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CHINA DAILY

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Visitors watch as an elderly resident dives into the Haihe River from the Shizilin Bridge in Tianjin on Saturday. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Tianjin divers make big splash amid cheers, concerns

By YANG CHENG in Tianjin
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An intrepid group of elderly individuals in northern China's Tianjin has recently sparked both curiosity and concern with their unique approach to the sport of diving.

The spirited seniors have turned the Shizilin Bridge on the Haihe River into a stage for their aquatic acrobatics, leaving both residents and tourists spellbound. Videos of their daredevil diving acts have been widely circulated on social media platforms such as Douyin, the Chinese version of TikTok, and Sina Weibo, a popular microblogging site.

The bridge stands approximately 6 meters above the surface of the river, with the depth of water being around 7 meters, according to the divers, most of whom are over 60 years old.

The elderly divers have become hugely popular for their signature moves, which often include bold opening statements with dollops of humor before the daring plunge. Amid an orchestra of gasps and applause, they perform their impressive array of flips and jumps, each with a style uniquely their own.

A "panel of judges" among the crowds flashes scorecards for the

participants after each dive. The panel comprises livestreamers, local residents and tourists.

The entertainment quotient of diving from the Shizilin Bridge is so huge that it has drawn many professionals, including 2008 Beijing Olympics gold medalist He Chong, who visited the site on Saturday and delighted onlookers with a riveting performance.

For the sake of comparison, the flexible springboards used by Olympic men's and women's competitions are roughly 3 meters high and are parallel to the water surface when stationary. The springboards also stick out around 1.5 meters from the pool's edge for safety reasons.

While there are other diving spots in Tianjin, the Shizilin Bridge in the city's Hebei district is the most popular, according to one of the elderly divers, who prefers to use his online name Muyu Qijue. "When I was a little boy, I frequently swam in the Haihe River. Diving from the bridge is currently very popular. People do it just for fun," he said.

Amid the viral videos, some netizens have dubbed this spectacle as the "6A level" or even "8A level" tourist attraction in Tianjin, while 5A represents the top level of China's tourist attraction rating system.

Hu Wen, an associate professor at Nankai University's Zhou Enlai School of Government, said the impromptu diving "represents the sense of humor of local residents, and the city's compelling culture in entertainment, which is reflected in popular cross-talk performances".

The fun sport seems to be playing a significant role in Tianjin's tourism. Attractions that are in close proximity to the bridge have experienced a substantial increase in their online exposure in the last two weeks of August, according to data from Douyin. Social media posts on the nearby Italian Style Street saw a staggering 51.8 percent jump, data showed.

Nevertheless, the amateur sport has triggered safety concerns, with local authorities adopting various countermeasures including stepping up bridge and river patrols, and putting up signs to discourage both diving and swimming.

A canoe rescue team has been put on duty since late August, and local authorities have also repaired the edge of the bridge that enthusiasts use as a diving platform. Volunteers have been recruited to inform people about the potential dangers associated with amateur diving.

On Monday, an online video showed a member of the canoe team rescuing a man who was in imminent danger of drowning after diving.

Later in the day, the local traffic police department issued a travel advisory to ensure the safety of pedestrians and smooth flow of vehicles on the crowded bridge and its surrounding intersections.

In the past, deaths have been linked to similar activities around the bridge, according to local news app Jinyun. Wang Haoran, a young tourist, agreed that the amateur sport was risky. "I didn't feel too good while diving off the bridge, especially the second time. I hit the water hard, and my head still hurts," he said.

A senior official of Hebei district said that people should indulge in safer fun activities instead. "There is so much to see and explore in Tianjin. Tourists can walk along the Italian Style Street and the Tianjin Ancient Cultural Street, and check out delectable breakfast options," the official said.

Shi Meiqin, 62, who won diving World Cup gold for China in 1981, said in a video post on Monday: "Safety is the priority. ... If there are risks involved, diving (at the bridge) should be banned."

Special bureau set up to boost private sector

Establishment has 'come exactly in time' as nation introduces major supporting policies

By CHENG YU
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China has set up a special bureau within the National Development and Reform Commission to promote the development of the private economy, and has pledged a series of detailed supporting steps to bolster the sector, said officials from the nation's top economic regulator and several ministries on Monday.

The new private economy development bureau will be responsible for coordinating and drafting policies in the sector and promoting the development of private enterprises both domestically and internationally, said Cong Liang, deputy head of the NDRC, at a news conference.

Cong said, "It is a powerful initiative ... as promoting the development of the private economy is a systematic and big project that involves various entities, policies and working procedures."

Tan Haojun, council member of the China Private Economy Research Institute, said: "China has recently introduced a series of major policies and documents to promote the private economy, creating a well-rounded macro environment for the private sector. The key lies in whether these measures can be put in place. Thus the establishment of such a bureau has come exactly in time."

China's private sector, which is responsible for 60 percent of the country's GDP and 80 percent of new urban jobs, has struggled to attract investment amid an economic slowdown. Data from the National Bureau of Statistics shows that between January and July this year, private investment fell 0.5 percent year-on-year, compared with a 0.2 percent year-on-year drop in the first six months.

In order to boost private investment, the NDRC said that the commission is actively encouraging private investment projects in the

infrastructure sector to issue real estate investment trusts, or REITs, and has successfully recommended the first such clean energy REIT project to the China Securities Regulatory Commission.

REITs refer to owning or financing income-producing real estate across a range of property sectors. Most REITs trade on major stock exchanges, and they are likely to offer a number of benefits to investors.

"We are working hard to carry out evaluations of current applied private REIT projects covering clean energy, big data centers, consumption infrastructure and warehouse logistics, and will strive to recommend more qualified projects to the CSRC as soon as possible," the economic regulator said.

As most of the country's private companies are small and medium-sized enterprises, Xu Xiaolan, vice-minister of industry and information technology, said on Monday that the ministry will soon launch a major guideline to drive the high-quality development of little giant companies, with a series of targeted supportive measures for technological innovation, industry chains and talent introduction.

"Little giant" companies are basically innovative SMEs that own core technologies in a niche market and show great market potential.

Xu noted that among the country's 98,000 "little giant" companies at present, 95 percent are private ones. In the first seven months, the profit rate of "little giant" companies was 5.5 percentage points higher than those of major SMEs in general.

Xu Hongcai, deputy director of the China Association of Policy Science's Economic Policy Committee, said, "The country's latest efforts, along with recent guidelines and measures, directly point to the current concerns of private entrepreneurs, which will greatly stimulate market vitality and economic recovery over the long term."

Camp David summit does not bode well for the Asia-Pacific region

It seems that Camp David, the US presidential retreat, has become the epicenter of a new Cold War and an instrument for covert formation of a mini-NATO in the Asia-Pacific region, after the recent trilateral meeting of the leaders of the United States, Japan and South Korea.

The meeting on Aug 18 was the first time that the nations held a



trilateral summit on an occasion other than at an international conference, and also was the first time that US President Joe Biden hosted

foreign leaders at Camp David since taking office in 2021. This vividly reflects the meeting's geopolitical and geostrategic importance.

Despite US officials' denial that the US-Japan-South Korea summit was against China, their statements and agreements run counter to their claim.

The agreements mainly focus on

military alliance moves, and their statements not only contain premeditated inclusion of the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea, but also have strong wording about so-called dangerous and aggressive behavior by China, not the US, in the South China Sea.

Such ill designs and grand policies of a zero-sum game on the

pretext of peace and stability, just to justify their containment of China, elucidate the chronic schemes of these three allies against China, making their officials blatantly hypocritical, with Camp David standing out as part of the anti-China syndrome.

Instead of any dovish endeavor for regional peace, Biden's holding

of the summit with South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida brought new military commitments, followed by the holding of joint military drills, a strengthening of China-excluded semiconductor supply chains, cybersecurity and artificial intelligence, and moving jointly toward encircling China to further consolidate US hegemonic designs.

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SHENZHEN GETS IN TUNE WITH CULTURAL AMBITIONS

Street piano initiative attracts players from many walks of life

By WANG XU
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Yi Qunlin looked nothing like a musician when he pounded the keys of a grand piano at a newly built concert hall in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, in May.

The 57-year-old forsook traditional concert attire of evening wear, opting instead to perform in a reflective safety vest and helmet.

Despite his unconventional appearance, he gave a masterly performance at the piano keyboard,



and has since become an internet sensation.

Wu Bing, a member of the audience that day, said: "I was simply blown away by how proficient he is. He is brilliant!"

Yi, the first person to perform in the new concert hall at the Cultural and Art Center in Guangming district, Shenzhen, could never have imagined that one day he would play the piano at a venue he helped build as a construction worker.

"Playing the piano in a concert hall is like a teenage dream come true," Yi said.

His interest was triggered when pianos were placed for the public to play near subway entrances in Shenzhen's Huaqiangbei, one of the world's largest electronics markets. The instruments were positioned on a street more than 900 meters long.

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Dancing with lions



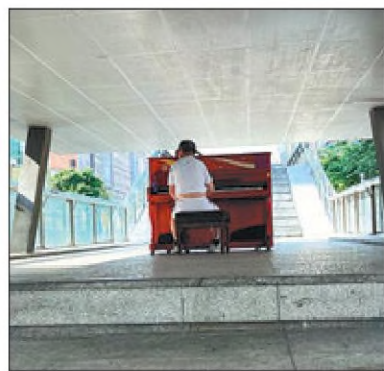
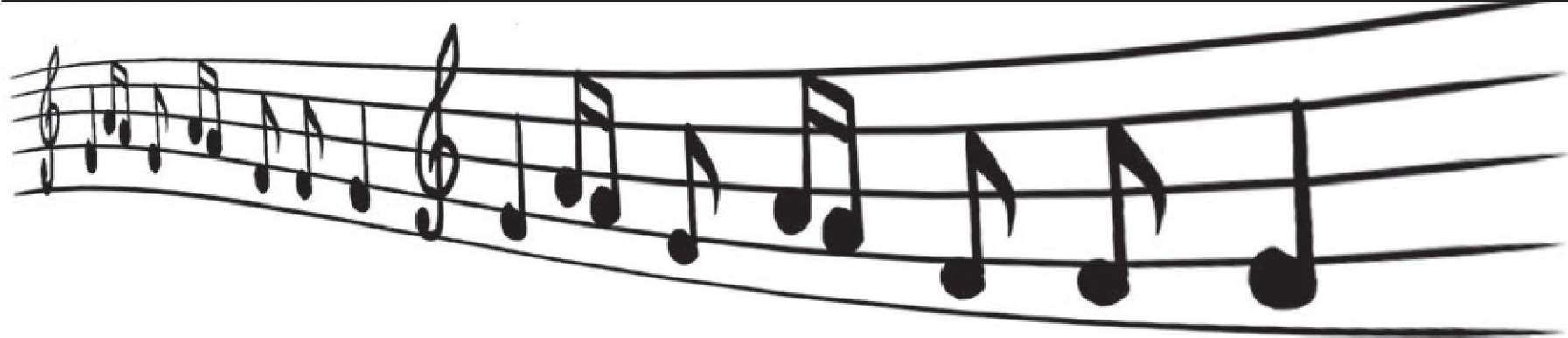
Performers participate in a lion dance competition during the 2023 Toronto Dragon Festival in Canada on Sunday. A series of activities, including martial arts demonstration, fashion show and dragon dance, were held during the three-day festival, which started on Friday.

ZOU ZHENG / XINHUA

INSIDE
BRICS expansion seen as boon for developing world
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Pianos are played in a subway station (above) and on a street (below) in Huaqiangbei, Shenzhen, Guangdong province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY AND YI YANG / FOR CHINA DAILY



"It was like chatting with an old friend. I was so excited, that my heart was still beating rapidly when I returned home."

Yi Qunlin, a worker in Huaqiangbei, Shenzhen, whose interest was triggered by pianos placed on a street for the public to play



A security guard (above) and a woman play pianos placed under escalators in Huaqiangbei. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY AND YI YANG / FOR CHINA DAILY



Project: Openness, inclusiveness targeted



From page 1

In April, video footage of Yi playing a piano in Huaqiangbei clad in a helmet and reflective vest went viral online, quickly trending on Sina Weibo and X, formerly known as Twitter.

By early last month, the footage had been viewed at least 4 million times worldwide, with attention focusing not only on Yi, but also on the determination of the authorities in Shenzhen for the city to embrace a culture characterized by "openness and inclusiveness".

Born in an obscure village in Huarong county, Hunan province, Yi had few opportunities to play instruments when he was young. Yet, the self-taught performer eagerly accepted any opportunity to learn and practice, as he was captivated by musical composition.

At the age of 6, when most performers have already begun studying the piano at music academies, Yi learned the traditional stringed instrument the *erhu* from a group of people lodging at his home. It was not until much later that he first saw a piano when he visited his cousin's house in Huarong.

"My family was too poor to buy a piano for me, so I often used to visit my cousin, even though it took about an hour to travel the 20 kilometers to his home over bumpy roads just for the opportunity to sit at the keyboard," Yi said.

Fresh start

Yi first arrived in Shenzhen 19 years ago and worked in factories, on construction sites and in kitchens, while teaching himself to play instruments such as the harmonica, flute and saxophone in his spare time. He had not played a piano for nearly 30 years.

The public pianos in Huaqiangbei offered him a fresh start.

On a hot summer's day, while taking a break from work at a nearby construction site, Yi and his son passed one of the instruments. Encouraged by his son, Yi decided to give it a try.

Feeling a little awkward at first, he rubbed his hands nervously on his clothes, but the moment he placed his fingers on the keys, his confidence returned.

"It was like chatting with an old friend. It had been a long time since my last piano practice. I was so excited, that my heart was still beating rapidly

when I returned home," Yi said.

Although his success quickly made him an online sensation in China and overseas, Yi is not the only one to benefit from the pianos in Huaqiangbei.

Inspired by the British artist Luke Jermam, who has placed more than 2,000 street pianos in over 70 cities worldwide since 2008 with the words "Play Me, I'm Yours" printed on their sides, the public piano project in Huaqiangbei was launched by the local government in 2018.

Zhang Chen, deputy director of the Huaqiangbei subdistrict office, said: "Huaqiangbei is located in the commercial district in the center of Shenzhen. We have been trying to provide diverse facilities to bring high-quality public cultural services to the area. We are surprised that the public piano project has attracted so many people to play the instruments, and others to watch them perform."

The project is also part of a bigger plan in Shenzhen to build a city culture characterized by openness and inclusiveness, which are the expectations of President Xi Jinping, Zhang said.

In June, Xi sent a congratulatory letter to the first Forum on Building up China's Cultural Strength, which was held in Shenzhen.

He wrote in the letter that the Communist Party of China is committed to securing new successes in developing socialist culture.

"We must fully implement the Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era and the guiding principles of the 20th CPC National Congress, better shoulder new cultural missions, increase



Yi Qunlin performs at a concert hall in Shenzhen in May. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

confidence in our own culture, adhere to the approach of openness and inclusiveness, uphold fundamental principles and break new ground, and inspire the cultural creativity of the whole nation," Xi wrote.

Zhang said the choice of Shenzhen to host the forum showed that the central government expects the city to take the lead in promoting cultural prosperity, adding that he was impressed by the emphasis placed by Xi on openness and inclusiveness.

"As grassroots civil servants, we will keep in mind the important instructions in Xi's congratulatory letter and work hard to deliver a vibrant, dynamic and thriving community that celebrates diversity, fosters social cohesion, and drives economic and cultural growth," Zhang added.

Group launched

Eight public pianos have been positioned in Huaqiangbei, and in addition to students, they are played by people in a wide range of jobs on their way home from work.

Some people come to Huaqiangbei to play the instruments, as they don't have a piano at home, while others feel they can perform in the area without any constraints.

When Lu Xuefeng, a 50-year-old housewife, discovered the public pianos, she visited the area every night to play them. She said she could "contribute what she has left" by playing in Huaqiangbei.

Lu decided to launch a WeChat group, "Romantic Piano Night in Huaqiangbei," which now has about 350 members. The group acts as a community where piano enthusiasts from different places come together to organize gatherings and other events.

Starting with just 20 people, the group once had as many as 400 members. It enables members to connect with each other, share their progress in practicing the piano, discuss challenges they face, and plan pieces to perform at gatherings.

Lu said, "Playing the piano on the street brings back memories of my youth," adding that it also provides the elderly with the chance to connect with the younger generation and become part of the vibrant city life in Shenzhen.

Hua Jian, a professor at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, said it is important to cultivate individuals through culture.

He added that culture plays a fundamental role in shaping people's inner spiritual strength, inspires a forward-looking vitality in the city, provides a benchmark for its future direction, fuels innovative energy in urban development, and fosters broad cultural exchanges among people.

