on-year increase of 56.23 percent, and close to 61 percent of the settlements, or 34.42 billion, were for individuals, a year-on-year increase of 45.09 percent.

With its exports standing at over 430 billion yuan last year, this means that over 13 percent of the deals in Yiwu were done in renminbi, with more expected going forward.

Cross-border yuan settlements have been on the rise, particularly over the past few years, said Zhang Wenjing, deputy general manager of Yiwu Pay, a third-party platform that helps facilitate cross-border payments for the city's merchants.

"Since the official launch of Yiwu



Traders check out Yiwu's small commodities in May. Its highly export-oriented business nature has made the city a key testing ground in China's efforts to internationalize its currency. QIAN XUSHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Pay this February, more than 16,000 merchants in the Yiwu International Trade Market have opened accounts at Yiwu Pay," Zhang said.

In other words, about 30 percent of the merchants who operate 75,000 stores using the market have signed up for the service.

"Cross-border RMB settlements valued at over a billion yuan have gone through our platform, with the volume expected to surge to more than 7 billion yuan at the end of the

year," she added.

Indeed, the first cross-border renminbi payment from Saudi Arabia to China was sent through Yiwu Pay.

Innovations like Yiwu Pay, which has partnered with over 400 banks and financial institutions in more than 120 countries and regions, and supports 20 major currencies for international settlement, have made cross-border renminbi settlement a more attractive and viable option.

Services provided by traditional channels such as SWIFT and banks are increasingly ill-equipped to meet new market needs, such as the exploding development of cross-border e-commerce, said Wu, from E-ter Network.

SWIFT (the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications) is an international payment network.

"We usually have to wait for at least several days, sometimes even weeks, before receiving or making a cross-border payment through traditional channels," Wu said. "Now it takes only a few hours or minutes to finish the transfer, and we don't have to worry about exchange rate fluctuations, either."

An added appeal is that these innovations have provided more security for cross-border yuan settlements.

Yang Fang, a vendor from the Yiwu International Trade Market, once had her bank account frozen after a payment for goods worth 40,000 yuan was transferred to it from a Vietnamese customer.

Although part of a routine anti-fraud and anti-money laundering investigation conducted by the authorities, the incident still affected her business, as a large amount of the money in the account was made unavailable for a three-month period.

While she understood the necessity of the procedure and fully cooperated with the investigation, Yang, like many other traders who have had similar experiences, said she "just hoped to have a more secure platform for merchants to ensure the normal and unhindered flow of legitimate funds".

In addition, external factors play an important role in spurring the expansion of cross-border renminbi settlements.

"After the Russia-Ukraine conflict began, our Russian clients started making payments in yuan, sporadically at first, and then by May this year, they began to settle every deal in renminbi," Zhang Li, who owns a foreign trade company exporting hardware and power tools in Hangzhou, told Zhejiang-based Tide News.

Settling business in yuan is apparently a "great thing" for Zhang, who has been pining for it since she started working in foreign trade 14 years ago.

"Now we don't have to convert roubles into dollars and then into yuan — and vice versa," she said. "It is more convenient and stable."

Zhang's experience and sentiments have been shared by other traders in Yiwu.

"Of course, we prefer to conduct transactions in the local currency," said Ali Maged, a 35-year-old Yemeni who first came to Yiwu in 2007 and later set up his own trading company in the city.

"While we can't force the clients to use a particular currency," he said, "more and more are choosing to settle in renminbi, especially those from countries affected by US sanctions, such as Russia and Iraq."

Local authorities in Yiwu have also stepped up efforts and come up with new initiatives to further boost cross-border yuan settlement. In late May, a China-Africa renminbi settlement center was inaugurated in the city to expand cross-border transactions between the two sides, as Yiwu's imports and exports to the continent hit 49.38 billion yuan in the first half of 2023, up 31 percent year-on-year.

Meanwhile, China has continued to encourage the use of the yuan all over the world and signed bilateral currency swap agreements with more than 40 countries and regions.

SWIFT announced recently that the Chinese currency's share in global payments had increased for five consecutive months to 2.77 percent in June, the highest level since January 2022.

The latest research report released by the International Monetary Institute of Renmin University of China showed that compared with 2021, the Renminbi Internationalization Index grew by 18.08 percent at the end of 2022 and will keep rising.

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As the renminbi's internationalization advances, more presence of the Chinese currency will be seen in the offshore market, with the dual counter model recently introduced in Hong Kong serving as one of the latest signs of progress.

Starting from June 19, a total of 24 Hong Kong-listed companies, accounting for 40 percent of the average daily turnover of the cash equities market, were included in the new Hong Kong dollar-renminbi dual counter model. These stocks can thus be traded and settled both in yuan and Hong Kong dollars, while only the latter were accepted before this new arrangement.

The introduction of the dual counter model is crucial for Hong Kong, which is already the major global offshore yuan hub, as the Chinese currency's ongoing internationalization "will be one of the defining characteristics of global markets in the next decade," said Nicolas Aguzin, CEO of Hong Kong Exchanges and Clearing Ltd.

Dong Yi, an analyst at Shenwan Hongyuan Securities, said products available for renminbi holders are quite limited in the offshore market, with "dim sum" bonds — offshore yuan-denominated bonds — bank deposits and funds issued by qualified foreign institutional investors and renminbi-qualified foreign institutional investors serving as the three most popular choices.

The QFII and RQFII funds mainly target the Chinese mainland financial market. The annual issuance value has stood above 200 billion yuan (\$27.34 billion) since 2020. But as of the end of the first quarter, the value of yuan-denominated deposits had approached 800 billion yuan in Hong Kong, much larger than the size of dim sum bonds.

"The dual counter model can help meet the increasingly larger offshore renminbi investment demand," said Dong.

Wu Fei, a professor from the Shanghai Advanced Institute of Finance at Shanghai Jiao Tong University, said the internationalization of the renminbi is inseparable from a mature offshore yuan market. Thanks to the lower remittance costs in offshore markets, capital flows more efficiently here, which can be translated into higher willingness to hold yuan-denominated assets.

Meanwhile, the development of the offshore renminbi financial market can help to complete the mechanisms for cross-border yuan settlements and direct outbound investments. The Chinese currency's role as an international reserve currency will thus be elevated, he said.

According to the macroeconomic research team at China Merchants Securities, the internationalization of a currency is mainly measured by international payments, foreign exchange reserves and pricing of

Renminbi ramps up internationalization pace



Pedestrians walk past the Exchange Square complex, which houses the Hong Kong stock exchange, in Hong Kong in June. LI ZHIHUA / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

"The dual counter model can help meet the increasingly larger offshore renminbi investment demand."

Dong Yi, an analyst at Shenwan Hongyuan Securities

commodities. The renminbi has made progress in all three areas, which is especially noticeable after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Much progress has been made this year. The Central Bank of Argentina announced on June 29 it would accept renminbi as the currency allowed for deposits and withdrawals in the Argentine banking system. Argentine financial entities are allowed to start yuan-denominated savings and time deposit businesses.

On April 10, the Bank of Russia, the country's central bank, announced that the yuan/rouble pair hogged a record 39 percent share of trading on the Russian currency market in March, dethroning the US dollar/rouble pair, whose share fell to 34 percent.

On March 28, Chinese national oil company CNOOC and France's TotalEnergies settled the first yuan-denominated trade for liquefied natural gas via the Shanghai Petroleum and Natural Gas Exchange.

In February, the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, signed an agreement with Brazil's central bank for yuan settlements. This indicates that the two countries can use the currency as an intermediary currency in trade.

According to data updated by the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications, or SWIFT, on July 20, the Chinese yuan remained the fifth most active currency for global payments by value, a position that the currency has maintained for 17 consecutive months.

In terms of foreign exchange spot transactions worldwide, the yuan ranked as the fifth most frequently exchanged currency for the second consecutive month in June, according to SWIFT. The fifth position was taken by the Canadian dollar in April, when the renminbi ranked sixth.

But more efforts can be made to further elevate the yuan's importance in the international market.

Zhou Xiaochuan, vice-chairman of the Boao Forum for Asia, said the yuan should be used more conveniently, with its convertibility improved. Further opening-up in the capital market, including facilitating investment in Chinese stocks, bonds and foreign exchange markets — and making credit and payment sectors more accessible to overseas institutions — will help make the renminbi more convertible.

But all these will require further reforms in the foreign exchange management system, said Zhou, former governor of the PBOC.

Experts from China Securities wrote in a report in late June that countries and regions included in the Belt and Road Initiative will be major drivers of the yuan's internationalization, which is especially true as these economies have shown stronger demand for renminbi given the current geopolitical changes.

China's adequate gold reserves will help the yuan expand its footprints globally, said the China Securities analysts.

COMMENT

Editorials

China, Africa should bolster relations to safeguard interests of Global South

The visit President Xi Jinping is paying to South Africa from Monday to Thursday, during which he will attend the 15th BRICS Summit in Johannesburg and pay a state visit to the country, looks set to inject fresh vitality into the development of bilateral ties as well as Sino-African relations at large.

President Xi has visited Africa four times over the past decade, and South Africa, the first African country to sign the Belt and Road Cooperation document and China's largest trading partner in Africa for 13 consecutive years, has been on his itinerary on three occasions during that period of time. That indicates the tremendous significance China attaches to its relations with South Africa and the continent as a whole.

Since China established diplomatic relations with the first African country — Egypt in 1956 — China and Africa have forged an unbreakable fraternity in their struggle against imperialism and colonialism, and their respective journeys toward development and revitalization. The key lies in the everlasting spirit of China-Africa friendship and cooperation forged between the two sides.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of President Xi putting forward the principles of "sincerity, real results, amity and good faith" as guidelines for China's Africa policy. And under these principles, China-Africa relations have made historic achievements that have brought tremendous tangible benefits to both peoples through such major projects as the Africa Centers for Disease Control

and Prevention Headquarters, the Foundiougne Bridge in Senegal, the Nairobi Expressway and the Mombasa-Nairobi Railway.

As President Xi pointed out in a signed article published in South African media on Monday, a strong China-Africa relationship and productive China-Africa cooperation provide impetus for global development.

To ensure that the people of China and Africa benefit from the development outcomes, the two sides should further expand their cooperation in agriculture, manufacturing, new energy and the digital economy, and facilitate the African continent's economic integration, industrialization and agricultural modernization.

As Xi noted, China looks forward to African countries and the African Union playing a greater role in international and regional affairs, because what the world needs today is peace, not conflict; and what the world wants is coordination, not confrontation. China and Africa should "fear no hegemony" and work with each other as real partners to push forward relations amid the changing international landscape.

In this regard, all the members of the Global South should work together to give developing countries and emerging economies a greater voice and influence in international affairs, promote accelerated reform of the international financial institutions, and oppose unilateral sanctions and the "small yard, high fence" approach, so that they can jointly safeguard their common interests.

US trying to politicize nuclear nonproliferation

In yet another blow to the already souring bilateral relations, the Joe Biden administration has tightened controls on the export of materials and components for nuclear power plants to China on the spurious grounds that it would help prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

The Bureau of Industry and Security, an arm of the US Commerce Department, requires exporters to obtain specific licenses to export certain generators, containers and software intended for use in nuclear plants in China. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the federal agency responsible for nuclear energy safety, also requires exporters to get specific licenses to export special nuclear material and source material.

The set of restrictions is being rolled out after the Biden administration issued a ban early this month on new US investments in China targeting artificial intelligence, advanced semiconductors and quantum technologies, in addition to the wide range of economic and trade sanctions against China that are already in place.

China is the only nuclear-armed country in the world that commits itself to a no first-use of nuclear weapons policy, and it has always remained a steadfast supporter of the international nonproliferation regime. By suggesting China is not honoring its obligations under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the United States is trying to extend the geo-

political conflict with China to the nuclear nonproliferation sector at the expense of global nuclear security.

The move only serves to further squeeze the room for any possible improvement in Sino-US relations. One cannot but wonder whether the Biden administration is being sincere when it says it wants to manage relations with China, which it has done on numerous occasions.

China and the US have engaged in extensive nuclear energy cooperation over the past several decades, with four Westinghouse Electric Company units using AP1000 technology already in operation in China. The company is now proceeding with the construction of four additional AP1000 reactors in China. The former Donald Trump administration had already issued restrictions on exports of nuclear reactor technology more advanced than the AP1000 in 2018, citing proliferation concerns. The additional restrictions imposed by Washington will only bring more uncertainty to future China-US nuclear cooperation.

China remains the world's largest market for nuclear power plants, with plans to build dozens of new nuclear reactors by 2035, with the aim that nuclear power accounts for 10 percent of the country's total power production, as compared with 5 percent at present. Further US restrictions will only hurt the interests of US nuclear companies, and compromise the global green agenda to deal with climate change.

Vietnam trip heralds more troublemaking

Earlier this month, US President Joe Biden said he would be traveling to Vietnam "shortly" because the country wanted to elevate its relationship with the United States. According to reports, he is planning to do so in mid-September with the intention of signing a strategic partnership agreement with Hanoi.

The agreement will allow for new bilateral collaboration that will boost Vietnam's efforts to develop its high-tech sector in areas such as semiconductor production and artificial intelligence.

The more salient, if unspoken, purposes are to strengthen the US' grip on semiconductor production and the implementation of its "Indo-Pacific" strategy, which is all about suppressing China and containing its influence in the region. It is an established tactic of the Biden administration to try and stoke tensions between China and its neighbors, so as to draw the latter closer to the US.

If such an agreement is signed, it will mark a significant improvement in US-Vietnam ties, paving the way for closer diplomatic, economic and technological cooperation between them. There is also some conjecture that the US could increase weapon supplies to Vietnam and strengthen its military cooperation with the country.

Such a prospect may bolster Biden's image at

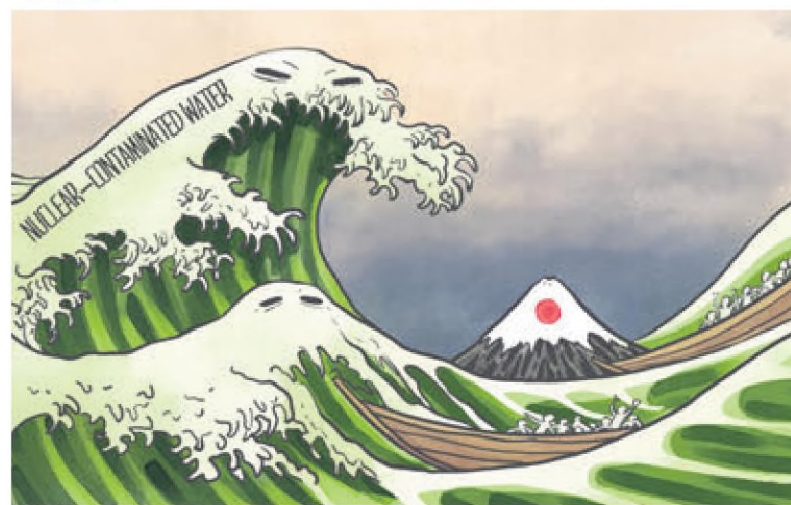
home and gain some political capital for him to leverage for the presidential election next year. However, even US experts and officials do not believe that Washington can turn Hanoi against Beijing. High-ranking Vietnamese officials have repeatedly pledged that Vietnam gives top priority to its relations with Beijing.

Two months ago in Beijing, visiting Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh told his Chinese hosts that his country opposes the politicization of economic issues and will never allow any force to drive a wedge between the two neighbors.

Hence, it is clear Vietnam does not want to take sides in the US' strategic competition against China. As China has repeatedly pointed out, the US maneuvering is by no means some kind of blessing for the region, but instead a symptom of its pathological need to disrupt regional peace and stability.

Countries in the region should remain on high alert to the US' actions as they run counter to the common aspirations of the region for peace, development, cooperation and win-win outcomes. To salvage its waning reputation and influence, the US should cease its attempts to make trouble in the region, and instead demonstrate leadership for the common good of all countries in the region.

Cai Meng



Opinion Line

Maybe German media is mocking more than the minister's aircraft

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock was forced to cancel a visit to Australia, New Zealand and Fiji because her special plane developed a problem twice in two days, some Australian media outlets reported.

The purpose of Baerbock's visit was to promote a German "Indo-Pacific" strategy. But before setting off, Baerbock said that "even though we are 16,000 kilometers apart, we remain strategic partners that support each other".

The technical snag in her aircraft triggered ridicule in the German press. Bild said "Germany has lost face in front of the whole world", while Der Spiegel sarcastically said that government aircraft cannot fly, "just as everything else you have heard about this country recently".

Recently, in May, Baerbock was forced to stay in Qatar for a day as her aircraft developed a tire problem.

Baerbock's aircraft, the oldest of the German government's three executive jets, is scheduled to be

grounded in 2024.

German government executive jets are notorious for breaking down. Former German chancellor Angela Merkel missed the opening ceremony of the G20 Summit in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in November 2018, because a radio system failure forced her aircraft to return mid-way.