Hua said the Guidelines of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council on Supporting Shenzhen in Building a Pilot Demonstration Area of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics put forward five strategic positions for the city to create a model for a modern socialist country, one of which is an urban civilization model.

"Under the guidelines, Shenzhen should leave a distinct mark on urban civilization in terms of cultural significance, industry, services, communication, and trade," Hua said.

"It is vital for the city to understand and harness its appeal, creativity, productivity, service capabilities and cultural influence to take the lead in shaping a modern urban civilization that showcases the prosperity of socialist culture."

He suggested that Shenzhen give priority to strengthening good cultural governance to create an open and inclusive environment that promotes a better life for residents.

"It is crucial to ensure that all residents can enjoy the benefits of urban civilization and have access to a diverse cultural experience in Shenzhen," Hua said.

"By fostering a rich and vibrant cultural landscape and an inclusive and welcoming atmosphere, the city can enhance residents' quality of life."

Hua also emphasized the importance of improving cultural infrastructure and organizing a wide range of cultural activities to meet residents' diverse needs.

Ye Ziyu, Liu Yangjiadi, Yan Xinyi and Wu Baorong contributed to this story.



TOP NEWS

News alliance ramps up cooperation to amplify Asia's voice

By CHAI HUA
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Representatives of 15 news entities in Asia emphasized the need for elevating cooperation to a new level and making Asia's voice heard, during the board meeting of the Asia News Network on Monday in Beijing.

The meeting marked the first in-person assembly of the leading regional news alliance since the COVID-19 pandemic, building new bridges for collaborative efforts among Asian countries and between Asia and the rest of the world.

The news alliance was established in 1999, and China Daily has been its member since 2000.

The Proposal for Strengthening Media Exchange and Cooperation was approved at the meeting, charting a new direction for the alliance's future development.

The meeting decided to work toward setting up an independent newsroom with reputable professionals to make the ANN an independent news source for all its members, and for regional and global media in general.

Qu Yingpu, publisher and editor-in-chief of China Daily, said in his welcoming remarks that the purpose of the meeting is to deepen ANN cooperation, enhance ANN story exchanges, jointly produce impactful videos, and organize enriching workshops and forums. "These initiatives not only strengthen our ties but also amplify our voices to resonate across Asia, and even globally," he noted.

Qu reminded that media organizations in Asia face common challenges. "We face the daunting task of not just reporting news but interpreting it in a way that is relevant, respectful and resonates with our diverse audiences."

These challenges push us to innovate, to adapt and to grow, he emphasized.

Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of Bangladesh's The Daily Star, said: "We need to understand and know each other better in our own region ... to mutually share our problems and opportunities. We must tell the world (about) the creativity and

the innovation, and most importantly, (about) our collective intellectual and cultural heritage in Asia."

Anam, who is also the incumbent chairman of the ANN, highlighted that as Asian countries are very important players in the international sphere, Asian media must use the opportunity of this alliance of 22 English-language news organizations to tell the Asian story to the world.

In its latest of Asia-Pacific regional economic outlook report, which was released in May, the International Monetary Fund predicted that Asia will contribute nearly 70 percent of global growth in 2023, and the growth in the region will accelerate to 4.6 percent from 3.8 percent in 2022. In particular, China and India together are forecast to generate about half of global growth this year.

The challenge at the moment is to turn this network into an efficient and independent news service for its members and the broader Asian market, Anam said. He urged all participating members to make the ANN a more effective network of media collaboration.

On how to enrich ANN content, Zaffar Abbas, editor of Pakistan's Dawn Media Group, suggested that the alliance should offer a broader range of opinions, editorials, exclusive features and human interest stories.

Abbas said that international readers are interested in features and opinion pieces from Asian countries, which the ANN can excel at delivering. To draw an audience beyond its member regions, Abbas believes that the network should create bias-free original content.

On Monday, ANN delegates also attended a captivating cultural heritage exhibition hosted at the China Daily headquarters in Beijing.

The event featured mesmerizing tea art performances on-site, exquisite crafts from various ethnic groups, as well as tea and coffee from Pu'er, Yunnan province, the birthplace of one of the world's most renowned fermented tea.

The delegates will participate in the Forum on Cultural Heritage Conservation and make field visits to local businesses in the following days.

Hopes and dreams gutted



Residents search for their belongings in the charred remains of their shacks after a fire gutted an informal settlement near Johannesburg, South Africa, in the early hours of Sunday. Two children died in the fire, which took place only three days after a deadly building blaze in the city killed 77 people. SHIRAZ MOHAMED / REUTERS

Economic recovery tops agenda of G20 Summit

China expected to underline need to refocus on development issue

By CAO DESHENG
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Premier Li Qiang will attend the 18th G20 Summit to be held in New Delhi, India on September 9 and 10, when leaders and representatives of the Group of 20 nations will gather to discuss measures to boost global economic recovery.

Li was invited by the government of India, the rotating presidency of G20 for 2023, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said on Monday.

The summit takes place at a time when the global economy is facing increased downward pressure, and there are growing difficulties in achieving sustainable development worldwide amid mounting challenges such as the climate change and the ongoing Ukraine crisis.

"As the primary forum for international economic cooperation, the G20 nations should strengthen partnerships and collectively

address prominent challenges in the international economic and development fields, and actively contribute toward promoting global economic recovery, growth and sustainable development," Mao said at a regular news conference.

China hopes that the New Delhi Summit will help build up consensus, send a message of confidence to the world, and promote prosperity and development, she added.

The G20 comprises 19 countries — Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Türkiye, the United Kingdom and the United States — and the European Union, representing around 85 percent of the global GDP, over 75 percent of the global trade, and about two-thirds of the world population.

It is the premier intergovernmental forum for international economic cooperation, and plays

Mao Ning, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman

an important role in shaping and strengthening global architecture and governance on all major international economic issues.

As the host of this year's summit, India gives priority to green development, climate finance and lifestyle for environment, accelerated, inclusive and resilient growth, accelerating progress on sustainable development goals, technological transformation and digital public infrastructure, multilateral institutions for the 21st century, as well as women-led development.

China, as the strong advocate for true multilateralism, is expected to use the summit to underline the need to refocus on the issue of development as the world is confronting multiple crises and challenges, observers said.

As the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is due for a midterm review this year, it is important to uphold true multilateralism, forge a global development partnership, and create a secure and stable international environment for shared development, they said.

On multiple occasions, China has called on the countries from around the world to practice the Global Development Initiative, proposed by President Xi Jinping, to boost international solidarity and cooperation to promote shared growth globally and jointly address the challenges the world is facing.

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Moutai-flavored latte gets coffee enthusiasts all abuzz

By CUI JIA
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China's top liquor maker Kweichow Moutai and major domestic coffee chain Luckin Coffee have got a hit on their hands, with a newly released latte containing the iconic spirit quickly selling out at some outlets in Beijing.

The latte, with an alcohol content lower than 0.5 percent of its volume, is emblazoned with the iconic Moutai logo. It soon became one of the most discussed topics on Chinese social media, with people curious about how traditional Chinese liquor would taste with coffee.

In Beijing, the Moutai latte sold out at some Luckin Coffee branches before midday, and many had to suspend their online ordering systems as demand surged.

Staff at a branch of Luckin Coffee in Chaoyang district said the majority of orders it had received on Monday morning were for the Moutai latte.

"It seems that people prefer iced

“It seems that people prefer iced latte, so we quickly used up the ice in the branch. The number of orders is scary.”

Zhang, a Luckin Coffee barista, on the surging demand of a new Moutai latte launched at the coffee chain

latte, so we quickly used up the ice in the branch. The number of orders is scary," said a barista surnamed Zhang.

She said she had no choice but to temporarily stop the online ordering system at around 1:30 pm because more than 200 orders were yet to be completed, almost all of which were for the Moutai latte.

People have been sharing their reactions on social media after try-

ing the latte, with most agreeing that the aroma of the liquor is very strong. Some people said they even felt dizzy after drinking the coffee because of its alcohol content.

Some also wondered whether it was safe to drive after drinking the latte. In response, Luckin Coffee stated that underage people, pregnant women, drivers and those who are allergic to alcohol are advised not to order the drink.

On Monday, an official from the Beijing Traffic Administration Bureau also asked people not to drive after drinking the latte, no matter how much alcohol is actually in the latte.

In recent years, Moutai has been looking for ways to be more accessible and attract a new generation of customers, said Zhu Dapeng, a food and drink industry analyst.

"By working with Luckin Coffee, which surpasses Starbucks as the largest coffee house operator in China, Moutai has made its brand younger and has generated more opportunities to develop its extended product portfolio for younger consumers in the future," Zhu said.

Moutai has run marketing campaigns recently in a bid to attract younger customers, including rolling out Moutai-infused ice cream.

Security: US, Japan and South Korea urged to uphold true multilateralism

From page 1

Furthermore, the trilateral agreement to pilot a supply chain early warning system to guard against disruptions of certain products, including critical minerals used in electric vehicle batteries, smacks of economic coercion.

The three countries are moving toward an interlinked security environment and a mini-NATO mechanism. It is seriously concerning that such plans, which serve the US' strategic competition with China and weaken China's development prospects, are being chalked out. The trilateral framework could be gradually institutionalized in these countries in coming years, creating further uncertainty and instability in the region.

In addition, the three countries have actually tried to forge their image as defenders of peace and stability in the so-called Indo-Pacific region, rather than troublemakers and creators of camp confrontation.

Wang Wenbin, a spokesman for China's Foreign Ministry, rightly urged the three countries to uphold true multilateralism amid a complex international security situation.

However, although both Seoul and Tokyo are bent by US military bases and politics, conflicting realities on the ground indicate a declining political grip by and acceptability of South Korean President Yoon, as his pro-US policies and olive branch offering to Japan have been labeled by some as a national disgrace. Neither is Kishida's approval rating at home satisfactory.

The current policies of the leaders of Japan and South Korea reflect a lack of independence, making their diplomatic approach unbalanced, which will surely affect these leaders domestically.

The Camp David summit has turned out to be another deliberate extension of the US containment of China, the US military-

industrial complex, Biden's executive order restricting US investment in China, and sanctions against Beijing, by involving South Korea and Japan. It may be appropriate to say that the trilateral summit was the first shot in a new Cold War.

However, this might not be a good omen for South Korea or Japan, because China is their huge trade partner and close neighbor. Their business communities already are feeling the chill from the Camp David results.

Ultimately, the implementation of the Camp David agreements will create economic imbalance, industrial supply chain disruption and security paradoxes in the days to come, which will hurt both Japan and South Korea, at least.

The author is executive director of the Center for South Asia & International Studies in Islamabad, Pakistan. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

CHINA



People experience automobile seats that can be electrically rotated and repositioned at the Smart China Expo 2023 in Chongqing on Monday. CUI LI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Chongqing shows NEV growth at Smart China Expo

By TAN YINGZI and DENG RUI in Chongqing

Chongqing, a traditional industrial powerhouse, has been leading western China in intelligent connected new energy vehicle development in recent years, and the ongoing Smart China Expo is expected to bring more technology and investment to the city.

At the expo, Chongqing enterprises signed 84 major projects with a contract value of 213 billion yuan (\$29.4 billion). About one-third of the agreements involved intelligent connected NEVs.

Among those projects, Chongqing Yulong Asset Management will partner with Chinese technology giant Huawei to build a super-fast charging industrial ecological network. Banma Network Technology, an offshoot of Alibaba Group, and automaker SAIC, will establish an intelligent vehicle operating system innovation industrial park in Chongqing. China National Petroleum Corporation will set up battery swapping stations with Aulton, Chi-

na's largest battery swapping company.

The Smart China Expo 2023 kicked off in Chongqing on Monday, highlighting intelligent connected NEVs and "digital China".

The three-day event has attracted more than 500 enterprises, more than 200 of which have exhibition space.

The annual expo, begun in 2018, aims to showcase new products, technologies, business formats and modes of smart technology through conferences, exhibitions, summits and competitions.

This year's expo highlights intelligent manufacturing and equipment, new-generation information technologies and smart transportation, the organizing committee said.

Cutting-edge innovative products, technological systems and the latest solutions in 27 subsectors such as batteries, key basic components and artificial intelligence are being showcased.

As the gateway to Southwest China and a major industrial base,

Chongqing, on the upper reaches of the Yangtze River, has established one of the world's largest IT industrial clusters and one of China's biggest auto manufacturing bases.

It aims to build itself into a renowned smart city and a smart manufacturing powerhouse with over 5,000 high-tech companies that contribute 19 percent of the dynamic city's industrial output, local authorities said.

Last year, Chongqing produced some 2 million vehicles, including 365,000 NEVs, up 140 percent year-on-year.

This year, NEVs in Chongqing have contributed to 85 percent of the growth of the city's automobile industry.

From January to July, Chongqing's automobile manufacturing sector completed projects involving the investment of 11 billion yuan, among which new energy automobile industry projects accounted for 8.54 billion yuan, according to Chongqing Development and Reform Commission.

On the sideline of the expo on

Monday, Chongqing hosted an event on technology cooperation with the Community of Latin American and the Caribbean States.

China and Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, El Salvador, Uruguay, the Bahamas, Barbados, Dominica, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago jointly announced the Chongqing Initiative of China-CELAC Digital Technology Cooperation Forum.

The initiative reiterates the importance of connectivity and calls for all the participating member countries to jointly promote the construction of new infrastructure represented by 5G and data centers, to promote the deep integration and innovative development of digital technologies with the real economy, and make new and greater contributions to the building of a community of shared future between China and CELAC countries.

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Students learn importance of state security

Special activities organized for start of new school year to raise awareness

By ZOU SHUO zoushuo@chinadaily.com.cn

Each year, schools up and down the country organize special activities to mark the beginning of the new semester, teaching their freshmen general knowledge such as traffic or fire safety. This year, many schools chose to teach their students about national security awareness.

At Chengdu No 7 High School in Sichuan province, more than 1,000 secondary school students were taught about patriotism, collectivism and tenacity by officers from the Sichuan Provincial Department of State Security.

They were taught how to understand national security, how to identify behaviors that may endanger national security and what to do if they encounter such behavior.

"I never thought that our daily life could be so closely connected to national security, the economy, culture and technology," said one student surnamed Li. "It is so cool that as a young student, I can also contribute to safeguarding national security."

In Zaozhuang, Shandong province, dozens of primary and middle school students visited the national security education center.

They watched documentaries on national security and viewed exhibitions. A quiz was held by center staff and the questions

“

It is so cool that as a young student, I can also contribute to safeguarding national security.”

A student surnamed Li from Chengdu No 7 High School in Sichuan province

included places where they cannot take photos and what kinds of information are not suitable to post on social media.

In Tianjin, students and teachers from Nankai University participated in a performance centered around revolutionary Xiao Minghua (1922-1950), who was a secret agent for the Communist Party of China during the War of Liberation (1946-49).

The performance will be uploaded to Tianjin's official online education platform for all university students in the city to view for free.

A student surnamed Zhang played Xiao in the drama and she said the experience gave her the opportunity to immerse herself in the sacrifice that the hero and other martyrs made. "I was shocked and lessons have been learned. I will promote the knowledge of national security to more students," she said.

Brush with history



Young calligraphy enthusiasts write at the former residence of Wang Xizhi in Linyi, Shandong province, on Sunday, the 1,720th anniversary of the birth of the great Chinese calligrapher. More than 100 children participated in the activity, writing in various calligraphy styles. SUN YUNHE / FOR CHINA DAILY

Scholars hail poverty alleviation measures in Tibet

By DAQIONG and PALDEN NYIMA in Lhasa

Experts and scholars have shared their experiences in developing China-Africa relations, and in particular, how the Tibet autonomous region has been lifted out of poverty and moved toward prosperity, at the 16th China Lecture held in Nyingchi on Friday.

Themed around the economic, social and cultural development of Tibet, the event brought together more than 80 participants from the China-Africa Institute, the regional academy of social sciences, and various institutes in Nyingchi. More than 50 participants, including government officials, scholars and university students from African countries such as South Africa, Sierra Leone and Nigeria attended the event online.

Sun Xiangjun, an official from the regional academy of social sciences, said that since the 1950s, Tibet's social productivity has been rapidly liberated and developed, and it has undergone earth-shaking changes.

"Absolute poverty has been historically eliminated in the region. It has achieved social harmony and stability, people enjoy happiness and well-being, the ecological environment quality maintains good momentum, and the excellent traditional cultures receive better protection, inheritance and development," Sun added.

Xu Wuda, deputy head of the rural economy institute at the academy, spoke about how the autonomous region has eliminated absolute poverty.