The same year, then German finance minister Olaf Scholz had to take a civilian aircraft to return from an International Monetary Fund meeting because rodents bit into the government aircraft's cables.

Thorsten Benner, co-founder and director of the Global Public Policy Institute, a German think tank, and also a member of Baerbock's entourage, said the trip was carefully choreographed to demonstrate Germany's commitment to the "Indo-Pacific", a geopolitical concept coined by Washington, but ended up becoming a perfect metaphor for the "German decline" narrative.

Almost all of Germany's econom-

ic indicators are dipping. Manufacturing was once the pride of the country, but in July, the preliminary reading of Germany's manufacturing purchasing managers' index was only 38.8, while Italy and Spain, two European countries that sought German aid during the European debt crisis, were 44.5 and 47.8 respectively.

The IMF's latest forecast is that Germany's gross domestic product will shrink by 0.3 percent in 2023, the only G7 country whose economy is to contract.

The deteriorating economy is reshaping Germany's politics, while also making the German media speculate why a top diplomat was flying 16,000 kilometers to promote the "Indo-Pacific" strategy, which serves the United States' geopolitical interests, during an economic decline.

The mockery in the German media may not be confined to rickety government aircraft. Maybe it mirrors a general anxiety and skepticism about the diplomatic move.

— BEIJING NEWS

Zhang Weili demonstrates Chinese women's power

Chinese athlete Zhang Weili made history with a record-high striking differential in the women's Ultimate Fighting Championship on Saturday.

Upon winning, she introduced herself to spectators as Zhang Weili from China, drawing loud cheers. The world will not forget her victory or her nationality in a hurry now.

Zhang is already a legend, not just because she won, but also because of her hard work and her fighting spirit. Unlike other contests, the UFC allows the player to choose his/her favored form of martial arts, and Zhang chose different methods against different

competitors, including boxing and wrestling, among others.

Along the way, Zhang has been growing and gaining new abilities. Her fighting spirit is commendable, the reason why some are already calling Zhang a legend.

However, it will be more appropriate to say that she is a legendary Chinese female athlete who has impressed the world with her performances.

At the International University Sports Federation World University Games 2023 held in Chengdu, Sichuan province, from July 28 to Aug 8, several Chinese female athletes won applause, such as Wu Yanni with her performance in the wom-

en's 100-meter hurdles competition.

In the Tokyo 2021 Olympics and Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics, too, there were many female Chinese athletes who became stars in the public field. The success of these female athletes is direct evidence of women's growing power in China. Unlike in the West where women players have to struggle to find a place and get noticed, Chinese women are competing equally in all sectors.

With hard training and ample support, they can make miracles and show the world that they are not inferior to men in any field.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

EU's 'de-risking' bears hallmarks of 'decoupling'

Although the United States actively promotes a "de-risking" policy in relation to China, it was the European Union that first put forward the concept against the backdrop of the Ukraine crisis with the aim of ending its reliance on Russia for oil and natural gas, as well as to provide itself with a cushion zone to shun the "decoupling" practices of the US, which Brussels thinks go too far.

However, as Washington tries to replace "decoupling" with "de-risking" in its China-containment strategy to avoid overstretching the EU and ease tensions with Beijing, more and more EU politicians and companies are slipping into the rhetoric trap of the US, as they no longer regard "de-risking" as an economic, industrial or technological necessity for security, but a political tool to suppress the development of ideological foes.

As such, with China being smeared by the US as a "threat" to

Western "values", "de-risking" in the EU does not stress self-reliance in some key fields of technology and resources anymore, and it is not based on facts any longer either, but rather the EU is seeking to eliminate Chinese products, services, technologies and investments from the key market sectors as instructed by Washington.

True, the EU upholds certain strategic autonomy in the process, as its "de-risking" moves also include some targeting the US, particularly in green energy, digital services and artificial intelligence, in which the US' subsidies and monopoly cause wide concerns in Brussels.

But most of its "de-risking" measures are to decouple the EU's industry, economy and technology from those of China.

Although the EU claims it is doing so to prevent other parties from weaponizing these factors against the bloc in case of emer-

gency, it is the EU that has taken the initiative to weaponize these factors first. Indeed, the EU remains a key partner of China. But the underlying logic of bilateral cooperation appears to be changing.

The EU is restructuring its industrial policy, focusing on raw materials, semiconductors, batteries, hydrogen energy, cloud computing and other fields to increase its own investment and reduce import dependence. It is a pity that Chinese investors and companies are mostly kept out of that process, simply because they come from China.

Many Western businesspeople say they feel pressured to fall in line with the "de-risking" drive, and they are adjusting their business strategy in China accordingly.

De-risking will therefore inevitably hurt the EU's interests in the long run.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

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COMMENT

Ehizuelen Michael Mitchell Omoruyi

BRICS means a lot to Africa's development

The emergence of BRICS has raised hopes that win-win partnerships can foster the development of Africa. The BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) oppose Cold War mentality and hegemonism, and are committed to promoting multilateralism, mutual respect, cooperation, fairness and justice, by cementing a global alternative that represents the trend of history.

BRICS accounts for more than 40 percent of the world population and 20 percent of global trade, and attracts 25 percent of global foreign investment. It represents the development expectations of emerging markets and developing countries, promotes cooperation among developing countries, acts as a platform for South-South cooperation, and has made substantive progress in cooperation across the board.

And the BRICS Summit in South Africa from Tuesday to Thursday will add to the vitality of this unique economic grouping.

Unlike certain countries that are trying to divide the world into blocs and expand their military alliances to maintain their domination in almost all fields, BRICS, which as a grouping has been growing at a faster pace than the G7, is focused on maintaining world peace and promoting common development, including Africa's development.

BRICS has emerged as a formidable economic bloc in recent years, with a combined GDP of more than \$20 trillion in 2021 against the G7's GDP of about \$35 trillion (both in nominal GDP terms). However, in terms of purchasing power parity-adjusted GDP, the BRICS members contribute 31.5 percent of global GDP while the G7's share has fallen to 30 percent.

It is clear therefore that BRICS will be in a stronger position to counter the interventionist attitude of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank when giving loans, and the United States when offering economic, political and military assistance.

BRICS nations more attractive to African countries

Given BRICS' rising economic and political power and increasing engagement with African countries, the BRICS countries are more attractive to Africa. They are attractive also because they offer new opportunities for trade, investment and technology transfer, which can help boost Africa's development and integration. In terms of finance, too, BRICS provides a better alternative to the existing global financial system led by the IMF and the World Bank.

For example, in 2014, with \$50 billion in seed money, the BRICS countries launched the New Development Bank not only as an alternative to, but also to complement the work of, the IMF and the World Bank. Likewise, BRICS created a liquidity mechanism called the Contingent Reserve Arrangement to support its members struggling with payments. These efforts and measures appear very attractive to African countries, especially because they have had painful experiences with the IMF's structural adjustment programs and austerity measures. This is one of the main reasons many African countries have shown interest in joining BRICS.

In recent years, the BRICS countries, China in particular, have expanded their economic engagement with Africa. For instance, China is the largest trading partner of Africa and is becoming a more



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

important market for African countries. In 2022, 12.5 percent of Africa's exports went to China, compared with a mere 0.8 percent at the beginning of the century.

According to official statistics, the total trade value between China and Africa hit an all-time high of \$282 billion in 2022, up 11 percent year-on-year. China has also invested heavily in infrastructure and industrial projects in African countries.

India, too, has increased its trade with and investments in Africa, mostly in the fields of agriculture, healthcare, renewable energy, infrastructure, education and information technology, and set up a \$10 billion fund to support development projects in Africa. Based on the Indian Ministry of Commerce and Industry data, in the 2022-

23 fiscal year, trade between India and Africa grew by 9.26 percent to nearly \$100 billion, up from just \$7 billion in 2001. And the fact that its exports amounted to \$51.2 billion and imports \$46.65 billion shows that India-Africa trade was more or less balanced.

Brazil and Russia have also increased their engagement with Africa through various initiatives including the Brazil-Africa Agriculture Platform, the Russia-Africa Summit, and the South Africa-India-Brazil Dialogue Forum. Taken as a whole, BRICS is Africa's largest trading partner. In fact, the 2022 economic survey data from the African Development Bank show BRICS is now Africa's largest trading partner with their trade expected to cross \$500 billion by

2030, with China accounting for 60 percent of it. The BRICS countries are also becoming significant investors in Africa, especially in the manufacturing, infrastructure and service sectors.

The above facts show BRICS is promoting South-South cooperation and making efforts to build a multipolar world order, which resonates with Africa's vision of achieving regional integration and becoming self-sufficient. As a matter of fact, African countries have decided to adopt a policy of strategic autonomy from the West, because Western economies are known to prioritize and impose their own interests and values when engaging with African countries.

The African countries have realized that

reliance on the West makes them vulnerable, especially when their interests conflict. The fact that they have to mainly sell their energy and other resources to Western nations, conduct trade in US dollars and use the West's Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication system for transactions is seen by African countries as a weakness, because the West has used the dollar, as well as the institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank, as an economic and political tool to control the African countries.

African nations seeking 'freedom from West'

So when African countries fight for autonomy and say they want to de-dollarize their economies, they are actually seeking total freedom from the West and its institutions. This freedom includes realizing economic emancipation, the freedom to conduct trade based on equality and manage their internal affairs without being dictated how to do so by the West. This in turn necessitates the reconfiguration of the global economic architecture, in which every country will be free to trade independently, without any conditions.

Since the African countries oppose the West-centered world order and are making efforts to make their economies more dynamic, they welcome the emergence of BRICS, because it opposes the domination of the West and offers African countries novel ways to de-dollarize their economies. The African countries think this paradigm shift will protect them against Western pressure, which is another key factor that has prompted African countries to partner with BRICS.

As a way of benefiting from this new partnership, African countries should further increase their trade with the BRICS countries and leverage their strengths and resources for mutual gain. This can be done if the African countries adopt a strategic approach to engaging with BRICS based on the assessment of their respective strengths and weaknesses, and by pursuing mutual benefit.

For that, however, they need to strengthen their domestic institutions and policies, enhance regional integration and cooperation, and engage in a more assertive and proactive manner with the BRICS countries and other emerging market economies based on a shared vision of mutual benefit, inclusivity, and sustainability. In particular, the African countries need to leverage their natural resources, cultural diversity and strategic location to boost their economic development. They also need to capitalize on the opportunities created by BRICS and the evolving global economic order by prioritizing investments in education, technology and infrastructure, and promoting innovations and inclusive and sustainable development.

Above all, African countries need to attract more investment from and increase trade with the BRICS members and other developing countries. By doing so, they can unleash their full potential and contribute to shaping the future of the global economy in a more equitable and balanced manner.

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

Xu Wenhong

A more inclusive path beneficial for multipolar world

Since the Russia-Ukraine conflict broke out, the major power game has intensified, a vast number of developing countries have become more marginalized, and Western domination in international relations and agendas has become increasingly obvious. It is because of these factors that the BRICS Summit in Johannesburg, South Africa, to be held from Tuesday to Thursday, has attracted wider global attention.

The focus of the 15th BRICS Summit is likely to be on its expansion. Up to now, 23 countries have applied to join the grouping and another 20 countries have expressed their desire to be part of BRICS.

First, the convening of a meeting on such a large scale in South Africa will be the first of its kind under the BRICS mechanism. When BRICS was established, the Western media criticized it, saying that given the huge differences among the member states, the grouping would find it difficult to reach a consensus on any issue or become a force in international relations. They have been proved wrong.

With the BRICS mechanism maturing, more and more countries are applying to join it and the voice of BRICS in international relations has been gaining strength with each passing day. Even French Presi-

dent Emmanuel Macron expressed his willingness to be a guest on this summit. No wonder the West, of late, has been paying greater attention to BRICS' development and seems even concerned over it. Western media have not only started smearing BRICS as a challenge to the rule-based world order, but also are trying to disintegrate the "BRICS" from within and isolate China and Russia by luring India to join the Inted State's "Indo-Pacific" mechanism, praising Brazil's positive role in international affairs and pressing South Africa to maintain a safe distance from China.

Second, the BRICS Summit may deliberate on a non-US dollar global trade settlement currency.

Since the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Russia, as a member of the BRICS, has been the victim of severe sanctions imposed by the United States, the European Union and their allies. This prompted Russia to use the ruble or other currencies to settle its foreign trade deals. In fact, in June 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin said the BRICS countries are working on a new international reserve currency based on a basket of currencies used by them.

And since being re-elected Brazilian president at the beginning of this year, Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has been calling for

developing a new global trade currency.

However, despite the US losing its credit rating recently and despite its constantly rising sovereign debt, the de-dollarization trend is yet to gather momentum, possibly because the BRICS countries have different views on de-dollarization. Russia, for instance, has suffered a serious blow in terms of foreign trade due to the sanctions announced by the US, the EU and their allies, and for being excluded from the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication system.

Therefore, among the BRICS countries, Russia is resolute in its stance on de-dollarization. It has even achieved preliminary results — by selling almost all the US Treasury bonds it held, significantly reducing the use of the US dollar in its foreign trade, actively promoting the Russian coined SPFS system — an alternative to the SWIFT system.

Given the long-term colonial influence on its economy, Brazil, too, understands the impact of the dollar hegemony on its economy. That's why President Lula has been working with other BRICS leaders to decide on a common currency to be used in intra-BRICS trade.

Besides, due to historical and practical reasons, South Africa has been advocating

the reform of the global financial system and has started settling foreign trade deals in non-dollar currencies.

As for India, it places greater emphasis on practical interests in its foreign trade and has been settling some of its trade deals in its own or its trade partner's currency. In fact, India intends to develop the rupee as an international currency, and has a clear stance on de-dollarization.

China, on the other hand, has been emphasizing currency swaps for years and promoting the use of the yuan or its trade partner's currency to settle foreign trade deals, which have been welcomed by many countries.

In spite of the stances of the BRICS countries on de-dollarization, however, South Africa's ambassador-at-large for Asia and BRICS Anil Sooklal said BRICS at present has no plans to deliberate on a new global currency to replace the US dollar, and de-dollarization is not on the Johannesburg summit's agenda. According to Sooklal, the BRICS countries have not given a direct call for de-dollarization but are only making efforts to settle their foreign trade in local currencies other than the dollar.

Settling foreign trade deals in non-dollar currencies is slowly but surely becoming a global trend, reflecting many countries' desire to realize currency sovereignty.

However, despite being closest to the US dollar as a global reserve currency and as a significant trade settlement instrument, the euro has lost some of its global value due to the EU imposing sanctions on Russia. Consequently, given its near monopoly in international trade, the US dollar is likely to remain the main trade settlement currency in the near future. So BRICS countries have to agree to a trade settlement currency that would coexist with the dollar.

In a West-dominated world, BRICS provides a more diversified and inclusive development path for Asian, African, and Latin American countries through cooperation with all countries in the Global South, so as to build a multilateral organization that enjoys greater international influence and discourse power. BRICS not only represents the multipolarity of the international order, but also advocates the use of diverse methods to overcome international challenges. In the future, therefore, how the BRICS countries strengthen cooperation, and increase trade and investment will decide the development of the grouping.

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GLOBAL VIEWS



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

ERIK SOLHEIM

An emerging new global order

The challenges and conflicts of the 21st century will have to be solved through cooperation between many nations. BRICS has a key role to play in that landscape

BRICS is one of the most important institutions in the multipolar system which will be the world order of the 21st century. The BRICS nations — Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa — account for 42 percent of the world population and 32 percent of the global economy. BRICS brings new dynamics to the international landscape and gives strength to developing countries in a world order that until recently was dominated by the United States and the other Western countries.

BRICS obtained its present shape in 2010, with the admission of South Africa as a full member. It was crafted at the unipolar moment after the Cold War when the US alone dominated the world. Perceived as a reaction to the US military's unilateral campaigns in Iraq and other places, BRICS can more importantly be seen as a response to Western economic dominance and Western resistance to reform of the World Bank and other financial institutions under their control. BRICS represents a strong force, aiming to rebalance a world which, in the words of Indian Foreign Minister Jaishankar, is "leaving too many nations at the mercy of too few".

Together with the G20, the Belt and Road Initiative, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and other elements, BRICS is part of a wider framework reflecting the world of the 21st century, a multipolar world where all critical issues such as the environment, climate, terrorism, regional wars, economic development and pandemics call for international cooperation.

These institutions jointly mirror the needs of a rapidly changing world and provide an answer to the very slow pace of reforms of the UN and the global financial institutions. While we need a UN-led world order, the UN is largely on the sidelines of most critical global issues. It remains stuck in 78-year-old paradigms. No headquarters of any significant UN institution is located in East and South Asia where half of humanity lives. Even their staff members are overwhelmingly Western.

BRICS started with the vision of creating a fairer world order, with a proper representation for the Global South. In the early days,

the focus was on promoting economic growth, while very rapidly the subjects covered have expanded to security, health, education, the environment, counter-terrorism and many others.