"Precise strategies have to be made to deal with the selecting of

aid targets, project allocation, the use of funds and different measures for different households," said Xu.

"To achieve targeted poverty alleviation, the first step is to accurately identify poverty, organize grassroots cadres to carry out surveys in villages and households to find out the distribution of impoverished populations, the causes of poverty and the assistance needs."

Xu said between 2012 and 2020, nine teams conducted more than 193,000 visits to people across the region to carry out poverty alleviation work.

"The successful practice and valuable experience of eliminating absolute poverty in Tibet has deepened the understanding of poverty reduction work in border and ethnic areas of China, and it has enriched the development of anti-poverty theo-

ries in high-altitude areas," he said.

Adetoro Olaniji Banwo, vice-dean at the Confucius Institute at the University of Lagos, and Alpha Mohamed Jalloh, director of the China-Africa Institute at the University of Makeni in Sierra Leone, hailed the achievements made in Tibet in terms of poverty alleviation.

Banwo said if African countries can learn from these valuable experiences, they could create a better social environment.

Jalloh said that African countries should learn from China's experiences of how to build large-scale infrastructure to connect their transportation, energy and mobile communication networks, laying the foundation for development.

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Painter ordered to pay damages for plagiarism

By CAO YIN caoyin@chinadaily.com.cn

A Chinese painter has been ordered to pay 5 million yuan (\$688,000) in damages to a Belgian artist for plagiarism, according to a ruling recently announced by Beijing Intellectual Property Court.

In the verdict, the court urged Ye Yongqing, a professor of oil painting at Chongqing-based Sichuan Fine Arts Institute, to stop the infringement of Christian Silvain's artworks, and also required Ye to make a public apology in the media to the Belgian.

The 73-year-old Silvain posted the result of the lawsuit on social media at the end of last month, saying "After four years of waiting, we won the

trial in China," ThePaper.cn, a Shanghai-based news outlet, reported on Friday.

Ye, who was born in 1958 and was among the first Chinese artists exposed to Western modernism, had not made any comment about the result as of press time.

Since the 1980s, Silvain has created a series of artworks with elements such as birds, nests, bird cages, red cross frames and airplanes, and he published an album of works in 1990.

The Belgian sued Ye after finding Ye had continuously copied ideas from his own collage series and profited from them since the 1990s, claiming that Ye did not identify the original author of the artworks but signed his own name instead, and

that Ye also modified the paintings without getting his permission.

In addition, Silvain complained that Ye copied, exhibited and published the works to seek profits, with plagiarism of 87 artworks over a period of more than 25 years.

Based on that, Silvain and his lawyer asked the court to stop Ye's infringement and pay more than 50 million yuan in compensation, along with a public apology.

"The amount of the compensation supported by the court is far from that requested by the Belgian, and Ye, the defendant, hasn't responded. So the verdict, I believe, is just a temporary result," said Liu Bin, a lawyer in Beijing who specializes in handling intellectual property cases.

He added that the final result of

the case depends on whether the two sides appeal, even though the Belgian artist has announced the victory of the lawsuit online.

Regardless of the appeal, he said, "Chinese courts will always uphold and give equal protection to litigants, no matter where they are from."

The Beijing IP Court was set up at the end of 2014 to address a rising number of IP disputes.

Data released by the court at the beginning of this year showed that it has filed more than 28,100 lawsuits involving foreign affairs since its establishment, accounting for over 22 percent of its cases.

The foreign litigants were from more than 100 countries and regions.

CHINA



Left: Members of the RideNow Cycle Club take part in an event on the streets of Shanghai. **Middle:** Club members assemble for a photo in front of their headquarters in the city. **Right:** Ken Goh, the RNCC's founder, surveys the action on the streets of Shanghai. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

In addition to enabling more people to experience and enjoy cycling, the RideNow Cycle Club in Shanghai has a wider goal: to connect cycling enthusiasts around the world through its work.

Established in 2016, the RNCC has grown from a small group of expats into a major cycling community, echoing the changes in the national cycling market. As such, it is now considered to be one of the largest cycling communities in the country.

Its founder, Ken Goh, from Singapore, is widely regarded as the driving force behind the growing popularity of road cycling in Shanghai. He gets up at 4:30 am every day to lead his members in rides around the waking city.

"Cycling is my lifestyle now. I wake up every morning full of anticipation, knowing that everyone is waiting for me to lead that day's ride," the 45-year-old said.

Motivation, revelation

Goh's sense of responsibility has not only enabled him to persist in rising early, but it also provided the initial motivation to establish the club.

Having lived in China for 18 years, Goh, who has been fond of cycling since childhood, began riding seriously in 2015, when he encountered a bottleneck in his work as a professional photographer.

"For a while, I couldn't produce any satisfactory photos, so I chose to stop for a while," he said, adding that road cycling provided a wonderful antidote to his situation.

"I explored many beautiful places that could serve as material, and also deepened my understanding of light and shadow as I often set out against the dawn."

With a strong physique and a passion for sports, Goh's cycling ability quickly improved and the people around him simply couldn't keep up. In response, he joined a club in the Hongqiao area in the hope of finding new company.

"However, the cycling activities at the new club were not like those of a team, but more like a competition. No one explained the rules or regulations, or set a speed before the activity. After setting out, many newcomers could not keep up with the pace, and if an accident occurred, few members had good awareness of emergency procedures," he said.

To improve the cycling experience, Goh wrote a safety code but it didn't win much support from the members. When he cycled overseas, he was inspired by seeing people riding in a standardized manner, such as giving way to pedestrians and cars, and cycling in groups.

"I felt I could not change my club. Instead, I decided to influence the entire cycling circle in China," he recalled.

Low ebb, poor growth

China used to be nicknamed the "Kingdom of Bicycles" as that was the major form of transportation in the years after the founding of the People's Republic of China.

Even today, the country has the world's largest manufacturing base for both bicycles and electric bikes, accounting for more than 60 percent of their total global export volume.

However, professional cycling clubs that aimed to build a safe riding environment and a social space after workouts hadn't developed well in China, so Goh decided to establish his own club.

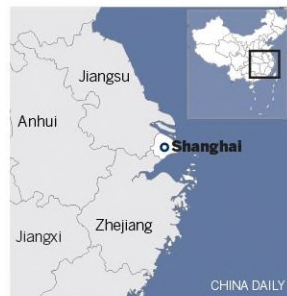
"I didn't consider profits at first. I just wanted to establish a communi-

Cycle club grows in tandem with burgeoning market

With membership numbers rising and a recently opened retail operation, the outfit is a new star in China's two-wheeled community. **He Qi** reports from Shanghai.



Chinese and expat members pose for a photo in front of several famous landmarks in Shanghai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



ty that would give members confidence and a sense of security," he said.

The RNCC's cycle events started with as many as 20 riders moving at a fixed pace, ensuring that everyone moved forward at a relatively synchronized speed.

Lin Weijie, who joins the events, said that the first time she rode with the team she felt very safe. "The team leader explains everything in advance: the route, speed, rules and solutions if problems are encountered," she said.

Goh also wrote some guidelines for future leaders of group activities, letting them know the rights and wrongs, and to learn to abide by their obligations and regulations.

The scarcity of decent cycling clubs in Shanghai and the RNCC's good reputation have seen membership numbers continue to grow, while the format and frequency of activities have gradually expanded.

"In 2019, the scale of each of our



Members ride in the peloton as they take part in an RNCC cycling event in the city. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

activities was between 40 and 80 people, and the RNCC became a benchmark. However, the characteristic at that time was that foreign nationals were our main members because most Chinese cyclists preferred to ride at night, while our activities were held in the morning, which was more in line with the expats' exercise habits," Goh said.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought some changes. Goh stayed in Singapore during the outbreak, and the RNCC was unable to continue its regular activities in Shanghai for a while.

"Fortunately, many event leaders volunteered to lead rides and keep the community active, which moved

me deeply and allowed this 'family' to continue surviving," Goh said.

The pandemic was a double-edged sword, as it persuaded some people to leave the club, but many newcomers were attracted because the outbreak raised people's awareness of healthy lifestyles.

According to Guo Wenyu, chairman of the China Bicycle Association, sales of high-end bikes in the country rose by 30 percent last year from 2021, and they are expected to rise by 10 percent this year.

"While (the use of) such transportation has mostly been covered by shared bicycles, the people who buy high-end cycles are mostly enthusiasts," Guo said.

In addition, "RNCC" has become a popular search term on Chinese social media, which has helped attract many new members.

"I used to only post content on Instagram, but in May last year, I suddenly noticed that there were many posts about the RNCC on the life-sharing platform Xiaohongshu, such as our cycling routes, photos and activities. Later, I registered an official RNCC account on the platform and decided to manage it carefully," Goh said.

With the promotion on Xiaohongshu, more local cyclists joined the RNCC, marking a demographic shift and lowering the proportion of foreign nationals from 90 to 50 percent.

Now, in terms of social media, the RNCC has nearly 3,300 followers on Xiaohongshu, 3,700 on Instagram and 100,000 on Sina Weibo. Meanwhile, it has approximately 4,800 members on the exercise app Strava and it operates five WeChat groups, each containing nearly 400 people, including a newly established Singapore cycling group with about 100 people.

"The fastest period of cycling growth in China started in 2021. Our member numbers on Strava fluctuated between about 800 and 1,200 in 2020, reached 2,000 in 2021 and broke through 3,000 last year. This year, the figure has already reached nearly 5,000," Goh said, adding that he has been surprised by the rise.

At present, the club guarantees to hold six activities targeting different

levels of cyclists every week to meet the needs of this growing group.

Changes, future plans

The rise of the RNCC reflects and accompanies the growth of the local cycling market. Goh said that he rarely saw cycle lanes a decade ago, but the introduction of shared bicycles has boosted their construction, leading to a noticeable rise in the number of cyclists.

The improved road conditions have also expanded the route options. The current routes in Shanghai range from 10 to 100 kilometers, according to Goh. "The long-distance ones are about 60 to 100 km, such as a journey from Thames Town in Songjiang district to the Huangpu River," he said.

"There are also daily city rides of 10 to 50 km, such as cycling around downtown Huangpu district, where riders will be pleasantly surprised by the changes in the seasons, the sunlight and the passersby."

With more cycling events being held, related insurance has also been optimized. Also, manufacturers of cycling clothing and related products have launched more styles and choices.

"We used to buy cycle clothing that was good enough to wear for about 100 yuan (\$14). Now, cyclists have a higher sense of aesthetics and requirements, so it's common to spend 2,000 to 3,000 yuan on riding clothing," Goh said.

Moreover, the abilities of local cycling enthusiasts are rising, while the performance of their bikes has improved significantly. In addition, more girls and women participate than ever before.

"We used to only have one or two females ride with us, but now the proportion has reached 30 to 40 percent. It's not just limited to leisure cycling but also to participating in training and team competitions," Goh said.

The growing market trend seems set to continue. China has an increasingly affluent middle-income group and the government is encouraging healthy lifestyles, resulting in a continuously growing interest in fitness, said Feng Baozhong, vice-president of the Chinese Cycling Association.

Feng added that the value of the national bicycle market reached 194 billion yuan in 2021, and it is expected to hit 266 billion yuan in 2027.

Goh has devised a plan to help maintain this trend. "We started to design cycling clothes because many members wanted to compete in events," he said.

"With the rising demand, I hope to reach 100 SKUs (stock-keeping units, the method used by retailers to monitor merchandise) of our products — including cycling supplies, accessories and clothing — and distribute them to members around the world as agents."

This year, the club launched an online store on Taobao, a popular e-commerce platform.

"I want to make our club members more recognizable, and I also hope to set up more rendezvous around the world," Goh said.

He added that while after-sales service is an important part of the RNCC, the club has collaborated with groups in countries such as South Korea and Malaysia to establish in-store services.

"We hope that all cycling enthusiasts around the world will make connections through the RNCC," he said.

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WORLD

Editor's Note: The scandal at the British Museum risks undermining the institution's founding purpose as a custodian of the world's treasures, sparking a wave of calls for returning looted artifacts to countries of origin. The story reviews the recent astounding case and experts' perspectives on artifact collections in museums.

By JULIAN SHEA in London
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Art in crisis: Thefts spark doubts over British Museum

Stolen artifacts fuel debate over its future as a safe repository for cultural items

Since it was established by the British Parliament in 1753 to house the collection of 71,000 artifacts bequeathed to the nation by physician Hans Sloane, London's British Museum has welcomed millions of visitors, including some of the most famous names in history, through its doors to marvel at its wonders.

In 1765, the 9-year-old Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart wrote a piece of music dedicated to the museum on Great Russell Street after a visit. Years later, Karl Marx, Bram Stoker and Arthur Conan Doyle became regular users of its famous reading room.

In 1972, the visit of the relics of Tutankhamen drew a record 1.8 million visitors to the museum. Then in 1980, it hosted a Viking exhibition. Currently, *China's Hidden Century* exhibition is being held at the museum to great acclaim.

But this summer, it is not who has been coming through the museum's doors that is being talked about, but it is what has been taken out of them, as a scandal over missing items has made hugely damaging international headlines.

When the story first broke in mid-August, the BBC reported that a staff member had been sacked and there was a police investigation over items that were "missing, stolen or damaged", with museum director Hartwig Fischer calling it "a highly unusual incident".

But less than two weeks later, it was Fischer who was on his way out, with his deputy Jonathan Williams stepping back from duties, as the scandal and reputational damage to one of the world's most highly regarded historical institutions grew, with the revelation that there had been unheeded warnings over suspected thefts two years earlier.

About 2,000 treasures are thought to have been stolen, but recovery has begun for some of them, BBC cited British Museum chairman George Osborne as saying on Aug 26.

Alert ignored

The items involved are dated from 15th century BC to 19th century AD, and had been kept primarily for academic and research purposes.

Osborne told BBC Radio 4's *Today* program that not all of the items were "properly cataloged and registered".

The BBC reported that art dealer Itai Gradel alerted the museum in February 2021 when he saw items that belonged to it for sale online, but he received a reply from Williams in July that year, saying "there was no suggestion of any wrongdoing".

Senior figures dismissed suggestions of theft as "wholly unfounded", and emails sent to Osborne said "all items are accounted for". But the truth was very different.

"It is evident that the British Museum did not respond as comprehensively as it should have in response to the warnings in 2021, and to the problem that has now fully emerged ... the responsibility for that failure must ultimately rest with the director," Fischer's resignation letter said.

Though it is called the British Museum, the most frequently searched term on its website is "Egypt". Despite the location, many of its most famous pieces are from much further afield.

For many years, questions have been asked — and not always satisfactorily answered — about how some of them ended up in British hands.

Sloane, whose life's collection started the museum, was a highly respected medic, promoting inoculation against smallpox, and becoming president of both the College of Physicians and the Royal Society. But the museum's own biography of him acknowledges that he worked on slave plantations, and that his wife's family fortune, which helped fund his collection, also had links to slavery.

In addition to the contentious provenance of many of its exhibits, the security lapses exposed by the scandal have demolished the suggestion that the British Museum is a safer repository for priceless items of international cultural significance than their places of origin.

One of the most high-profile examples of this is the long-running dispute with Greece over the marble friezes from the Parthenon in Athens, acquired by Thomas Elgin in the early part of the 1800s and subsequently sold to the museum. The other is the Benin bronzes,



Visitors look at the reconstructed Nereid Monument, removed from modern-day Türkiye in the early 1840s, on Aug 23 at the British Museum in London. LEON NEAL / GETTY IMAGES



Visitors to the British Museum gather around a display case containing the Rosetta Stone on Aug 23 in London. LEON NEAL / GETTY IMAGES



An employee of the British Museum views Benin bronzes in January. TOBY MELVILLE / REUTERS



A group of 20 glazed ceramic tiles originally from China's Shanxi province is on display at the British Museum. The artifact was made during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

brought back by British soldiers from what is now southern Nigeria, in the late 19th century.

Member of Parliament Bell Ribeiro-Addy, chair of the all-party parliamentary group on African reparations, told *The Guardian* that the recent scandal, and the fact that there is a specific law — the 1963 British Museum Act preventing the return of such objects — highlighted the "insulting ridiculousness" of the situation.

Unfolding scandal

"One of the most insulting reasons that they've given is that the other countries that these items belong to would either not be able to take care of them or they are likely to be stolen," she said. "But you've got people in this country putting them on eBay."

Unsurprisingly, the Greek govern-

ment has been watching the unfolding of the scandal closely, saying that it "reinforces the permanent and just demand of our country for the definitive return" of the marbles. In an interview with newspaper *To Vima*, Greek Minister of Culture Lina Mendoni said the scandal brought into question the fundamental credibility of the British Museum.