Since last year, the world has seen a strong movement from the Global South for creating an alternative to the US dollar as the global currency, and BRICS has been at the forefront of promoting the idea of de-dollarization of the world.

In 2015, BRICS created the New Development Bank, which is headquartered in Shanghai. Former Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff is its current president. Along with the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, it forms a supplement to and a different narrative from the West-dominated banks.

BRICS may give the impression of being an artificial group, because the BRICS nations have little in common. They represent different versions of human civilization with different political systems. They are located in four different continents. Economically, China is much bigger than the rest. What brought them together was the desire for a more just world order with a stronger voice for the South. BRICS has shown remarkable resilience and a continuous momentum. The 15th BRICS Summit is being held in Johannesburg, South Africa, on Aug 22 to 24.

Interestingly, BRICS has not developed as a platform against the West, but more as a platform where the members seek freedom and autonomy of thought and action. It also functions as an intellectual hub for debates and dialogues outside the West-dominated spheres.

BRICS is meeting at a time when the Ukraine crisis is on top of the global agenda. No BRICS nation has joined the West-led sanctions against Russia. But they all support the territorial integrity of Ukraine. BRICS nations are among the most likely candidates as peacemakers when the conflict comes to a negotiated settlement.

The issue of expanding the grouping will take the spotlight at the summit. It seems all BRICS nations are in principle open to adding more members. Very recently, Naledi Pandor, South Africa's minister of International Relations and Cooperation, said 23 countries have formally submitted

an application to join BRICS. These include incredibly important developing nations such as Indonesia, Argentina, Egypt, Mexico, Vietnam and many more. A particular game changer would be Saudi Arabia. The country would add more financial resources to BRICS. In addition, it would also strongly underline the new world order if a traditional US ally such as Saudi Arabia joined BRICS.

An interesting area for a stronger BRICS footprint is the environment. I participated in a BRICS Environment Ministers' Meeting in Tianjin a few years ago. This forum plays an important role in advancing environmental cooperation among the BRICS states. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has recently suggested a BRICS' work stream on global development of green rail. The BRICS members are world leaders in green development. China alone accounts for 60-80 percent of global solar, wind, hydropower, electric cars production and high-speed rail. Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has just put Brazil in the front seat on protecting the Amazon, bringing deforestation to a seven-year low just after half a year in office. India will soon be the second biggest solar power in the world after China and is launching green plans by the day.

Looking back on the US foreign policy after the Cold War, Richard Haass, a US foreign policy expert, said it was "squandered", mainly due to the US' wish to dominate the world and insensitivity to others.

Whatever the 21st century brings in terms of challenges and conflicts, one thing is for sure. They will all have to be solved in a multipolar context, through cooperation between many and very different nations. BRICS has a key role to play in that landscape. The call of the time is dialogue and respect. Let's respect each other and find common ground through dialogue.

The author is vice-president of the Green Belt and Road Coalition and former executive director of the United Nations Environment Programme. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

ARAVIND YELERY

BRICS' steady advent and unfolding scenarios

Despite reservations, the group has achieved significant milestones, such as a bank of its own, moves to trade in local currencies, and sharing a development agenda despite distances

It has been almost two decades since the acronym BRIC was coined, and it has since evolved through the worst political, financial and social-health crises. Today, BRICS represents a fundamental transformation undertaken in the international system. Its member countries contribute 32 percent of the global GDP, which is more than the share of G7 countries. BRICS, comprising 42 percent of the world population, has been forthcoming in meeting Human Development Index requirements and has helped the world achieve poverty alleviation targets and set examples to overcome spatial differences.

The world has changed on many fronts, and challenges have multiplied. The significant risks in the financial markets, waves of pandemic in the past few decades, including SARS, Ebola and now COVID-19, besides climate change, are the new challenges that underline the importance of the BRICS grouping. BRICS includes countries from various regions and each has their priorities to deal with. At the same time, the larger consensus of the Global South over the global crises has rekindled the hope in BRICS, as these countries have faced adverse global conditions such as post-war polarization of growth and the wealth divide.

The West-led globalization generated disproportionate benefits. The rich countries' interest in the abundant factors of production in developing countries lets them control the financial strings and affect the growth of developing countries. The fundamental hurdle for developing countries to overcome the challenges has been answering the "deprivation". The socioeconomic and technological advent of the BRICS countries is possible only with its financial platform. The New Development Bank was a revolutionary idea by the developing bloc, as it includes a clause to make it accessible to every developing country seeking assistance. The low-income and middle-income countries require finance for their development projects. There is a need for colossal funds in developing economies to make a transformative impact.

As per a statistical study by Oxford Economics, the global infrastructure investment is required to be \$94 trillion between 2016 and 2040. This means \$3.7 trillion per year on average.

The study also forecasts that Africa's investment gap will widen further to 43 percent if the investment needs include Sustainable Development Goals. Developing countries need to address this massive gap in development finance, underlining the need and scope of the NDB. The bank has become an operational arm of BRICS extending help and accessibility to developing and emerging economies.

Be it developmental goals, sustainability and development indexes, BRICS provides a realistic alternative. BRICS is expanding the group through a process of evolution. BRICS and the Global South are overcoming the financial uncertainties not by adopting the over-leveraging approach of the liberal economies, but by reducing risks.

The data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and the World Bank suggest that the North-North flow of foreign direct investment shrunk in the first quarter of this century, and the outbound investments within the Global South increased by approximately 20 percent.

Moreover, the South-South FDI scenarios multiplied, accounting for 18 percent of the world FDI, up from a mere 3 percent in 2001. The prospects of South-South cooperation have increased manifold according to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the Asian Development Bank.

The next step is forging a common agenda and streamlining cooperation. The BRICS countries need to find ways to gather consensus over a currency independent of the West-dominated world economy. About 84.3 percent of global trade takes place in the US dollar. Given that the BRICS countries account for 18 percent of the global trade and 19 percent of the global export volume, over-reliance on a single currency could be disastrous.

A free and independent international monetary system, free trade and promotion of global public interest lie in the need to de-risk developing economies from their excessive dependence on the dollar as the dominant currency to trade. BRICS is already looking beyond the dollar, paving the way for a multi-currency system. Boosting local

currencies and, at the same time, eliminating risks of foreign exchange fluctuations, are indispensable measures.

The evolving BRICS signals how the West is slowly losing the remarkable capacity it has enjoyed to set the agenda on a global scale. In the opinion of Kishore Mahbubani, former Singaporean ambassador to the United Nations, the responses from the West to the current challenges have been inconsistent, and this has led to the emergence of a non-Western approach to balance and reform the governance system. The pandemic has offered a glimpse of such a phenomenon which is already underway.

Global Health Governance is the benchmark that the BRICS continues to pursue. During the third BRICS summit in 2011, about 10 years before COVID-19, health issues were raised for discussion. A year later, in 2012, India, Brazil and China jointly protested against investment nations' efforts to make the intellectual property regime more stringent through the World Trade Organization. At a meeting in the WTO, the three countries of the BRICS grouping refused to give in to the pressure from the developed countries under the legitimate reasoning that such moves could seriously hinder poor people's access to cheap drugs. This collective stand helped BRICS phenomenally. During and after the pandemic, the potency of BRICS in global health is slowly being recognized.

Despite the contention that BRICS is incapable of finding a common denominator and challenging the members to streamline the agenda, BRICS has achieved significant milestones. BRICS stands out as a special institutional arrangement because of its ability to integrate countries from different parts of the world with diverse challenges and yet homogenize the approaches to form a collective development vision. Distance is not an obstruction for BRICS, as the transnational commonalities among them have brought them close together.

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LI YUBING / FOR CHINA DAILY

LIFE

ACHIEVING CORE GOALS

Despite a raft of difficulties, an expedition to the Purog Kangri Glacier has returned with essential samples of ancient ice that contain important information about the planet's past, which is vital to its future, **Li Yingxue** reports.



In the heart of one of the world's most enigmatic landscapes, where the very air whispers tales of ancient times, lies the Purog Kangri Glacier. For glaciologist Tian Lide and his intrepid ice core drilling team, this setting is both a laboratory and a theater of discovery.

Over the course of an arduous expedition that lasted more than two months, they embarked on an extraordinary journey to unravel the mysteries that lie within the icy heart of Purog Kangri — the third-largest glacier on the planet.

"Glaciers are like wise elders, their faces adorned with beards, as they bear witness to the historical changes of the Earth and the celestial movements of the sun, moon and stars," says Tian, a professor at the Institute of International Rivers and Eco-security, Yunnan University.