"The loss, theft, deterioration of objects from a museum's collections is an extremely serious and particularly sad event," she said. "In fact, when this happens from within, beyond any moral and criminal responsibility, a major question arises regarding the credibility of the museum organization itself ... the Ministry of Culture is following the development of the issue with great attention."

An unnamed Greek government official was quoted by the *Financial Times* as saying that the government "like others in the cultural community, are shocked by the scale of the theft ... these issues have no direct bearing on our campaign for our legal right for the return of the Parthenon Sculptures to Greece, which continues unabated".

In addition to the current temporary exhibition, which ends in October, there are around 23,000 pieces from China among the British Museum's estimated 8 million items, with some there since its foundation.

Given the importance that has recently been placed on repatriating Chinese cultural artifacts that have ended up overseas, the saga has been followed with interest in Beijing. There has been no formal com-

“It seems that for too long, the British Museum has been run by people who have regarded it as a private collection and think no one will ask any questions. ... It seems to have been operating on a too-big-to-fail mentality. This has been proven very wrong.”

Emiline Smith, a fellow of the Centre for Criminology at the University of Hong Kong

ment from the authorities yet, but there was a strongly worded editorial piece about the issue in the *Global Times* on Aug 28.

Emiline Smith, a fellow of the Centre for Criminology at the University of Hong Kong and a lecturer at the University of Glasgow in Scotland, told *China Daily* that although the initial story had taken her by surprise, given the museum's status as being the epitome of safe guardianship, it was less of a shock when more details emerged.

"It was clear that there was total lack of oversight and action contributing to an epic failure," she explained. "This isn't the first theft from a museum, and it's not the first insider theft either — anyone who's been in museum storage would know that things do walkabout, and in this case, it was very clear

that there is far too much in the collection for anyone to be able to control it effectively.

"It's a problem of documentation, but also a problem of funding in relation to the kind of oversight needed to avoid these things happening. In recent years, the former government's policy of austerity has clearly had a negative impact in terms of the loss of expertise and a weakening of the systems that could have prevented this happening, so it's quite ironic that the former chancellor of the exchequer George Osborne, one of the political architects of that policy, is now chairman of the museum, when this has emerged."

Although the British Museum had the misfortune to be caught out, other museums around the world, particularly ones with roots in colonialism, could face many of the same difficult questions.

In recent years, momentum has been building behind a wider global movement to repatriate items, and Smith said the publicity this incident has received had given that campaign renewed energy.

"It seems that for too long, the British Museum has been run by people who have regarded it as a private collection and think no one will ask any questions," she said. "It seems to have been operating on a too-big-to-fail mentality. This has been proven very wrong."

China is one of many countries that will be keeping a close eye on how the story continues to develop, given the amount of items of its own heritage that are in different hands and distant lands. But as Smith pointed out, its approach to repatriation so far has been distinctive.

"China has positioned itself slightly differently from other countries, as it's bought back items — normally countries of origin make a legal claim, involving law enforcement and suing, or go down the ethical route, making a public claim," Smith explained.

"Instead, China ... has asked private donors to buy back objects, which are then reinstated through private museums, which has been effective — if Chinese items ever come up at auction, the room is sure to be full of Chinese buyers."

Wider shock waves

Although official voices have not been heard from China on the issue, the *Global Times* made it clear where the authorities stand over the matter.

"The *Global Times* statement showed a desire to go down the ethical route and hold countries accountable for the harms they have done through history," she explained.

The wider shock waves caused by the museum's very public crash and burn are likely to embolden efforts from communities of origin around the world to reclaim their heritage, a path of action cleared by the most unlikely of helpers — COVID-19.

"The pandemic meant museums had to put their collections online, to maintain visitor interest, and that made it easier to discover where things are," she explained.

"Now people in even the remotest areas can get hold of a smartphone and follow the story and track things down, so you're getting countries and communities that haven't necessarily spoken up before saying that they want their heritage back. Politically, it's extremely interesting."

As the museum looks to rebuild its credibility, Carl Heron, its director of scientific research, has been appointed as acting deputy director. But the museum's journey back to its former status will be a long one, with difficult decisions to be made along the way.

What was initially described as a "highly unusual incident" has brought voices and spirits from the past into the spotlight of the present, and the final irony is that these items, long buried in dark archives, could end up shaping the future of the museum world.

"For years, momentum has been dictated by European and North American forces, but it's high time someone else took over at the wheel as what they have been doing has been shown to have failed," Smith said.

"The world is ready for the British Museum to be reinvented, so it needs to take stock of what it has, and come up with an authentic and equitable safeguarding plan that is practical, as opposed to the outdated approach of the gentleman curator. If it changes those values, then there's hope it can reinvent and rebuild itself."

WORLD

Unity and inclusivity: ASEAN Summit focus

3-day meet offers chance to discuss free trade, economic growth, global security

By LEONARDUS JEGHO in Jakarta
For China Daily

Southeast Asian nations will be emphasizing unity and inclusiveness at a series of coordinating and preparatory meetings over the next few days as heads of state and government are gathering in Jakarta for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and related summits.

Indonesia, this year's rotating chair, is hosting the 43rd ASEAN Summit and Related Summits from Tuesday to Thursday.

President Joko Widodo is expected to chair the plenary and retreat sessions of the ASEAN Summit, the East Asia Summit, the ASEAN Plus Three Summit, as well as ASEAN one-on-one meetings with Australia, Canada, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, the United States and the United Nations, besides bilateral meetings.

Opening the Foreign Ministers' Meeting at the ASEAN Secretariat on Monday, Indonesia's Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi said the meetings will discuss the development and the strengthening of ASEAN's cooperation with its external partner countries.

They will also discuss establishment of a long-term vision of the region, strengthening ASEAN's resilience in facing challenges of the times, pushing for an economic center of the world, and further developing the Pacific region into a peaceful and safer place that is also nuclear-free.

Retno also called on colleagues to find peaceful solutions to the conflict in Myanmar.

Regional centrality

At the Consultation Meeting of ASEAN Economic Ministers earlier, Indonesia's Trade Minister Zulkifli Hasan said the country agreed to enhance intra-ASEAN trade and investment, and he was optimistic that ASEAN will emerge stronger in addressing any future challenges, highlighting the centrality of ASEAN in regional affairs.

Also on Monday, Serbia's Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic, Panama's Vice-Foreign Minister Vladimir Franco and Kuwait's Deputy Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah signed the Instrument of Accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia for their own countries.

Chinese Premier Li Qiang and US Vice-President Kamala Harris are also attending the meetings. Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Manet has arrived in Jakarta on his first international appearance.

Bangladesh and the Cook Islands have also been invited to the ASEAN Summit, as they respectively chair the Indian Ocean Rim Association and the Pacific Islands Forum.

Founded in 1967, ASEAN groups Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam, with Timor-Leste expected to become the 11th member. This year's summit, themed "ASEAN Matters: Epicentrum of Growth", focuses on propelling the ASEAN Community Vision 2025.

Aleksius Jemadu, a professor at Pelita Harapan University in Banten, Indonesia, said the events should give full attention to economic growth.

"ASEAN is a region that has grown fast after the pandemic. Don't let this go futile," he said, adding that leaders should take advantage of the current economic and business boom.

The writer is a freelance journalist for China Daily.

Xinhua contributed to this story.



Workers pull a red carpet as they prepare the venue ahead of the Africa Climate Summit 2023 at the Kenyatta International Convention Centre in Nairobi, Kenya, on Saturday. The three-day summit would last until Wednesday. LUIS TATO / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Africa seeks more investment on climate

By OTIATO OPALI in Nairobi, Kenya
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Kenyan President William Ruto launched the inaugural three-day Africa Climate Summit on Monday in the capital Nairobi. The summit seeks to position Africa as an equally important player with global influence and to bring in more financing and support into the continent.

In his opening remarks, Ruto said Africa is the key to accelerating decarbonization of the global economy, and it was time that everyone contributes to catalyze climate action. He also called on climate actors to move from the North versus South conversation, urging them to join forces in ending the climate crisis.

"You have entered the future, a future driven by global partnerships committed to African prosperity, inclusive growth and a habitable planet for all of us," Ruto said. "This is no ordinary summit."

Ruto, currently serving as chair of the African Heads of State and Government on Climate Change,

said the summit will usher in the Nairobi Declaration, a document that holds the potential to steer Africa toward a path of radical affirmative action in addressing the pressing issue of climate change.

The meeting, held under the auspices of the African Union, also aims to establish a common African position on addressing the global climate crisis before the COP28 summit in the United Arab Emirates in November.

High-level delegates

The Nairobi gathering was expected to attract more than a dozen African heads of state, with high-level delegates including United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, Pakistani President Arif Alvi and US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry. More than 20,000 delegates from 136 countries were expected to attend the summit, Kenya's Ministry of Environment said.

At Sunday's African Youth Assembly preceding the launch of

the summit, African youth expressed the need to be systematically embedded in climate frameworks. Through the Youth Secretariat, they presented the youth's declarations to Ruto.

Elizabeth Wathuti, lead coordinator of the African Youth Climate Assembly, said young people have been at the periphery and excluded from the decision-making process, and called for integration of the youth in the process as opposed to mere inclusion.

After the launch of the summit, Ali Mohamed, a Kenyan delegate and Kenya's special climate envoy, said he is certain the declaration at the end of the conference will have an inclusive resolution that will represent aspirations of the continent.

"This summit presents an opportunity for our leaders to set a bold and ambitious vision for a green economic transformation that optimizes the continent's abundant human and natural resources, and integrates enhanced climate adaptation and mitigation outcomes," Mohamed said.

S. Korean teachers protest harassment

SEOUL — About 50,000 South Korean teachers rallied in Seoul on Monday to demand better protection of their rights and spotlight what they called widespread harassment by overbearing parents that has spurred some colleagues to take their lives.

After a young teacher was found dead in an apparent suicide in July, complaints by public school teachers have grown sharply over mistreatment by parents and students, such as accusations of child abuse for disciplining pupils.

"To inquire is to mourn," read some of the banners displayed at the protest.

Legal measures had been inadequate and government officials passive when it came to protecting teachers against problems, said one teacher who took part in the rally, but gave only her surname, Lee, so as to protect her anonymity.

"On top of classes, there have been unnecessarily heavy workloads and excessive complaints from students and parents," she said. "They have been a comprehensive problem, which I experienced throughout my 15 years of teaching."

During the six years up to June, about 100 public school teachers have committed suicide in South Korea. Fifty-seven taught at elementary schools, government data showed.

President Yoon Suk-yeol ordered officials to listen to the teachers' demands and work to protect their rights, his office said.

Apart from the Seoul protest, about 60,000 to 70,000 teachers held rallies elsewhere, organizers estimated.

Authorities warned that collective action by teachers to disrupt



A mourner attaches a message on a memorial wall on Monday at Seoul Seoi Elementary School, paying tribute to an elementary school teacher who ended her life in July. JUNG YEON-JE / AFP

classes was illegal and threatened disciplinary steps.

The South Korean teachers' union was not involved in Monday's demonstrations, said the group leading the protests, Everyone Together As One.

"We will protect them (the teachers) and make changes so that not one more teacher chooses to take their life," protest organizers said in a statement.

In July, an elementary school teacher was found dead at school after reportedly expressing anxiety over complaints by a parent regarding a dispute among students.

Among the visitors to the memorial of the teacher set up at an elementary school in Seoul was Jung Chai-jin, 67.

"They studied hard to go to educational schools and became teachers because they loved children," she

said. "And they have to die like this in the classroom?"

Ku Bo-na, a fifth-grader from another school who also visited the memorial, said, "Teachers are those who make me grow, so it will be sad if my teacher passes away."

Teachers have held nationwide vigils and demonstrations each weekend since to mourn the death, culminating in a rally on Saturday that drew as many as 200,000 teachers near the National Assembly in Seoul.

South Korea has the highest rate of suicide among developed countries, data from the World Health Organization and OECD showed, with more than 20 people per 100,000 of its population taking their lives.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Saudi dry port aims to enable connection

By JAN YUMUL in Hong Kong
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Saudi Arabia is giving its Eastern Province a big boost on the world map after the King Salman Energy Park, or SPARK, announced its logistics zone will begin operations next year to become the first private dry port in the region.

The zone is among the many headline-grabbing projects that the Gulf powerhouse has introduced in recent years, as part of its grand Saudi Vision 2030 aimed at transforming its oil-dependent economy.

A dry port is an inland terminal linked to a seaport by road or rail.

Once operational, it will feature the first private and largest dry port in the Middle East, on-site customs clearance services and bonded warehouses.

Last week, Saif Al Qahtani, president and CEO of SPARK, emphasized the significant milestone of establishing the logistics zone. This move aims to build an integrated,

world-class ecosystem for investors and tenants, intending to attract significant investment and opportunities.

Operated and maintained by SPARK Logistics, a joint venture between SPARK and Hutchison Ports, the zone will serve as a gateway for the regional energy sector, ease global market access and enable businesses to seize the growing demand for energy-related products.

Master plan

At full capacity, it is expected to handle up to 10 million metric tons of cargo utilizing fully automated rubber-tired gantry cranes and gates, with noninvasive scanning equipment to expedite cargo clearance.

Before the SPARK announcement, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud, chairman of the Supreme Committee for Transport and Logistics, unveiled the Master Plan for Logistics Centers on Aug 27.

Under the plan, Saudi Arabia will construct 59 logistics centers with a total area of more than 100 million square meters.

Currently, there are 21 centers being worked on, and all are expected to be completed by 2030, according to the Saudi Press Agency.

The centers will enable local industries to export Saudi products with high efficiency, and support e-commerce by facilitating a rapid link between logistics and distribution centers in the kingdom's various regions, cities and governorates, the agency reported.

Saudi Arabia's logistics sector has been growing in recent years, with current investment volume reaching \$559 million, Arab News reported in April.

Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Transport and Logistics Services has laid out an ambitious strategy to expand the logistics sector's market size to \$15.31 billion by 2030 and position it as a global logistics hub.

Oh, deer! 'Bambi' increasingly unwelcome in US capital

WASHINGTON — To some, they are a magical sight to behold in the heart of the city. To others, it is a pest that eats through their gardens, endangers traffic and helps spread tick-borne diseases.

After nearly being wiped out by rampant deforestation and overhunting in the 19th century, deer have made a stunning comeback across the United States. Estimates place their numbers at more than 30 million, much of it along the East Coast.

In Washington, deer threaten the future of Rock Creek Park, a "hidden jewel" stretching across 710 hectares that offers residents a refuge from daily life in the federal government's seat of power.

"If this forest were perfectly healthy, we wouldn't be able to see this far," National Park Service offi-

cer Megan Nortrup told Agence France-Presse.

In the absence of their natural predators, white-tailed deer have devoured native plant species essential to local biodiversity, including the saplings needed for forest renewal.

In other words, woods like these could disappear in the next hundred years or so.

Park botanist Ana Chuquin opens the gate of a small plot fenced to keep deer out. It is part of a long-running experiment involving protected plots paired with unprotected controls.

She points out a 1.8-meter-tall sapling that has survived only because deer were physically prevented from getting to it.

"All around, you don't see one single sapling this size, so it means

that we lost that generation," Chuquin said.

Because deer evolved alongside the region's native plants, they prefer to eat them over nonnative invaders like Linden viburnum, a garden favorite whose seeds are carried into the park by wind, water and birds.

That's bad news, because local insect species rely on native plants, and the effects of their loss rise up through food webs, imperiling the wider ecosystem.

Gun-toting biologists

In response to the hoofed menace, the National Park Service decided in 2013 to begin annual culls.

These take place in winter, at night, with the park sealed off. Biologists trained in firearms use infrared heat scanners and night vision

goggles as they thin out the herds.

In 2020, the program was extended to other Washington parks managed by the NPS.

At their peak, deer numbered more than 100 per square mile — far more than the 20 per square mile scientists have determined is a sustainable presence — but have since been brought down.

During a public comment period, some residents asked the NPS whether, instead of shooting deer, it would be possible to bring back predators like wolves, coyotes and bobcats.

In its official reply, the NPS said that wolves "have home ranges averaging 30 square miles when deer are their primary prey", while the whole of Rock Creek Park is 2.8 square miles (7 square kilometers).

Moreover, it is "impractical for



Deer are seen in Takoma, a neighborhood of Washington, DC. ISSAM AHMED / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

additional predators to be reintroduced ... given the possible adverse effects on surrounding rural or suburban residents, especially safety of children and pets," it said.

There are tentative signs deer

management is making a positive difference for the park, said Chuquin, but she stressed recovery is a long process.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

WORLDUS

Culture helps ease fraught US-China relations

Differences between civilizations should not be cause of conflict, envoy says

By ZHAO HUANXIN
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Beijing's top envoy in Washington has called for ramping up cultural exchanges to enhance understanding between China and the United States and help improve the fraught bilateral relations.