In 2000, Chinese and American scientists extracted ice cores from the Purog Kangri Glacier in Nagchu, the Tibet autonomous region. However, the drilling process was rushed. Compared to back then, there have been significant technological advancements, prompting Tian and the team to drill for new samples.

Tian explains that there are only two suitable windows each year for ice core drilling, during spring and autumn. The team set off at the end of April and returned early last month, overcoming numerous challenges.

The climate at Purog Kangri was a surprise to the team and the first hurdle they had to overcome. Heavy spring rains made the roads extremely difficult to traverse, making transportation of the drilling equipment and freezers challenging.

The team spent a full 10 days covering the 80-kilometer journey from the ice line to the glacier's summit. The planned journey from the glacier's terminus to the glacier's peak was expected to take two days, but in reality, it ended up taking the team two whole weeks.

On May 20, a month after their departure from Kunming, Yunnan province, they finally started drilling and extracting ice cores.

The difficult and slow journey to the glacier was just the start of the problems for Tian and the team. Among the numerous other issues the expedition encountered were a technical failure of the drilling equipment and the sudden malfunction of two out of the eight ice chests brought to store the samples.

Then, while transporting the ice cores back down from the peak, the team faced drastic changes in the ice and snow at the glacier's terminus. The melting snow forced an alteration to their previously planned route. As a result, the sled carrying the ice cores overturned, resulting in damage to over a dozen samples.

The expedition originally planned to drill one or two holes to the bottom of the glacier to extract samples, but as a result of the loss, the team had to drill another hole.

Despite all of this, 55-year-old Tian never once thought of giving up.

On the 54th day of the expedition, at an elevation of 5,900 meters in the core area

“Glaciers may not speak, but their message is found in the melting waters. Through ice core drilling, we are endeavoring to not only rescue ‘the story of glaciers’, but also listen to nature.”

Tian Lide, glaciologist

of the Purog Kangri Glacier, the team successfully transported the first 211 meters of samples back to the base camp.

Meanwhile, they were currently in the process of extracting the second ice core from what was the third hole.

At the time, Tian provided an update via satellite phone, noting that the team had already reached a depth of over 100 meters.

Due to the rising daytime temperatures, Tian and the team could only drill at night, and they made up for the sleep in the daytime, so for the final month of the expedition, they didn't see daylight.

Some members of the 21-person team left the expedition early, due to the harsh environment, but not Tian.

Upon his return home last month, he was 10 kilograms lighter, and his skin displayed a deep tan.

Collectively, the team had successfully managed to extract over 530 meters worth of ice core samples, which will be subdivided into multiple segments to facilitate the ongoing research conducted by Tian's team, as well as collaborative institutions both domestically and internationally. Additionally, a portion of the cores will be preserved for future research.

He says that, as the technology and means of analysis continue to improve, the ice cores that are stored will have a better use in the future.

"We used to drill ice cores together with foreign teams, but now we can do it on our own, and it gives us a great sense of accomplishment," Tian says. "This journey has accumulated a lot of experience."

In Tian's mind, the stratified glacier ice is akin to a thick diary, recording the history within the glacier's interior.

"Our country is abundant in glaciers; however, with the global climate warming up, a significant portion of them is facing a reduction in surface area, thickness and volume," Tian says, adding that this loss is leading to irreversible and irreparable destruction of essential information pertaining to the Earth's climate.

"Glaciers may not speak, but their message is found in the melting waters. Through ice core drilling, we are endeavoring to not only rescue ‘the story of glaciers’, but also listen to nature and heed



From top: In May, the scientific expedition team makes its way to the Purog Kangri Glacier in Nagchu city, Tibet autonomous region. The scientific expedition team takes a well-deserved rest at Chang Tang National Nature Reserve in Tibet in 2021. Tian Lide (left) and Wen Xu display an ice core.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

its messages," Tian says.

An ice core is a column of ice obtained by using a mechanical drill to bore from the top to the bottom of a glacier. Each one has a diameter of 10 centimeters and a length of 80 cm.

According to Tian, ice core isotopes — or as he refers to them, "the Earth's history

book" — provide information about the Earth's temperature fluctuations during past ice ages and interglacial periods, and they also record El Nino and La Nina climate events.

"For example, the data indicates a significant increase in heavy metal content in the ice cores from Himalayan glaciers

since the Industrial Revolution," Tian explains.

"Ice cores, serving as invaluable records of climatic history, are of great importance. Scientists are working tirelessly to preserve these precious glacial archives before they succumb to melting," Tian says.

Tian's trip to Purog Kangri Glacier is part of the project, Memory of Glaciers, a public welfare initiative in China that focuses on the rescue and preservation of ice cores, which aims to raise public awareness about the climate crisis and promote climate action.

"The purpose of this project is to combat climate change, salvage ice core archives and leave a complete record of ice cores for future generations," Tian says.

Memory of Glaciers is initiated by Polar Hub, a nonprofit organization in China that focuses on scientific exploration, citizen science and public education on the subject of climate change.

Wen Xu, co-founder of Polar Hub, recalls that, during an expedition on a glacier on Tangula Mountains, he encountered numerous ice lakes formed by glacial melting at an alarming rate due to climate change.

This experience led Wen to realize the urgency of addressing climate change and its impact on glaciers. As a result, he decided to take action, spreading awareness about climate change and encouraging collective efforts to confront the challenges it poses. In May 2017, Polar Hub was jointly initiated and established by Wen together with renowned domestic scientists and explorers.

According to Wen, the Memory of Glaciers project has a well-defined and long-term objective that its primary goal is to conduct rescue drilling of ice cores in mid-to-low latitudes, with a particular focus on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, at elevations above 6,000 meters.

"The project aims to preserve glacier archives before they vanish, thus promoting climate change research and safeguarding valuable climatic heritage for the study of the Earth's history," he says.

Over the next decade, the project aims to salvage and preserve 100 representative deep ice cores from polar regions and the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, contributing to the establishment within the Chinese scientific community of the most comprehensive ice core repository and an ice core museum for the mid-to-low latitude glaciers worldwide.

According to Wen, in addition to the Purog Kangri Glacier, this year's Memory of Glaciers project is also in the process of conducting sustainable ice core rescue activities on Mount Muztagh Ata in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region. Moreover, they are planning to launch a mini-program called "watch the glaciers", aiming to involve more people in glacier protection, both online and offline.

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From left: The scientific expedition team drills ice cores at Chang Tang in Tibet in November 2021. The scientific expedition negotiates the terrain on their way to drilling at the Purog Kangri Glacier in May. In November 2020, a drill team carries core samples onto a helicopter at the Aemye Ma-chen Range in Qinghai province.

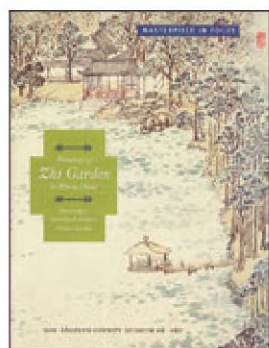
LIFE



In *The Zhiyuan Garden Album*, Zhang Hong from the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) depicted in 20 successive leaves a sequential experience of touring the Zhiyuan Garden along a certain route and enjoying the poetically named scenes, including pavilions, ponds and rockeries, among others. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

In pursuit of Utopia

How decades of research led to the rediscovery of one of the greatest gardens in Chinese history, **Yang Yang** reports.



From top: *Zhiyuan Mengxun*, a newly published book by Huang Xiao and Liu Shanshan devoted to the rediscovery of *The Zhiyuan Garden Album*. The exhibition catalog of the album of paintings shown at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1996. The preface of *The Zhiyuan Collection* by Wu Liang in the late Ming Dynasty. The cover of *Garden Paintings in Old China*, published in 2012.

In a storage room in a museum in the United States, in the 1950s, a collection of Chinese landscapes painted by Zhang Hong in 1627 — *The Zhiyuan Garden Album* — quietly awaited its destiny. The 20 leaves featured a garden called Zhiyuan. The museum was considering the album for purchase until a young visitor introduced it to the world, realizing a dream that had haunted him for decades — the rediscovery of a garden that had long vanished — and starting a period of cooperation that would transcend time and space.

James Cahill, who would later become a recognized authority in Chinese art, was a postgraduate student at the University of Michigan at the time he saw the album, before it was split into separate folios and sold to different collectors.

At first, he did not pay it much attention. As a student of Chinese art, he understood that Zhang's paintings did not conform to orthodox Chinese standards of good composition or brushwork.

As Cahill explained, during a lecture at an exhibition to mark the regrouping of the separated leaves at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1996, it was not until a few years afterward that he realized that the 17th-century artist had sacrificed strong composition and brushwork to pursue "a kind of visual truthfulness".

Hailing the album as "incomparably the best visual evidence we have for a major garden from the great age of gardens in China", Cahill told the audience at the lecture that, although he was not able to identify either the artist's patron, or the location of the garden, he believed that according to the canals in the paintings, it might have been in Suzhou, Jiangsu province. For decades, he was unable to find evidence to support this theory.

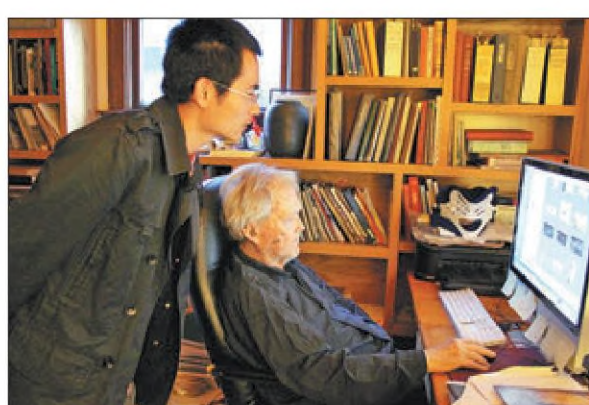
In 1978, before China and the US officially established diplomatic ties, Cahill met Chinese garden historian Chen Congzhou in New York, where the latter was helping to create the Ming Xuan (Astor Court) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

When Cahill showed Chen some leaves from the Zhiyuan album and photos of several others, the historian was "quite excited", Cahill wrote in a letter.

Chen said that he would like to work with Cahill to study the album. The two eventually lost touch, but not before the American could gift Chen with a set of black-and-white photos of the 14 paintings, which he later published in the opening pages of his comprehensive 2004 collection of articles on ancient Chinese gardens, *Yuanzong*, and which are the only photos in the book.

Detective work

When in 2010, Cao Xun, a professor of architecture at Tsinghua University, came across the only copy of the 800-page *The Zhiyuan Collection* amid the sea of old books at the National Library of China, he immediately thought of the photos in *Yuanzong*. Written by late Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) author Wu Liang, who was a lay Buddhist and who adopted the name Zhiyuan, it is a collection of poems and essays, including the 3,000-word *An Ode to Zhiyuan Garden*.



Top: Cao Xun (middle), Huang Xiao (right) and Liu Shanshan pose for a photo at the National Library of China in 2010. Above: A photo taken by Liu shows Huang and James Cahill at his home in Berkeley in 2013.

Carefully comparing the details in the 14 photos with Wu's poems and essays, Cao became certain that Wu was the owner of the Zhiyuan Garden in Changzhou, which is also in Jiangsu province, and that there must be other leaves to the album. He asked two postgraduate students Huang Xiao and Liu Shanshan, to keep an eye out for any further information they could find.

In 2010, the SDX Joint Publishing Company brought out a series of books by Cahill. Liu and Huang found long discussions about the Zhiyuan album in the Chinese versions of *The Compelling Image* and *Distant Mountains*. At Cao's suggestion, they tried to reach Cahill via email to ask him about the album.

"We were just two kids, but surprisingly, Cahill replied. He was very excited about the discovery of *An Ode to Zhiyuan Garden*, and asked us whether we were serious about the research, and if so, he would send us his material on the garden," said Liu, an assistant professor at Beijing University of Engineering and Architecture, in a lecture about the newly published book *Zhiyuan Mengxun* (A Pursuit of Utopia in the Dreams About the Zhiyuan Garden), which she co-authored with Huang, who is an assistant professor at the Beijing Forestry University. Although Cahill had written the two

books several decades earlier, his interest in the Zhiyuan Garden remained.

A month later, the pair received a package from the US in which they found a whole set of duplicates of the Zhiyuan album and the catalog of the 1996 exhibition, in addition to some 400 pages of literature and two CDs containing images of paintings of gardens that Cahill had collected over the years.

Over the course of almost two years, the trio exchanged 100 emails, researching paintings of Chinese gardens beginning with the Zhiyuan Garden, and discussing the structure, content and pictures of their collaboration fruit, a book eventually published in 2012 titled *Garden Paintings in Old China*.

"That book is a dialogue that transcends time and space," Liu says, "because we didn't meet until after it was published, and there was a time gap between Cahill's part and our part of the book. His was completed decades ago, and ours had only just been finished."

In 2011, Huang and Liu identified the former location of the 3.33-hectare garden in present-day Changzhou, but most of the land had since become a commercial residential area.

"It was a disappointment for Cahill, who had imagined that after finding the remains of the garden,

with enough funding, and the addition of water, rocks and flowers, it would be possible to accurately re-create it according to Zhang Hong's paintings," Liu says.

In 2013, a digital model of Zhiyuan was completed and in 2015, the Museum of Chinese Gardens and Landscape Architecture made an intricate model of the garden to serve as a representative example of the private gardens in the southern reaches of the Yangtze River during the Ming Dynasty, alongside the model of the Old Summer Palace which represents royal gardens in northern China during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). Cahill unfortunately passed away in 2014, before the latter was complete.

"At a peak moment for Chinese gardens during the late Ming Dynasty, and designed by one of the greatest garden masters of the period, the Zhiyuan Garden was a milestone in Ming gardens," says Huang.

"It was a masterpiece that integrated artistic forms including literature, calligraphy and painting with the efforts of literati, painters and craftsmen," he continues.

"What's special about the garden is its rich use of water, its combination of garden styles from the north and south, the fact that it is grand and well-structured, and the romantic style used in the design of its rockery."

A reborn album

The fruit of the pair's research, *Zhiyuan Mengxun*, contains not only finely reproduced prints of the 20 paintings from the Zhiyuan album, but also five chapters respectively devoted to the story of the artist Zhang, Cahill and the album, the garden's philosophy and layout, its designer Zhou Tingce — who was a master garden designer of the time — and Wu Liang's family, whose history spans a period between the Ming Dynasty and today.

According to a pioneering researcher of Chinese gardens, Tong Jun, who was quoted by Huang and Liu in an article about the Zhiyuan Garden published in the *Art Trade Journal* in 2018, Chinese gardens are regarded as a fairytale and an idealistic world where one can liberate oneself from

mundane worries and fatigue, and live a leisurely, elegant life.

"People often connect Chinese gardens with concepts of Taoism like tranquility and inaction that were advocated by Laozi, and with the sincerity and selflessness advocated by Zhuangzi. Meanwhile, we can also see in the gardens the order and hierarchy of Confucianism. For example, in the dominant buildings and the Chinese belief in the symbolism behind flowers and trees," the article reads.

"Like the yin and yang of tai chi, Taoism and Confucianism both exert an influence on Chinese gardens, shaping them into a perfect vehicle to represent the thoughts and lives of ancient people."

In 1610, 48-year-old Wu Liang, fed up with the factionalism of officialdom and feeling homesick, resigned from his position in North China, and returned to his hometown in Changzhou, in the hope of planting a garden where he could live in seclusion.

He invited Zhou to design it and named it Zhiyuan (a "garden for stopping", *zhi* meaning stop) after the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317-420) poet Tao Yuanming's composition *Zhijiu* (Stop Drinking Wine).

Zhijiu represents the idea of knowing when it is better to stop, advocated by both Taoism and Confucianism, Huang says.

Deeply influenced by this idea, Wu Liang ended his career to protect himself from political rivals. He became a lay Buddhist, taking on the name Zhiyuan and giving his 11 sons similar names that each included the character *zhi*.

Before Wu was reinstated in 1622, he spent 12 years in his garden. It was replete with symbols from the stories and poems of great writers of previous eras, and as he strolled through it, Wu would have been able to see these hidden allusions.

In his garden, Wu's spiritual world met with those of great ancients like Laozi from the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC), Zhuangzi and Qu Yuan from the Warring States Period (475-221 BC), Wang Wei, Li Bai and Du Fu from the Tang Dynasty (618-907), and Su Shi from the Song Dynasty (960-1279), vividly illustrating the essence of Chinese gardens as the residence of the human spirit, Huang and Liu write in their book.

Among the great literati, the most important for Wu was Tao, whose fable *Peach Blossom Spring* is one of the earliest utopias described in Chinese literature, a place where people live harmoniously with nature, unaware of the outside world for centuries. Zhiyuan is Wu Liang's Peach Blossom Spring, Huang and Liu write.

Wu was as wise to know when to stop his career, as he was to know when to stop his seclusion. In 1622, the 61-year-old left Zhiyuan, embarking on his next journey, losing his Peach Blossom Spring forever. He died in 1624.