Speaking at the 21st Washington Chinese Cultural Festival held downtown in the capital on Saturday, Ambassador Xie Feng said both China and the US are multiethnic, multicultural countries, whose hardworking and talented people "share the same guts, grit and gusto" to chase their dreams.

"Be it coffee or tea, each is there for its own reason. Differences between civilizations should not be the cause of conflict, but should be the impetus for progress," he said on a stage on Pennsylvania Avenue near Capitol Hill.

"Let's open our minds, appreciate the beauty in each other's culture, break down barriers, and strengthen cultural ties so that we will understand each other better and grow our friendship, and bring more positive energy into China-US relations," he said.

The annual festival was started in 1999. It ran for 20 years — except for 2001 — in a row before being suspended during the pandemic.

Through food, music, dancing,



Dancers from the Beijing Dance Academy perform at the 21st Washington Chinese Cultural Festival on Saturday in Washington. ZHAO HUANXIN / CHINA DAILY

and traditional performances and ceremonies, the event offers a window to see the beauty and variety of Chinese culture, while helping build a bridge of friendship between China and the US, its organizers said.

"This is really a great event. It's hot weather, but I think people's enthusiasm about the cultural exchanges is even hotter," Xie told

China Daily in an interview.

"So I hope that together with this festival, the exchanges and friendship between the Chinese and American people will further grow," the ambassador said.

Asked about the status quo on the people-to-people exchange between the two countries, Xie said he had noted some progress, but "still a lot needs to be done".

Over the past few months, the two countries have stepped up efforts to stabilize their tense relations, beginning with a series of trips of high-level officials.

In the tourism sector, earlier last month, China lifted pandemic-era restrictions on group tours for more countries, including the US, a key market.

The US Travel Association said

in a release on Tuesday that a complete rebound in Chinese visitation to 2019 levels would boost the US economy with an additional 2 million visitors a year and more than \$11 billion in export spending.

Tourism cooperation

The two countries have agreed to hold a tourism summit in the

first half of next year in China to revive their once booming tourism cooperation, China's Ministry of Culture and Tourism said last week.

In a congratulatory message to the Washington Chinese Cultural Festival, US President Joe Biden said the US has been "immeasurably" enriched by the vast contributions of Chinese Americans, with countless Chinese immigrants helping to shape the nation's character.

Biden said that for over two decades, the Festival has been a "wonderful" occasion to celebrate the proud heritage and wide breadth of achievements of the Chinese-American community.

Beijing, a sister city of Washington, sent a delegation to attend the festival.

One of the delegation members was Yang Hao, a teacher at the Beijing Dance Academy. She led a group of eight young dancers to Washington, the first such group ever to fly from Beijing to the city since the outbreak of the pandemic.

The dancers performed dances of various ethnic groups in China, including Han, Uyghur, and Tibetan styles, drawing cheers and ovations from the audience.

Jane Pennewell, a resident of Falls Church, Virginia, was on the front row watching the Chinese folk dances, Chinese opera, and music.

"I thoroughly enjoyed it, every minute of it. I mean, I just couldn't believe how talented the individuals are and how they conformed — all in sync," said Pennewell, an artist who runs JP Image Consulting.

Room to negotiate seen for US-China commerce

By YIFAN XU in Washington
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Two foreign policy experts say the US and China can work out their commercial relationship, which would be a long-term process.

"This is good as long as both sides are willing to behave positively and focus on solutions rather than on blame," Jack Midgley, the principal of global consultancy Midgley & Co told China Daily.

US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo was the latest high-level official from the Biden administration to visit China. The trip came at a time when there are concerns that growing tensions between the two major global powers could escalate.

Raimondo met with a number of senior Chinese officials during her trip to Beijing and Shanghai from Aug 27 to Aug 30.

The two sides agreed to increase communications and to an annual meeting of commerce ministers; a new "export control enforcement information exchange" mechanism; and a "commercial issues working group", a new high-level dialogue between China and the US tourism industry.

Midgley said that both the US and China were "obviously interested in a good outcome" for Raimondo's trip. "That's not a matter of emotion. That's a matter of hard economic interest," he said.

"So, the real question is a pragmatic question. Are the two sides going to continue to do the hard daily work of negotiating trade agreements and advancing the economic development of both countries?" he asked.

Export controls, Midgley said, are always "a stumbling block" in a bilateral relationship. The export mechanism "will provide both sides with the information they need to reduce export controls step by step, transaction by transaction", which is "a good thing for both sides".

He said that because the US and China represent more than 40 percent of global GDP, "removing obstacles to that relationship is a very important step for the world and for



US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo chats with campus official as she tours the New York University campus in Shanghai on Aug 30. ANDY WONG / REUTERS

the two countries".

"This was a good accomplishment and a testimony to the willingness of both sides to work patiently and pragmatically on the relationship," said Midgley.

Raimondo said at a media briefing on Aug 30 in Shanghai that she is hopeful about holding regular and direct talks with Chinese officials but that she is "very clear-eyed" and does not expect every issue between the US and China to be resolved "overnight".

In Midgley's analysis, some technologies, like software, microprocessors, communications equipment and robotics are key to China's development.

China must develop those technologies while the US wants to maintain an edge, he said. "So this is where the US-China trade relationship becomes complicated and where it has to be managed one piece at a time, one transaction at a time," he said.

Raimondo said there was "no room to compromise" with China on national security.

"She's not speaking to the Chinese side. She is speaking to the Americans," Midgley said of the comment.

He said that when Raimondo mentioned national security, she meant artificial intelligence, advanced computing capabilities, advanced materials, et cetera.

"And those things are important for national security, but they are also the key drivers of economic development for the United States and for China," Midgley said. "Of course we are going to negotiate these technologies; these dual-use technologies are the main challenge in the US-China trade relations today."

"That's exactly where we are going to negotiate. We have to negotiate to reach solutions that are acceptable to both sides," he said.

However, Sourabh Gupta, a senior fellow at the Washington-based Institute for China-America Studies (ICAS)

told China Daily that "the room for negotiations on the US dual use technology controls regime is a narrow one".

He said the US' view is primarily to improve market access and the business environment for American companies doing or seeking to do business in China.

Gupta also said that the area "most amenable" to talks about improving the business environment related to foreign companies in China because there is a mutual desire on that front.

"The Chinese government would like to ramp up private sector investment, including by foreign businesses, and to this end, it recently put out a State Council opinion that was well-received by the foreign business community," he said.

"At the US' end, it would of course like its businesses to make greater inroads in the Chinese market and fatten its profits — although I think there is an overestimation at the US government end as to what it can achieve for American businesses in China given that the Biden administration itself has been willfully creating an inhospitable business environment for Chinese businesses in America," Gupta said.

"Be that as it may, this is one of the few areas where the two sides can provide mutually beneficial assurances to each other," he said.

"The idea that China is 'uninvestable' is just nonsense," Midgley said. "Money is pouring into China. Foreign investment continues to pour into China. It's in China's interest to make sure that it's an attractive place to invest."

The experts are not optimistic about shortening the blacklist of Chinese companies — for the US export restrictions or the investment ban.

"At best, there is hope for only a marginal few to be delisted, and that too only if a core US interest is involved," said Gupta.

Overpumping depleting US groundwater, threatens crops

By MAYZHOU in Houston
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The United States is overpumping groundwater so fast that some damaged aquifers will never recover, and the reduced supply of groundwater reportedly is threatening agricultural production and the availability of drinking water.

Those findings come from a monthslong investigation by The New York Times using a database it assembled of more than 80,000 wells nationwide despite the data of US aquifers being sketchy. The Times also spoke to more than 100 experts and professionals in the field.

It found that about 45 percent of examined wells showed significant declines in water levels since 1980. Four in 10 sites reached record-low water levels during the past decade, and last year was the worst yet, the Times reported.

Consequences of the groundwater shortage have manifested in many ways, the investigation found.

Last year, the US produced 39 percent of global sorghum exports, 32 percent of soybean exports, and 23 percent of corn exports, according to federal data. That success couldn't have been achieved without pumping groundwater to grow the crops.

As a result, groundwater is nearly exhausted in some farm areas, the Times reported, threatening the US' status as an agricultural giant.

In Wichita County, Kansas, farmers used to produce 165 to 175 bushels of corn per acre, above the national average. But it came at a cost of draining the aquifer to irrigate the crops.

As groundwater ran out, Wichita farmers have had to rely on rainwater alone to grow their crops. With an average of only 20 inches of rain each year, their corn yield was a meager 70.6 bushels last year, about 40 percent of peak yield.

"We overpumped it," Rarrin Watt, a Wichita County farmer for 23 years, told the Times. "We didn't know it was going to run out."

Arkansas, one of the largest rice producers in the country, is another state that consumes a large amount of groundwater. The state is pumping twice as much water each year as can be naturally replenished, state data show, and some aquifers have fallen below 10 percent of their capacities.

Kansas has no mechanism in

place to stop its groundwater decline, nor do Texas and Colorado, where groundwater is allowed to be drained completely, the Times reported.

In Colorado, farming, residential development and reduced precipitation have increasingly strained the state's groundwater.

In Texas, around the Houston-Galveston area, overpumping has caused the ground to sink more than a foot in the past century, with some areas subsiding as much as 12 to 13 feet.

Aquifers in the area have lost between 300 and 400 feet of water since groundwater was drawn, leaving some of the land to collapse, according to Texas Living Waters.

California is another agricultural giant and a major groundwater user. Aquifers in at least 76 basins there last year were being pumped out faster than they could be replenished by precipitation, according to state data.

In the US, more than one-third of drinking water comes from aquifers. Depleting groundwater could end the drinking water supply for some areas, the study warns.

In one example, Arizona has determined that there is insufficient groundwater for housing projects already approved, and the government has stopped granting new permits to builders of new subdivisions around the fast-growing metropolitan area of Phoenix.

In Maryland, close to three-quarters of monitoring wells have seen their water levels drop over the past 40 years, some by more than 100 feet. Charles County, which contains the fast-growing suburbs of Washington DC, has used most of its groundwater for houses and agriculture. And the water isn't coming back anytime soon.

"Most of the water we're pulling out of the ground is thousands of years old," Jason Groth, the county's deputy director of planning and growth management, told the Times. "It's not like it rains on Monday, and by Saturday it's in the aquifer."

Groth said the county, which gets most of its water from its own aquifers, will hit a point within a decade where it doesn't have enough water.

Overpumping could contaminate aquifers and make the remaining water unsafe or undrinkable. For example, in coastal areas, overpumping can accelerate "saltwater intrusion", drawing ocean water into the

freshwater aquifer. The Times discovered that such saltwater intrusion is already happening in the Northeast, the mid-Atlantic states, Florida, the Gulf Coast and California.

It happened in the past, too. Some wells in Brooklyn and Queens in New York City began to show signs of saltwater intrusion at the beginning of the last century. By the middle of the 20th century, some of those wells had to be shut down.

Depletion of groundwater also can poison aquifers and render groundwater undrinkable. The cancer-causing heavy metal arsenic is commonly present in clay, and it can be released into drinking water supplies when aquifers are overpumped. Such a case has been documented in San Joaquin Valley in California, and similar changes in the San Luis Valley in Colorado are being evaluated.

Contamination of aquifers also can come from industrial activities. A Times reader named Mark, a former gas engineer and manager, said that there are 800,000 abandoned wells in the US. "Each one, as the casings deteriorate, puts a possible conduit into groundwater," he wrote.

Another reader who also worked in the oil gas industry wrote that many old wells contain high quantities of naturally occurring toxic and corrosive materials such as sulphur, waxes, salts, radioactive materials, condensates, brine and freshwater that eat through steel casing over time, "producing a time bomb that's only going to add to the toxic contents of the shrinking aquifers over time".

Climate change is exacerbating the problem, the Times report said. Rising temperatures are reducing snowpack, which in turn led to less water flowing through rivers. The higher temperatures also mean plants and lawns require more water. The situation makes people depend even more on the disappearing groundwater.

Water stress is a worldwide problem facing humans. A recent study released by the World Resources Institute shows that one-quarter of the world's population in 25 countries are already facing extremely high water stress. Those countries are concentrated in the Middle East and North Africa.

The study said that by 2050, another 1 billion people will live with extremely high water stress, as global water demand is projected to increase by 20 to 25 percent by 2050.

BUSINESS

CIFTIS

Trade in services seen pulling foreign capital

Execs: Transition from manufacturing will help firms find new growth points

By ZHONG NAN
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China's burgeoning trade in services, a trend championed by the annual China International Fair for Trade in Services, will help the country generate consensus on the need for global cooperation and attract foreign capital, said executives of foreign businesses and government officials on Monday.

China has been transitioning from a manufacturing-based economy to a services-led one; its fast-growing trade in services, propelled by CIFTIS, will facilitate and accelerate this transformation, they said.

The fair provides a valuable opportunity for businesses to interact with government stakeholders. It also helps China to showcase its strengths and aspirations in the services sector. Besides, companies can use the fair to explore new avenues for growth, said Dorothy Tembo, deputy executive director of the Geneva-based International Trade Centre, a multilateral agency that has a joint mandate with the World Trade Organization and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

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 stable growth during the first seven months of 2023, growing more than 8 percent year-on-year to 3.67 trillion yuan (\$505.4 billion) in total value, data from the Ministry of Commerce showed.

"As China continues to promote openness and the growth of trade in services, we will leverage our strengths and expertise in the realm of international logistics by expanding our networks in the country, optimizing our portfolio of cross-border shipping services, and bolstering connections between China and global markets," said Eddy Chan, senior vice-president of US-based FedEx Express and president of FedEx China.

He said such efforts will contribute to the stability of the world's industrial and supply chains, helping facilitate the recovery and prosperity of the global economy and trade.

FedEx, a long-term CIFTIS participant, speeded up the delivery time for goods from the Chinese mainland to the United States, Canada, Mexico and more than 10 markets across the Asia-Pacific, the Middle East and Africa regions in June. Those items can now be delivered within one to two days.

To enhance its market presence in trade in services, French multinational Schneider Electric SE — a

four-time CIFTIS participant — introduced a number of software solutions during the event this year, to help domestic manufacturers cut carbon emissions and boost production efficiency.

With the emergence of the digital economy, related technologies are deeply integrating into the modern services sector, empowering China's real economy to accelerate its transformation and upgrade, said Xu Shaofeng, senior vice-president of Schneider Electric and head of medium voltage and services for the China market.

The convergence of digital and physical realms has become a crucial opportunity for the development of various industries. To advance this convergence, technology, especially software technology, and services are critical, he said.

Expressing similar views, Dominic Johnson, the United Kingdom's minister of state of the Department for Business and Trade, said the UK is ready to meet further market demand in China's services sector and vast consumer market.

Referring to the challenges the global economy has been facing, Johnson said: "The world will be a far better place with the UK and China collaborating and cooperating more closely together."

Thanks to its vast market and well-developed industrial system, coupled with favorable policies to expand opening-up, China saw foreign direct investment from the UK jump nearly 160 percent year-on-year in the first seven months of this year, data from the Ministry of Commerce showed.

Xiao Ran, general manager for China at British technology consulting company Thoughtworks Inc, said China's "Digital China" plan solidifies the country's position as the leader in the digital era.

"The emergence of generative artificial intelligence illustrates China's expanding capacity for innovation while also opening up sizable potential that plays to our advantages," said Xiao, adding the company, in the next step, will deploy more resources to enhance the business coordination between its offices in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, and Hong Kong to expand its businesses in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.



Livestreaming hosts promote sales at the ongoing 2023 China International Fair for Trade in Services in Beijing. WANG JING / CHINA DAILY

E-commerce progress high on agenda

By LIU YUKUN
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More measures are in the pipeline to boost development of e-commerce, which plays a vital role in driving growth of the real economy, promoting trade and boosting capital flows, officials and experts said.

Speaking during the China E-commerce Convention, a sub-forum at the ongoing 2023 China International Fair for Trade in Services in Beijing, Chen Chunjiang, assistant minister of commerce, emphasized the importance of fostering a deep integration between e-commerce platforms and the real economy.

Chen said further efforts are expected to give full play to the leading role of national e-commerce demonstration bases. Nurturing internationally competitive e-commerce industry clusters and leading enterprises will be emphasized, which help empower growth of the real economy.

"Our ministry will work to promote the launch of favorable policies that facilitate trade reform and innovative development, strengthen digital trade platform construction, and help foreign trade companies with their digital transformation and upgrade. It will also prioritize boosting consumption among all work," Chen said.