In 1627, Wu's son Wu Rousi invited Zhang to paint the 20-leaf Zhiyuan album. In the centuries that followed, the garden disappeared, lost to the mists of time. Only in these paintings can people get a glimpse of the Chinese garden at its peak.

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LIFE



Left: Yoheved Kaplinsky, the chair of the piano department at the Juilliard School in New York, gives a masterclass at Tianjin Juilliard during the school's inaugural piano festival.



Right: Piano student Li Tianyou, 19, plays under the baton of conductor Lai Jiajing during one of the festival's concerts at the Tianjin Juilliard Concert Hall on Aug 12. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Young pianists find keys to success

Technically challenging pieces mastered by youngsters as audience show their approval, **Chen Nan** reports.

Pushing his black-framed glasses up the bridge of his nose, 19-year-old Li Tianyou, a young man with the face of a high school student, began his performance of *Concerto No 2 in G minor, Op 16*.

It was the first time that Li played the piece by Russian composer Sergey Prokofiev (1891-1953) along with a symphony orchestra — the Suzhou Symphony Orchestra — under the baton of conductor Lai Jiajing. His performance sparked a dynamic response from the audience.

"Many pianists would agree that from a technical viewpoint this is the most unremittingly difficult of all the Prokofiev piano concertos. But the young man impressed all of us," Lai said the day after the performance, which was held at the Tianjin Juilliard Concert Hall on Aug 12. She joked that the way Li adjusted his glasses was like a trigger, transforming him into a totally different persona and bringing him into the "zone" of the performance.

Born and raised in Jinan, Shandong province, Li, who learned to play piano at the age of 4, was a pre-college student at the Tianjin Juilliard School and this September, he will begin studying at the Tianjin Conservatory of Music.

"I have played Prokofiev's *Concerto No 2 in G minor, Op 16*, but I never played the complete piece. I was very nervous when I did rehearsals with the orchestra because I not only played my part, but also listened to other musicians, as well as paying attention to the conductor," says Li, adding that he spent a

month practicing the piece. "It allowed me to have a full understanding about how to work with a symphony orchestra and a conductor, which opened my vision."

Li took part in the inaugural Tianjin Juilliard Piano Festival, which was held from July 30 to Aug 13 at the Tianjin school, and he was one of several young students, who got the opportunity to perform with the Suzhou Symphony Orchestra.

On Aug 13, three young piano students, Jiang Qifan, Wei Yinu and Zhou Pengcheng, performed with the Tianjin Juilliard's affiliated QingXin Ensemble, under the baton of Lai, playing piano concertos by Johann Sebastian Bach, Joseph Haydn, and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Star pianist Chen Sa also performed with the Suzhou Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Chen Lin, playing Frederic Chopin's *Concerto No 1 in E minor, Op 11*, which brought an end to the festival.

"Piano students practice alone most of the time. When they participate in piano competitions, they usually work with symphony orchestras during the final rounds. However, many students don't have the experience of working with symphony orchestras. The goal of the event was to allow piano students to get such rare and fresh experience," says Lai, who was born in 1991 and had her first piano lesson when she was just five years old.

She now serves as an assistant conductor of the China NCPA Orchestra, the resident orchestra of the National Centre for the Performing Arts, and teaches choral singing



Renowned Israeli pianist Arie Vardi, 86, during a masterclass at the inaugural Tianjin Juilliard Piano Festival.

“Many (piano) students don't have the experience of working with symphony orchestras. The goal of the event was to allow piano students to get such rare and fresh experience.”

Lai Jiajing, conductor

in the pre-college program at Tianjin Juilliard.

In the festival's first week, Lai and the QingXin Ensemble worked with 36 young students, aged 7 to 17. Lai says that most of the students had no experience of playing with orchestras.

"For some, it was a new adventure and for the others, they had the opportunity to express their own ideas about the interpretations of the music," Lai says.

The two-week festival, which was initiated by Tianjin Juilliard in April and featured recitals, a series of private lessons and masterclasses, opened to applicants of all nationalities above 7 years of age. A total of 28 young artists, 37 junior participants and 14 adjunct participants, took part in the festival, coached by 12 internationally renowned pianists, including Israeli Arie Vardi and

Russian Sofya Gulyak.

"Before they launch their professional careers as pianists, young students spend hours practicing and gradually build up their own styles. In the past two weeks, I saw many talented young people come together, attend masterclasses and take private lessons. They got a lot of information, which cannot be obtained by learning on their own. I believe that the experience will be unforgettable in their career," says Wang Xiaohan, head of the piano department of Tianjin Juilliard's pre-college division. He notes that he was very excited that his own teacher, 86-year-old Vardi, came to the festival.

Along with the chair of the piano department at the Juilliard School in New York, Yoheved Kaplinsky, Wang served as co-artistic director of the piano festival.

The festival also opened to the public with one outdoor concert and three indoor concerts, as well as online streaming programs.

"Besides gathering a group of high-level pianists from around the world to provide piano students with an exciting and inspiring educational experience this summer, the festival was also like a musical celebration," says He Wei, CEO and artistic director of the Tianjin Juilliard School.

The school, opened in 2019, is the first overseas campus of the New York-headquartered school and is the first such institution in China that confers a US-accredited music degree.

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Chinese composer celebrates legendary Japanese monk

By CHEN NAN

Composer Zou Ye hesitated when he was commissioned by the China Philharmonic Orchestra to write a piece about Kukai's legendary life.

Zou, who is known for writing symphonic works, operas and soundtracks for movies and TV dramas, had never composed any religious-themed music.

"The more I learned about Kukai, the more hesitant I felt. Buddhism is so deep and profound. It is closely associated with traditional Chinese culture. It was a great challenge for me, a Chinese composer, to write music about a Japanese monk, who had a close relationship with ancient China," says Zou.

Kukai, whose original name was Saeki Mao, is one of the best-known and most beloved Buddhist monks from Japan. He came to China in 804, during the Tang Dynasty (618-907), hoping to learn more about Buddhism. After arriving in the Tang Dynasty capital, Chang'an — today's Xi'an in Shaanxi province — he met the great master of Buddhism, Huiguo, and became his favorite student.

Kukai finished his studies in China and returned to Japan in 806.



Left: Led by conductor Yu Long, the China Philharmonic Orchestra played a piece about ancient Japanese monk Kukai, who once came to China to learn Buddhism, in Kyoto on Wednesday. **Right:** Zou Ye, composer of *Kukai*, which celebrates Sino-Japanese friendship, at the piece's debut in Lanzhou, Gansu province, on Aug 1. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

A year later, he began building a monastery on Mount Koya — a sacred mountain in west-central Honshu, which was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2004.

However, Zou was tempted by the idea of writing the piece, not only hoping to challenge himself but also because he found that Kukai's legacy still has an impact on bonds

between China and Japan.

Then, he spent over a year working on the piece, which features six chapters, recounting the life of Kukai and his contribution to communication between China and Japan more than a thousand years ago.

On Aug 1, under the baton of conductor Yu Long, the China Philharmonic



Orchestra premiered the piece at the Lanzhou Grand Theater in the provincial capital of Gansu, working with the chorus of the Lanzhou Concert Hall.

Marking the 45th anniversary of the signing of the Sino-Japanese Treaty of Peace and Friendship, the China Philharmonic Orchestra performed in Japan from Tuesday

to Saturday. Led by Yu, the orchestra played at the Kyoto Concert Hall and the Tokyo Opera City Concert Hall, featuring Zou's composition.

"In addition to his role as a religious leader, Kukai was also a poet, an artist, and a calligrapher. During his stay in China, he was heavily influenced by Chinese arts and cul-

ture. For example, he studied Chinese calligraphy, painting, poems and architecture. All of those influences were taken back to Japan by Kukai," says Zou, who conducted deep research into the monk.

"There were many things I wanted to portray through the piece about Kukai, from his birth and study of Buddhism, to his life in China and how he promoted Buddhism in Japan," Zou adds.

"I wrote the music by referring to the form of the requiem, writing the choral parts as a restless fugue. I also borrowed musical elements from Japanese music and used Western musical instruments to imitate the sounds of traditional Japanese musical instruments, such as the *shakuhachi* (Japanese bamboo flute) and the *taiko* (Japanese drum)," Zou says.

According to Yu, the composition celebrates the 1250th anniversary of Kukai's birth, as well as the Sino-Japanese friendship.

"The last time we toured Japan was four years ago. The long gap made this tour valuable," says Yu. "Cultural exchange between China and Japan has a long and profound history. This new piece made this tour even more meaningful."