"Efforts will also be made to guide e-commerce platforms to deeply integrate with the real economy, encourage e-commerce enterprises to extend their presence to rural areas, enhance logistics effi-

ciency, reduce logistics service costs and promote sales of rural specialty products.

"Meanwhile, the ministry will actively advance bilateral e-commerce cooperation with countries and regions involved in the Belt and Road Initiative."

The Ministry of Commerce announced on Saturday 16 new national e-commerce demonstration bases, including the Huawei E-commerce Logistics Park in Hubei province and the Chongqing Road Logistics Base.

In 2022, China's digital economy surpassed 50 trillion yuan (\$6.89 trillion) for the first time, accounting for 41.5 percent of the country's GDP. E-commerce constitutes the largest and most extensive component within the digital economy, the ministry said.

It added that in recent years, China's e-commerce sector has continuously innovated and grown in scale and quality, which supports the employment of nearly 70 million people. China has maintained its position as the world's largest online retail market for 10 consecutive years, and its role and significance in the overall global digital development landscape have become increasingly prominent.

Jiang Xiaojuan, president of the China Society of Industrial Economics, said that in the first half, the country's international e-commerce growth rate exceeded 16 percent.

"E-commerce, through digital technology, optimized international transactions and production processes, reduced transaction and pro-

duction costs, enhanced supply and demand matching, and efficiently allocated various cross-border resources. It has played a crucial role in facilitating foreign trade and two-way flows of cross-border capital for China," Jiang said.

"E-commerce drives the substantial growth of the real economy, playing a crucial role in the overall development of China's industries," Jiang said.

With a diverse manufacturing sector and extensive industrial chains, China hosts a large number of small and medium-sized enterprises. Digital platforms help innovate their trade models, with online and offline segments complementing each other, she added.

Xu Ran, CEO of JD Group, said that as digital technology increasingly integrates into all aspects of economic and social development, digitalization has opened up a new, broader, deeper and more potential development prospect for businesses. The convergence of digital and real economies has become an important engine that drives stable growth and high-quality development.

Zhou Lichen, chairman of clothing brand Heilan Group, said that in the current context of a global economic slowdown and severe market saturation, problems such as the decoupling of production and sales, order delays and low production capacity have become key constraints on development in the traditional clothing sector. Digital transformation, no longer optional, is now imperative as it emerges as a new growth engine.



Reporters visit a plant of Schneider Electric in Beijing. CUI JUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Weather services to grow on rise of green energy

By LIU YUKUN

Providers of meteorological services in China are poised for sustained growth as the country's evolving clean energy sector presents fresh opportunities, experts said.

The clean energy sector's fortunes are heavily linked to weather systems and even climate patterns that are known to be random or unpredictable and volatile. But, modern weather forecasting has developed into an exact science, which can empower the sector's attempts at decarbonization for the sake of high-quality economic development, they said.

As the scale of clean energy con-

tinues to expand in China, wind and solar power generation relies heavily on high-precision meteorological support, especially when frequent extreme weather events pose challenges to energy supply, necessitating improved meteorological forecasting capabilities, they said.

"During peak summer, winter demand and extreme weather events, meteorological departments provide timely weather warnings and disaster monitoring information, helping us to forecast and prepare in advance, significantly supporting energy security and stable supply," said He Yang, deputy head of the

National Energy Administration.

He made the remarks during the 2nd International Summit on Meteorological Economy, a sub-forum at the ongoing 2023 China International Fair for Trade in Services in Beijing.

Petteri Taalas, secretary-general of the World Meteorological Organization, said China has played a vital role in meteorology and climate-related initiatives. Chinese measurements and satellites are pivotal in advancing early warning services, monitoring greenhouse gases, sources and sinks, as well as tracking methane and nitrous oxide emissions.

"China has emerged as one of the

global leaders in meteorology. The country boasts modern satellite programs, modern observational systems, and high-computing resources. Moreover, China has actively engaged in personnel training and fostered international collaborations."

Taalas also said China has a well-established system for addressing climate change-induced risks, emphasizing the need for swift action, evacuation procedures and property protection. "We are happy to see China sharing its expertise and experience with other countries."

During this year's CIFTIS, a number of meteorological companies

showcased their latest products and technologies. Weather service platform Beijing MojiFengYun Technology Co Ltd launched a new product that provides global radar-integrated precipitation services.

Jutian Weather presented a new generation of energy and power meteorological service solutions. The company said it will cooperate with Huawei on providing "energy meteorological solutions" by leveraging their expertise in energy meteorology, supercomputing models, artificial intelligence and other related areas.

Beijing-based meteorological service provider Geovis Weitianxin, a subsidiary of State-owned Geovis Technology Co Ltd, has attended CIFTIS for three consecutive years. Zhang Kai, vice-president of the company, said meteorological servi-

ces play a crucial role in various sectors like agricultural production, transportation and aerospace. "Precise, detailed and customizable meteorological services are becoming new trends."

At the fair, the China Meteorological Service Association signed a strategic agreement with the Nanjing University of Information Science and Technology and Nanjing Jiangbei New Area's intelligent manufacturing industrial park to jointly build China Meteorological Valley.

The initiative, the CMSA said, aims to create a national hub for professional meteorological services, meteorological big data and comprehensive meteorological services, contributing to independent innovation in the sector and China's decarbonization goals.

Freshwater aquatic product sales set to surge

By ZHU WENQIAN in Beijing
and HU MEIDONG in Fuzhou

Given Chinese consumers' growing appetite for aquatic products, freshwater aquatic products will likely become more popular now due to concerns over the feared adverse impact on seafood of nuclear-contaminated wastewater discharged by Japan's Fukushima Daiichi power plant into the Pacific Ocean.

Following widespread concerns over the safety of seafood, China has suspended imports of all aquatic products originating in Japan since Aug 24, according to the General Administration of Customs.

From the perspective of consumers, reducing dependence on seafood imports will create demand for fresh-

water aquatic products. Both prices and sales of braised eel in Fujian province in East China have surged recently, industry experts said.

"Eel prices rose by 4,000 yuan (\$550) on average to top 57,000 yuan per metric ton for some varieties, and daily consumption nationwide jumped to 130 tons on average from 100 tons," said Zhang Jiaolin, executive president of the Eel Industry Association of Fujian.

In China, the busy season for eel sales starts around October and ends at Spring Festival in January or February. It is a period that includes breaks such as Mid-Autumn Festival, the National Day holiday and the Lunar New Year holiday. Eel consumption during this period makes up about 60 percent of the whole-

year total, the association said.

China is the world's largest market for aquatic products. In the recent past, as people's living standards improved entailing consumption upgrade, aquatic product sales have surged.

Last year, China imported 4.54 million tons of aquatic products, up more than 20 percent year-on-year. They were valued at 132.7 billion yuan. China has become one of the largest salmon importing countries globally, with Norway, Canada and Chile as the main suppliers, the GAC said.

"We can vigorously develop freshwater aquaculture, which will show an uptrend in the future," said Wang Weiru, president of the Fujian Fishery Industry Association.

Fujian Tianma Science and Technology Group Co Ltd, a major fishing and husbandry group based in Fujian, said its aquaculture sector focuses on braising freshwater eel, so would not be affected by the nuclear-contaminated water issue.

Tianma's eel are mainly supplied to domestic factories, which process them into roasted eel products for export and domestic sales. Such exports account for about 55 percent of Tianma's output. Overseas sales are growing steadily as exports reach more than 70 countries and regions, including Japan, the United States, Russia, Australia and Singapore, the company said.

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Briefly

BASF breaks ground on syngas plant

German chemical giant BASF started construction of its syngas plant at its Verbund site in Zhanjiang, South China's Guangdong province, on Monday, which is scheduled to be up and running in 2025, it said. The company will adopt unique process concepts in the syngas plant to reduce carbon emissions compared to conventional syngas plants, thus contributing to BASF's sustainability goals, it said. The facility will produce syngas and hydrogen for captive use at the Verbund site, which will be BASF's largest investment, with up to 10 billion euros (\$10.8 billion) upon completion, as well as the company's third-largest Ver-

bund site worldwide.

Chinese brands top Israel's EV sales

Chinese brands topped Israel's electric vehicle sales in the first eight months of 2023, according to data issued by the Israel Vehicle Importers Association. The best-selling EV brand in Israel is Chinese carmaker BYD, which sold 12,168 cars, mainly the subcompact crossover SUV Atto 3, during the January-August period this year. Meanwhile, BYD moved up one position to fourth place in Israel's overall car sales rankings which include both gasoline and electric cars.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

BUSINESSFOCUS



1: Visitors savor Georgian wines during the 2023 China International Fair for Trade in Services at the China National Convention Center in Beijing on Sunday. This year's CIFTIS is taking place in Beijing from Sept 2 to 6 and features over 200 varied events. Themed "Opening-up leads development, cooperation delivers the future", the fair is being held at both the China National Convention Center and Shougang Park in the capital.

2: Visitors check out a miniature flying vehicle during the 2023 CIFTIS on Sunday.

3: A view of this year's CIFTIS venue at the China National Convention Center on Friday. PHOTOS BY WANG JING / CHINA DAILY

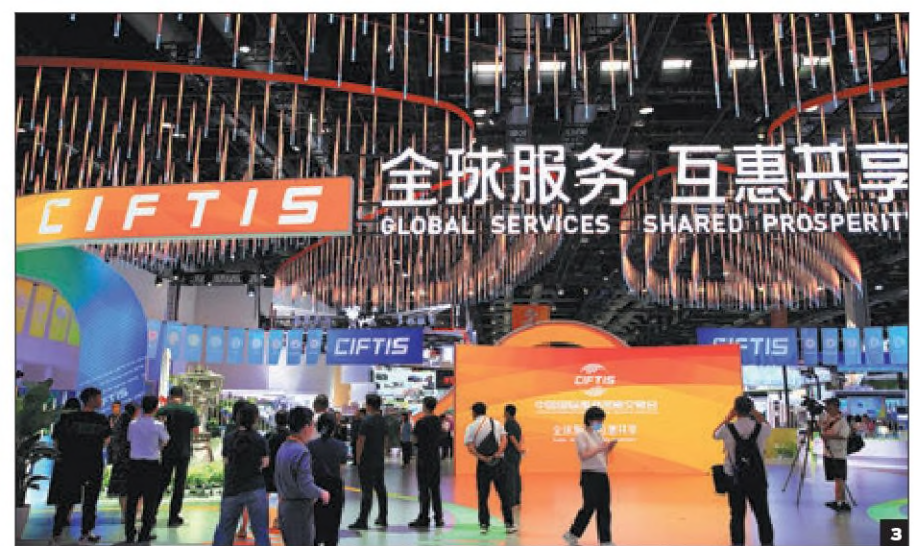
4: A visitor interacts with a multifunctional robot at Shougang Park on Saturday.

5: A staffer demonstrates skimboarding at the sports services section of Shougang Park on Saturday.

6: At this year's CIFTIS, Shougang Park presents the SoReal Metaverse Park located within the iconic No 1 Blast Furnace. The area has been upgraded in a creative fashion, allowing visitors to interact with augmented reality facilities and experience cutting-edge technologies. PHOTOS BY ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY

Technologies shine bright through innovative concepts

Cutting-edge products being showcased at the 2023 CIFTIS in Beijing, attracting visitors from all around the world



COMMENT

Editorials

High-level dialogue between China and Australia can help consolidate improvement in relations

Since Australia's Labor government took office last year, Canberra has made a departure from its predecessor's anti-China stance and sought to mend fences with Beijing. Thanks to the efforts of both sides, bilateral ties have not only witnessed a thaw but seen a significant uptick.

The upcoming high-level dialogue between China and Australia is the first since 2020. It will provide a good opportunity for both sides to continue to build on the current upward momentum in bilateral ties. By deepening mutual understanding, the two sides can build a meaningful consensus on bringing bilateral cooperation to a higher and more stable terrain.

An Australian delegation with representatives from industrial sectors, government agencies, academia and media are heading to China for the highly anticipated dialogue with their Chinese counterparts, which is scheduled for Thursday.

By reviving the dialogue mechanism established in 2014, both Beijing and Canberra clearly want to send a message that they now want to consolidate the improvement in relations in such areas as the economy and trade ties and people-to-people exchanges.

With the thaw in relations, bilateral trade, which was frosty in 2020 and 2021, has seen signs of a turnaround. In April, China and Australia reached an agreement in their barley dispute, and Canberra subsequently suspended its World Trade Orga-

nization complaint against China.

In a media release on Saturday, Australian Minister of Foreign Affairs Penny Wong said the upcoming dialogue "represents another step towards increasing bilateral engagement and stabilizing our relationship with China". That speaks volumes about Canberra's strong political will to join hands with the Chinese side and build on the current good momentum in bilateral relations.

China and Australia have no fundamental disputes. For years, China has remained Australia's largest trading partner, export market, source of imports, source of tourism revenue and source of international students. Hence, Canberra has everything to gain from working with Beijing to put bilateral ties back onto the right track.

Canberra should not let itself be swayed by Washington. If it views China objectively, it will recognize China's development presents an opportunity, not a threat, to Australia.

Canberra needs to know no matter how close it draws to Washington, it should not let the US dictate its relations with China. Developing China-Australia ties caters to the fundamental interests of both peoples. It is natural for the two countries to have differences in various fields, and efforts such as the upcoming dialogue is the right approach for the two countries to reduce misunderstandings, deepen mutual understanding and build more mutual trust.

Free fall in Sino-ROK ties must be checked

Bilateral relations between China and the Republic of Korea are at a historical low since the two countries established diplomatic relations more than three decades ago. This is mainly due to Seoul strengthening its alignment with Washington in recent years as part of the latter's plan to rally its allies in Asia to counter China.

The deterioration in their relations began with the decision of the ROK government to deploy the United States' Terminal High Altitude Area Defense anti-missile system pointed at China. The trilateral summit between US, Japanese and ROK leaders at Camp David last month has also drawn sharp criticism from Beijing, which sees it as another attempt by the US to forge a bulwark to contain China.

The telephone conversation between Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and his ROK counterpart Park Jin on Thursday was a timely attempt to ease the mounting frictions between the two sides. It is a welcome development, as it indicates that the two sides are unwilling to allow their relationship to continue its free fall to the detriment of their national interests.

During their talks, Wang told his ROK counterpart that China's policy toward the ROK has maintained "continuity and stability", and the ROK should not let its China policy be influenced by a third party. While he stopped short of identifying that third party by name, it is evident which party

he was referring to and that "interference from external factors" orchestrated by that party is to blame for the deteriorating bilateral ties. Seoul needs to be alert to that disruptive force making further efforts to erode the existing partnership between the ROK and China.

It is pivotal that the ROK "strengthen its strategic autonomy" and refrain from ideological confrontation. And it should work with China to push for steady and long-term cooperation between the two countries. Encouragingly, Park told Wang that his country has no intention to engage in decoupling from China on the issue of production and supply chains. "De-Sinicization" is not only not possible, it is also not desirable, he said.

Indeed, the mutually beneficial economic and trade cooperation between China and the ROK, which signed a free trade agreement in 2015, has remained the ballast for bilateral relations. Over the past three decades, trade between the two countries has grown 72-fold to more than \$360 billion, with China being the ROK's biggest trade partner for 18 consecutive years.

Despite their differences, China's huge development potential and large market lay a solid foundation for expanding China-ROK cooperation and helping the ROK achieve sustainable prosperity and development. Seoul should choose cooperation rather than confrontation, unity rather than division, as that is the only way forward for China-ROK relations.

US shamefully politicizes righteous seafood ban

The US ambassador to Japan lambasted China for imposing a ban on imports of Japanese seafood on Thursday. If his remarks really represent the views of the US government, Washington is shamelessly going too far in endorsing its ally's irresponsible move to start discharging nuclear-contaminated water from the tsunami-destroyed Fukushima nuclear power plant into the ocean on Aug 24.

Visiting Soma in Fukushima Prefecture, seven days after the water release started, the US ambassador to the country, Rahm Emanuel, had a seafood lunch with the Soma mayor. He also talked to fishermen and stocked up on local produce to show they are safe.

Calling China's ban "political" in nature, Emanuel praised Japan's water release plan as "scientifically based" and "fully transparent", which he said "stands in total contrast" to how China handled the novel coronavirus pandemic.

That is a blatant contradiction of the facts. The US diplomat has flipped the two around. He has gone too far with his remarks. China's banning of seafood imports from Japan is to protect the Chinese people's health and it is its domestic affair. It does not affect the US' national interests or threaten its national security.

Japan certainly has every right to appeal to the World Trade Organization to settle the trade dispute and protect its fishing communities' interests

if it thinks China's ban is problematic. Although it is telling that the Fumio Kishida government allocated 80 billion yen (\$550 million) to support the country's fisheries and seafood processing industry and combat potential damage to the reputation of Japanese products long before China's ban, and has pledged that the compensation will continue to be paid until the water discharge ends.

That clearly shows the Kishida government is as well aware as those countries opposing its move, including China, that the environmental impacts are real and may have substantial accumulative effects. Japanese fishers also know that well. No wonder around 100 fishers and locals living near Fukushima are due to file a lawsuit this week seeking to stop the water release.

The Kishida government knows that it is almost impossible for the WTO, except with the help of the US, to rule China's ban illegal, as even the International Atomic Energy Agency admits its report does not equate to endorsement of the discharge plan. The world nuclear energy watchdog also said that it is not responsible for the safety of the practice.

Shame on Emanuel for comparing Japan's opaque handling of the toxic water with China's resolute fight against the novel coronavirus. The former is questioned and opposed by the Japanese people and most countries, the latter was supported by the Chinese people and praised by most countries.

Cai Meng



Opinion Line

Tokyo shedding postwar shackles raises specter of repeated mistakes

On Sept 3, seventy years ago, the Chinese people eventually won a great victory in the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45) after 14 years of arduous struggle.

However, despite the atrocities committed by Japanese invaders in China, Japan selectively forgets this history. The words and deeds of the Japanese government and right-wing forces should arouse high suspicion and the vigilance of the world.

The 2023 defense white paper released by the Japanese government on July 28, which is consistent with three other documents Japan released at the end of 2022, namely the National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy and Defense Buildup Program, emphasizes that "having the ability to strike back is the key to deterring a strike". It makes clear that Japan will increase its defense spending to an unprecedented 43.5 trillion yen

(\$297.56 billion) from 2023 to 2027. The white paper marks a major break from Japan's postwar Pacifist Constitution.

More important, the white paper increases its focus on China compared with those of previous years, questioning the increase in China's defense spending and hyping up the so-called military threat from China. It also links Taiwan with Japan's security for the first time, saying "something happening to Taiwan is something happening to Japan", which is a serious provocation to the post-World War II international order.

Since it announced an unconditional surrender, Japan's right-wing forces have gone all out to cover up and falsify the history of Japan's aggression, by revising textbooks, visiting the Yasukuni Shrine, where 14 class-A war criminals of the then imperialist Japan are worshipped,

and finding excuses for lifting the ban on collective self-defense.

With the new security pact, focused on lifting the ban on its collective self-defense, Japan is shedding the shackles of the postwar system and becoming a country that can wage a war against other countries again. Such moves have intensified the concern of its Asian neighbors.

That right-wing Japanese politicians and the media spare no effort to glorify or deny the history of its aggression not only disappoints other countries, but also makes them feel the danger of Japan repeating the mistakes of history. Only by seriously reflecting on its history of aggression and bearing in mind the lessons of history can Japan avoid going further down the wrong path and win the trust of Asian neighbors and the international community.

— PLA DAILY

DPP shows how little it cares for Taiwan people

Tokyo Electric Power Company claims that the nuclear-contaminated water it is dumping has been "treated". Japanese politicians claim their nation's seafood products are "safe" despite the discharge of the nuclear-contaminated water. These are to be expected.

What's beyond expectation, however, is the claim made by Hsieh Chang-ting, Taiwan's "representative" to Japan, that micro-amounts of radioactive elements "benefit" human health and his calling for people to consume more aquatic products from Japan. Even though he said some people from Taiwan island living in Japan had made the claim, one can't believe he was endorsing it.

Every known scientific theory and common sense make it amply clear that radioactivity is harmful to the human body. Even cancer patients who undergo radiation as treatment are reminded many times about the side effects of the therapy. Japanese consumers themselves have been boycotting aquatic products from Japan, doubting their safety ever since Japan began discharging nuclear-contaminated water from its destroyed nuclear power plant in Fukushima into the sea.

Hsieh's claim not only goes against science, but also against the residents of Taiwan. It shows that for Hsieh, it is more important to keep Japan in good humor, even if it amounts to ignoring the

health and lives of people on the island he comes from.

Hsieh is a senior member of the Democratic Progressive Party and Tsai Ing-wen's team. By selecting him to that position, the DPP has shown to the world its lack of care for Taiwan people's health. Hsieh's voice is the DPP's voice, which flatters Japan for its support of the DPP's secessionist goal at the cost of Taiwan people's health and lives. Days after Hsieh made the comments on social networking sites, neither the DPP nor Tsai has issued any statement on the topic. As the island readies for elections, it's time the voters remember how much the DPP really cares for them.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Communication, cooperation key to regional stability

Editor's Note: Foreign Minister Wang Yi delivered a speech on regional cooperation and development in the Asia-Pacific via video link at a think tank forum organized by the Foreign Policy Community of Indonesia on Saturday. The following are excerpts of his remarks that are translated into English from Chinese:

The accelerating changes in the world are creating both the danger of division and confrontation and opportunities for unity and cooperation. In which direction the pendulum of history swings depends on our choices. I hereby put forward four proposals as follows.

The Asia-Pacific countries should always adhere to genuine multilateralism and jointly promote the improvement of the global governance system. As an important force shaping the international landscape, emerging markets and developing countries should remain independent and take their future in their own hands. We should uphold solidarity and mutual assistance to enhance the voice and influence of the Global South in international affairs. We should uphold fairness and justice and work together to make global gov-

ernance more just and equitable.

We should practice open regionalism and promote the development and revitalization of Asia. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership framework should be allowed to play a full role. Its participants should oppose decoupling, protectionism and economic coercion, and build a more smooth and integrated regional economic cycle. We should respect the centrality of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the ASEAN-led regional cooperation framework, so as to make sure the region is far away from geopolitical calculations and no longer serves as a pawn in the game between major powers.

The Asia-Pacific countries should strive to carry forward the way of good-neighborly and friendly coexistence and jointly build a community of shared future for their

neighbors. We need to strengthen investment and trade, deepen the integration of production and supply chains, accelerate connectivity, and achieve win-win results through mutual achievements. We should carry forward the Asian value of harmony, and bring people in the region closer to each other.

We should pursue the concept of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security. The Ukraine crisis must not be staged in Asia, and regional security should be promoted through dialogue and cooperation. The attempt by certain forces outside the region to undermine peace in the South China Sea will not succeed. China will work with ASEAN countries to implement the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, and strive to reach a code of conduct at an early date.

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COMMENT

Zhu Zhenming

China, ASEAN promoting shared prosperity

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, whose annual summit will be held in Jakarta from Sept 5 to 7, has made economic recovery its priority in the post-pandemic period. It is in this regard that China-ASEAN cooperation, which has been promoting common development and prosperity for years, has gained added importance.

China-ASEAN cooperation has contributed to the economic robustness of Southeast Asian countries, and could hasten its recovery from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

First, China-ASEAN economic cooperation has already been facilitating regional economic recovery, and that is borne out by their trade volume. In fact, China-ASEAN trade has been growing at a fast pace over the past years, allowing ASEAN to overtake the European Union in 2020 to become China's largest trading partner. In 2021, China-ASEAN goods trade reached \$878.2 billion, up 28.1 percent year-on-year. And in 2022, two-way trade increased 11.2 percent year-on-year to \$975.3 billion — an increase of 120 percent over the past decade.

On the investment front, ASEAN has become one of China's major outbound investment destinations and sources of foreign direct investment. By July this year, two-way investment topped \$380 billion, with more than 6,500 Chinese enterprises directly investing in ASEAN member states. This robust two-way trade has boosted the region's economic recovery.

Second, improved connectivity between China and ASEAN member states has expanded their markets, and helped them make remarkable achievements in infrastructure under the frameworks of the Belt and Road Initiative and ASEAN members' development policies.

The China-Laos Railway, launched in 2021, is an ideal example of what China-ASEAN cooperation can achieve. The 1,035-kilometer-long railway, which links the Laotian capital of Vientiane with Kunming, capital of China's Yunnan province, has generated benefits for local people on both sides. The railway has helped Laos, to some extent, to recover from the impacts of the pandemic. The railway passes through the Laotian province of Luang Prabang, which has many tourist attractions. Last year, Luang Prabang witnessed more than 500,000 passenger trips which brought tourism revenue of \$216 million that helped the local economy. The number of trips this year is likely to increase to 1 million and they are expected to bring \$360 million in tourism revenue.

The China-Laos Railway has already made about 20.09 million passenger trips, with 17.09 million of them being on the Chinese side, according to China Railway Corp, and transported more than 24 million tons of freight. Thanks to the railway, Laos has now transformed from a landlocked country into a land-linked country. It could even become a transportation hub in the Mekong River region and a dry port for China and

Southeast Asian countries.

The railway has already been extended to Thailand, reducing the transportation time for China-bound cargo from that country by more than one-third. And in the first five months of this year, Thailand exported goods worth 2.84 billion baht (about \$80 million) to China through the extended China-Laos Railway, 72 percent of which were fresh durian.

The railway, among other things, has helped Thai farmers increase their income by selling their produce in a new market in the post-pandemic period. They are now more confident about their economic recovery. The work on the China-Thailand Railway and its extension to the China-Laos-Thailand Railway has been expedited.

Third, the digital economy has become a new contributor to China-ASEAN cooperation and ASEAN member states' economic recovery. According to former ASEAN secretary-general Lim Jock Hoi, China is leading the development of digital infrastructure and is an important partner of ASEAN in promoting the digital economy. In today's age, the digital economy is crucial for social development, employment generation and improvement of people's well-being.

No wonder China and ASEAN declared 2020 as the China-ASEAN Year of Digital Economy Cooperation, demonstrating the readiness of both sides to seize the opportunities presented by the new round of technological and industrial

revolution to deepen their cooperation in such fields as artificial intelligence, big data and cybersecurity.

China and ASEAN are deepening their cooperation in the digital economy. For example, Chinese and Thai enterprises are working together to develop digital projects such as "smart" transportation, tourism and healthcare in Thailand, while cross-border e-commerce platforms have been introduced in Thailand so farmers can use them to sell their produce and increase their incomes, which will help them to shake off poverty.

Moreover, Chinese enterprises are cooperating with their counterparts in Malaysia, Laos, Singapore, Myanmar, the Philippines and Indonesia in fields such as the internet and cloud computing. And there is no doubt China-ASEAN cooperation in digital economy is injecting new impetus into social development, promoting common prosperity and helping maintain regional stability.

However, the Southeast Asian region still faces uncertainties due to the fast-changing global landscape. Therefore, China should further strengthen relations and deepen cooperation with ASEAN, and make greater contribution to ASEAN's economic recovery and growth, in order to promote common development and shared prosperity.

The author is a professor with the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



Kang Bing

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A toilet revolution has occurred in nation and made life all the better

During the 1960s and 1970s, we used to come across occasional reports in newspapers about "green revolution" and "toilet revolution" in some countries. "Green revolution" was easy to understand even for youngsters like me, because China, too, was making great efforts to increase agricultural production at the time to feed its huge population.

But do toilets need a revolution? The question puzzled me for years.

In the late 1970s, China launched reform and opening-up, which helped the country to become the world's second-biggest economy. The "green revolution" has been partly successful in some countries, which can boast of food security today, though hundreds of millions of people are still suffering from hunger.

"Toilet revolution" turned out to be a longer-lasting phenomenon. Both developed and developing countries are yet to declare their "toilet revolution" to be a total success. Eating, drinking, and discharging waste matter from the body are our daily routine. The former two are crucial for survival, while we can discharge waste matter from the body outdoors, behind a bush or anywhere out of other peoples' sight. That used to be the case in all agricultural societies.

Growing up in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, flush toilet was something I had heard of but never seen. Not until I got admission to a university in Shanghai in the late 1970s did I see and use a toilet with a flush. It felt good!

With more and more people moving into apartments equipped with flush toilets, urban dwellers in China eventually bid goodbye to outdoor toilets. Even those who still live in old houses without indoor toilets can use flush-equipped public toilets in the neighborhood. The last time I saw an outdoor toilet was two decades ago while visiting a small town.

Inside some scenic attractions, public toilets look like fancy pavilions. As a result, many tourists mistake them to be exhibition halls.

Such outdoor toilets can now be found only in remote villages. With 88 percent of China's villages being supplied tap water, the percentage of rural residents using flush-equipped toilets had reached 73 by the end of last year.

For the past two decades or so, concerted efforts are being made by governments at different levels to build and/or renovate public toilets. Official data show China now has 370,000 government-built public toilets in cities and towns, not including those in parks, scenic spots, or operated by companies.

Beijing tops the ranking among Chinese cities, boasting 20,000 public toilets. Many even claim Beijing has the highest number of public toilets in the world. No matter where you are in Beijing, the urban area map on your smartphone will show a public toilet within 500 meters. These toilets are well maintained and classified into five categories according to certain criteria including sanitary ware, sanitary condition and upkeep — and at least one cleaner is employed in each toilet to ensure it is kept dry and clean round the clock.

In some cities and towns, government organizations and public service institutions are required to allow the public to use their toilets, and some commercial organizations have been asked to do the same. Inside some scenic attractions, public toilets look like fancy pavilions. As a result, many tourists mistake them to be exhibition halls.

More important, the public can use these toilets for free. So spoiled are the Chinese people by these public facilities that many of them, after returning from an overseas tour, complain how difficult it is to find a toilet in the foreign countries they have just visited, and how much they have to pay to use it if they find one.

The late 1960s and more than half of the 1970s were nightmare years for the Chinese people so much so that they are reluctant to add the word "revolution" to any term. Although some observers used the popular expression, "toilet revolution", to describe China's efforts to build more toilets, especially public toilets, the official documents rarely use the term "revolution" to describe it.

But for me, a toilet revolution has taken place in China, and the Chinese people are on their way to achieving victory in that revolution.

Can their experience offer some useful tips to people in other countries making efforts to realize a toilet revolution but seem to have hit a roadblock? Maybe.

Chen Yihao and Pan Yuanyuan

Foreign investment crucial for economic growth

In his video address at the Global Trade in Services Summit on Saturday, President Xi Jinping emphasized the importance of expanding the services sector and fostering global cooperation to drive global economic recovery. He also encouraged the development of new technologies and innovative business models.

On Aug 13, the State Council, China's Cabinet, issued a document titled the "Opinions on Further Optimizing the Business Environment for Foreign Investment and Increasing the Attraction of Foreign Investment", which outlined 24 policy measures across six areas.

Although these measures reflect China's commitment and determination to promote high-level openness, they should be implemented in a way that they can achieve effective results.

Since the further improvement in the business environment will increase China's appeal to foreign companies, the government should focus on facilitating the cross-border flow of capital, labor, technologies and data to integrate domestic production factors, and advanced technology and management with those of the rest of the world. For that, the government has to expand channels to attract foreign investment, implement some favorable policies to attract foreign executives, high-tech talents and their families to enter and exit China more conveniently, support foreign-funded research and development centers, and ensure the orderly and secure flow of data.

Efforts should also be made to strengthen relations between China and foreign investors, including normalizing exchanges at different levels between Chinese and foreign governments and enterprises. There is a need to advance institutional openness, too, by promoting fair competition, providing better protection to intellectual property rights, and according national treatment to foreign-invested enterprises, and aligning and integrating the domestic business laws and regulations with international business laws and regulations.

To achieve that, the government needs to coordinate with regional and global trade organizations such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement. It should also make efforts to play a bigger role in formulating global governance rules on cross-border trade.

These efforts will facilitate the integration of foreign-invested enterprises into the Chinese market. The measures outlined in the "Opinions on Further Opti-



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

mizing the Business Environment for Foreign Investment and Increasing the Attraction of Foreign Investment" are aimed at attracting more foreign investments to China. Policy stability and predictability impact both existing and new foreign investments. To maintain and expand foreign investment, China needs to focus more on "policy formulation, implementation and adjustment", using diverse measures to help the world better understand China's economic system and how it can benefit them.

In terms of formulating key policies, China should improve certain systems and establish effective market mechanisms to ensure foreign investors that their investments will yield healthy returns. But the emphasis should always be on maintaining fair market competition, which can be done by better regulating foreign trade and economic policies, and drafting laws and regulations related to support policies and competition neutrality.

It is also important to expand the pool of experts by including international

and domestic professionals to ensure policies that are formulated succeed in attracting more foreign investments and businesses.

When it comes to implementing key policies, it is crucial to optimize the process of implementation, by reducing the additional institutional costs some foreign enterprises would have to unnecessarily bear, and improve the rules and regulations on the responsibilities of foreign-funded enterprises. For instance, the government should make clearer the rules on the pilot program for further opening up the service sector, further improving the "Qualified Foreign Limited Partner" foreign exchange management facilitation system, and specifying the criteria for "production within China's borders".

This will help foreign-invested enterprises to conduct their business more smoothly.

While policy adjustments and transparency should always be maintained, a system that allows foreign-invested enterprises' opinions to be heard and

take corrective measures, if necessary, should be established. Also, policies should be implemented to grant foreign-invested enterprises a transition period to adjust their production and operations.

China's fast-paced economic growth, vast market and complete industry chain are critical factors that make China an attractive investment destination. Yet China needs to further improve its business environment to attract more foreign investment. To do so, the government has to take measures to ensure foreign investments yield healthy returns; and for that the government has to ensure healthy economic growth in the future.

As for the industrial sector, the government should intensify efforts to attract foreign investment in key areas and encourage foreign enterprises to more deeply engage in the high-tech and commodity markets, especially because foreign enterprises' involvement will enrich sectors such as biomedicine and modern services. The State Council document encourages foreign enterprises to collaborate with vocational colleges and training institutions, too, to promote advanced manufacturing, modern services and the digital economy, and build a pool of new types of skilled workers.

China's robust supply and industry chains have benefited from economic globalization and have been contributing to global economic growth. And foreign enterprises' participation in the Chinese market can play an important role in a new development pattern characterized by the "dual circulation" development paradigm, in which the domestic and overseas markets reinforce each other, with the domestic market being the mainstay.

In other words, China should not only implement policies to attract more foreign investment to boost growth, but also take measures to ensure foreign investment helps support development in the country's less-developed areas. This will sharpen the competitiveness of foreign enterprises and contribute to the coordinated development of different regions and industries in China.

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GLOBAL VIEWS

ZHU FENG

Stuck in a Cold War playbook

The US is stoking divisions and confrontation in Asia in an attempt to lock China behind a new "Iron Curtain"

The recent visits to China by several high-level US officials — Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, Presidential Special Climate Envoy John Kerry and Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo — have resumed the talks between the United States and China.

However, the US continues to spare no effort to isolate and suppress China. It not only smears China's constructive role in Asia's security architecture, but is also interfering in the South China Sea issue, the East China Sea issue and the Taiwan question.

The US is also trying to hinder the progress of China's high-tech industries. It has imposed sanctions on Chinese technology companies, restricting their access to key high-tech products and technologies of the US, creating a "silicon curtain". The US' goal is to hobble China's industrial upgrading and lock China in the lower end of the global industrial chain so as to maintain, or even extend, its lead over China.

The recent moves by the US indicate that the Joe Biden administration is trying to instigate a new Cold War targeting China, encompassing technology, trade and industry chains to geopolitics and geostrategy. Driven by Washington's hegemonic and bullying mindset that seeks its own narrow ends at the expense of other countries, the US is provoking confrontations and divisions in Asia by creating a new "Iron Curtain".

First, the US has been hallowing out its one-China policy and provoking tensions across the Taiwan Strait. The country has increased its military aid to Taiwan, arranged high-level exchanges between the US and the Taiwan authorities, and actively supported the island's "international participation" in an

attempt to "Ukrainianize" the Taiwan question, which is the most important and sensitive topic in US-China relations. The US openly adopting a pro-independence stance on the Taiwan question marks a strategic shift in its China policy from cooperation to confrontation.

Second, the US is seeking to exploit the disputes over territorial sovereignty and marine rights and interests in the South China Sea, the Taiwan question, China-Japan dispute over the Diaoyu Islands, and the nuclear issue in the Korean Peninsula to suppress and demonize China's efforts to defend its sovereignty, development and security interests.

The US labels China's normal military maneuvers as "aggressive" and portrays China as the one that is attempting to change the "status quo" in Asia. While peddling the "China threat" fallacy around the world, the US is shifting its global strategic focus to the Asia-Pacific, and conducting "integrated deterrence" in Asia by strengthening its military presence in the region. Since the end of World War II, the US' military deployment has been concentrated in Europe, which was the main battlefield of the Cold War. Today, Asia has become the center of gravity in the new Cold War launched by the US.

Third, the US has been forming anti-China cliques by enlisting the support of its allies, be it the US' security alliance with Australia and the United Kingdom, known as AUKUS, the Quadilateral Security Dialogue, or the recent US-Japan-ROK summit in Camp David. From pushing NATO eastward to the Asia-Pacific to gaining access to four more military bases in the Philippines, the US' movements in Asia show it wants the fall of a new "Iron Curtain" against China.

The US-Japan-ROK meeting in Camp David was a historical regres-

sion in the geopolitics of East Asia. The summit attacked China's legitimate actions to safeguard its sovereignty in the South China Sea and smeared China's role as a peaceful player in regional affairs, while forging an anti-China trilateral alliance.

After the breakout of the Korean War in 1950, the US and allied countries interfered militarily in the conflict on the peninsula under the banner of the United Nations. Following the signing of the Armistice Agreement in 1953, the US has kept the peninsula in a state of confrontation through forging a trilateral alliance with Japan and the ROK.

The three countries' recent Camp David meeting indicated a revival of the Washington-Tokyo-Seoul triangle. To preserve its geopolitical and geo-economic dominance, the US has tied Japan and the ROK to its bandwagon to increase military pressure on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and push for "decoupling" from China by creating an exclusive "chip alliance" to stymie China's ability to develop advanced semiconductors and other high-tech products.

In mid-August, the three countries held a joint missile defense exercise in the Sea of Japan, and agreed to share real-time missile warning data. Moreover, Japan plans to carry out advanced fighter research along with the UK and Italy. The Fumio Kishida government toes the line of the US in its China policy by labeling China as the biggest challenge and threat, which indicates that Tokyo is moving away from its post-war pacifist idea and returning to militarism.

What is more alarming is that the US has recently passed the US National Defense Authorization Act



To contain China's rise, the US and its allies are attempting to foment a new Cold War, which will hurt the sound development momentum that has brought prosperity to Asia over the past four decades.

for fiscal year 2024, according to which the US will expand its military command system in the West Pacific and draft military plans to block the transportation of energy to China in key waterways in the South China Sea, which is in essence making preparations for military interventions in the Taiwan question. The new law raised the country's defense budget to a record high of \$868.4 billion despite a mounting government fiscal deficit.

The Biden administration's "Indo-Pacific strategy" has rung alarm bells in the region.

After the end of Cold War, East Asia emerged as a key engine of the global economy, and it has been the most stable and peaceful region in the world in the past decades. To contain China's rise, the US and its allies are attempting to foment a new Cold War, which will hurt the sound development momentum that has brought prosperity to Asia over the past four decades.

In the speech by Chinese President Xi Jinping read out by Chinese Minister of Commerce Wang Wentao at the BRICS Business Forum 2023 on Aug 22, President Xi called for the world to avoid sleepwalking "into the abyss of a new Cold War." However, the Biden administration hypes up "de-risking" economic links with China, and is ganging the US up with its allies to suppress and contain China, increasing the risk of a conflict between the US and China. China, on its part, doesn't want to be dragged into a new Cold War, and is committed to pursuing win-win cooperation and peaceful coexistence with other countries, which is the common aspiration of people of all Asian countries.

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ZHOU YUYUAN

BRICS buildup

Summit in South Africa evinced the deepening solidarity of the Global South

The 15th BRICS Summit was held in Johannesburg, South Africa, from Aug 22 to 24. It marked the historic expansion of the group, which will have a profound impact on the BRICS mechanism, the Global South and even the international landscape.

As the world is facing growing development and security challenges, unity and cooperation are the common demands of developing countries. Since the Russia-Ukraine conflict, developing countries have faced increasing pressure to choose sides in international politics, which has triggered a new boom for the Global South, reflecting the developing countries' dissatisfaction with the current international order. In a world of turmoil and transformation, how to find a position that is in line with their own interests in the existing international system has become a strategic consideration for them.

The expansion of BRICS brings new opportunities for the group's development. Before this year's summit, more than 40 countries had expressed an interest in joining BRICS and over 20 countries had formally applied for membership in the group. This demonstrated the vitality, attractiveness and strategic value of the BRICS cooperation mechanism in international affairs. At the summit, BRICS leaders overcame their internal differences and reached a consensus on the expansion guidelines of admission to BRICS, and invited Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to be new members from Jan 1, 2024.

In essence, the BRICS mechanism is inclusive. BRICS states uphold true multilateralism and adopt the principle of equality and consensus, which is in sharp contrast to the exclusive mechanisms of the Western countries and it has become a major reason for many countries wanting to join BRICS. The summit reflected BRICS' growing influence in leading the Global South. The five founding members of BRICS account for about 40 percent of the world's population, and their GDP and trade take up about one-fourth



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

and one-fifth of the world's total respectively. In purchasing power parity terms, BRICS took a larger share of global economic activity than the G7 in 2022. Emerging markets and developing countries have contributed as much as 80 percent of the world's economic growth over

the past two decades, and their global share of GDP has increased from 24 percent to more than 40 percent over the past 40 years. The rise of these emerging markets and developing countries is redrawing the world map.

One of the fundamental values of

the BRICS countries is to work together to restructure the global political, economic and financial architectures to make them more equitable, balanced and representative. In recent years, many countries have argued that the US dollar's dominance in the global

financial system has hindered their economic growth. In particular, interest rate increases in the United States and other developed economies have led to currency devaluations, higher inflation and sharp declines in export earnings in developing regions such as Africa, which in turn have had a serious impact on national economic and social stability. BRICS is seen as a potential counterweight to the Western financial hegemony. The BRICS heads of state actively seek "de-dollarization". The BRICS countries are making greater use of their own currencies, exploring the possibility of "a unified currency for BRICS" and pushing forward reform of the international financial and monetary system.

China showed its responsibility as a great power at the summit. The China-South Africa partnership is a good example of BRICS cooperation. This year marks the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between the two countries. Ahead of the summit, the two sides released a joint statement and signed 25 cooperation documents and financing projects worth \$2.2 billion. These projects will support South Africa's exports of manufactured goods to China, and improve its power supply and financial services.

This year also marks the 10th anniversary of China putting forward its Africa policy featuring sincerity, real results, affinity and good faith. Over the past 10 years, China-Africa cooperation has seen rapid development and China has been Africa's largest trading partner for 14 consecutive years, the largest financier of infrastructure, its largest international contractor, its investor with the fastest FDI growth, and its major international development partner. China has played an important role in supporting Afri-

ca's economic and social development and transformation.

However, in recent years, African countries have faced severe development challenges as a result of multiple overlapping shocks. It is an important agenda for China's cooperation with Africa to support the latter in meeting challenges and achieving national development and transformation. Focusing on the immediate challenges and urgent needs of African countries, at the China-Africa Leaders' Dialogue on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit, China put forward the Initiative on Supporting Africa's Industrialization, the Plan for China Supporting Africa's Agricultural Modernization, and the Plan for China-Africa Cooperation on Talent Development. The Chinese side plans to expand cooperation in agriculture, manufacturing, new energy and digital economy to help Africa achieve economic integration, industrialization and agricultural modernization.

Next year, the meeting of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation will propose more systematic planning and initiatives for their cooperation.

In a word, the BRICS Summit in South Africa was an important event marking the solidarity of countries of the Global South in a world experiencing a period of turbulence and change. The BRICS expansion reflects the trend of the times and the long-cherished desire of the Global South for unity and growth. This will further promote BRICS states and countries in the Global South to become a major force shaping the international landscape, and will make a more positive contribution to global governance and world peace and development.

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CULTURE

Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) once said: "Nobody knows if the portraits of the great men resemble them, it is enough that their genius lives there."

The French general and emperor obviously had a good sense of the importance of ordering portraiture to enhance his image as someone brilliant, powerful and superior. He would have felt satisfied that his dozen portraits, which remain intact in public and private collections around the world, have ensured his profile as one of history's most accomplished figures endures today.

Now four of those portraits, vividly presenting his masculinity and heroism from different perspectives, are on show at *Faces of Time*, a Beijing exhibition of Western portraiture with works spanning five centuries at the National Centre for the Performing Arts. The exhibition is set to run until Nov 12.

On show are 56 fine figure paintings and portraits from the collection of the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum of Japan.

Napoleon is the most portrayed figure at the exhibition, with the four paintings produced by different reputed European artists. This includes one from 1810 showing a serious Napoleon reading a letter by candlelight, one of the several portraits he commissioned from Pietro Benvenuti, a successful Italian painter.

Paintings depicting Napoleon dressed in his coronation finery, commissioned to commemorate his ascension to emperor, mark a classic theme among his portraiture. The exhibition shows two such, significant, examples: one, a side profile, by the workshop of Anne-Louis Girodet-Trioson, and the other, a front-facing piece, by the workshop of Francois Gerard.

The latter resembles another portrait, a full-body work also by Gerard, which Napoleon favored so much that he commissioned reproductions of it as gifts for his prominent officials, as well as an exquisite woven tapestry copy, which now resides in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

Artistic interpretations

However, the most eye-catching Napoleon portrait at the show is, unarguably, *Bonaparte Crossing the Great St. Bernard*, also known as *Napoleon Crossing the Alps*, which is attributed to the workshop of Jacques-Louis David.

The work depicts the famed general in his signature uniform, sitting comfortably and calmly on a rearing horse, against a backdrop of snow-capped mountains.

It was half realistic, inspired by a successful military campaign led by Napoleon himself in 1800.

While created with a heavy sense of idolatry — the painting shows one of his hands pointing to the sky and his bright red robe is whipped by the wind — it accentuates the image of a youthful figure with a strong will, a well-defined physique and sound judgment.

David was a celebrated painter at the time who trained a number of



Pictures with character

Fine examples of Western portraiture, spanning five centuries and featuring prominent historical figures, are on show in Beijing, **Lin Qi** reports.



Faces of Time showcases Western portraiture in Beijing. (Clockwise from top left) *Portrait of Napoleon I*, by the workshop of Francois Gerard, *Woman and Children*, by Edouard Vuillard, *Girl's Head Turned Left*, by Gustav Klimt, *Portrait of Dr Adam Ferguson*, by Henry Raeburn, and *Portrait of Prince Murat*, by Emile-Jean-Horace Vernet. PHOTO BY LIN QI / CHINA DAILY AND PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

great students including the aforementioned Gerard and Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, whose painting *Jupiter and Thetis* is also on show.

David's famous works include *The Death of Marat*, and yet it is, perhaps, his depictions of Napoleon that have made his name familiar to

people around the world. David was believed to be a fervent admirer of Napoleon and once said, after a meeting with the general, "what a beautiful head he has! It is pure ... beautiful like (an) antique".

In 1801, David was appointed by Napoleon as his "first painter". Afterward, he created the classic

painting, *The Coronation of Napoleon*. He completed several versions of *Bonaparte Crossing the Great St. Bernard*, including the one in the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum collection.

The technical refinement and timeless appeal that mark the Napoleon portraits, and other paintings on show, are big attractions of the

exhibition; while there is another motivation, to engage the audience in a discussion about "what people look like in their own eyes, and how others see them", according to the exhibition curator Qian Qian. "Answering these questions has been at the heart of portraiture throughout centuries."

Portraits are made not only to capture a subject's appearance but also to reflect their character, social standing and virtues; portraiture shows "the image the figures wanted themselves to be documented and remembered, in the long term", Qian says.

She says artists from different periods of time continuously explored new styles and visual philosophies to present their subjects, and also to interpret the progression of history in a specific, dynamic way.

She says from Renaissance and Baroque to realism and modernism, the exhibition navigates the evolution of portrait making, from the 16th to 20th centuries, and it examines how artists conveyed their own thoughts and feelings of the time, by profiling mythological characters, historical personalities and ordinary people. "At the exhibition, people will understand the enduring vitality of portraiture at a time when photography is highly developed."

A female perspective

A section at the exhibition is dedicated to portraits of women to reflect the changes of feminine role in society.

The Renaissance era saw a number of commissions from women of the high aristocracy, posed in a graceful and yet distinct manner. Then, beginning in the late 18th century, more women from common backgrounds were depicted in scenes of daily life.

Throughout this trend, female artists tried to lend their subjects a sense of self-consciousness and independence, such as French painter and print artist Marie Laurencin, whose *Two Women* at the exhibition exemplifies her distinctive aesthetics in showing women with confidence, identity and self-sufficient happiness.

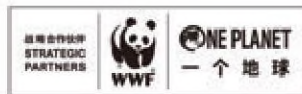
Xu Li, vice-chairman of the China Artists Association and an oil painter, says that, from impressionism to modernism, the works on show lead people on a journey through the centuries, where they can feel the breadth and depth of history, dig into various themes and discover clues that uncover the art of portraiture.

"It is a dialogue with the artists on the different approaches to presenting a subject, be it a member of the clergy, an aristocratic woman from the time of the Industrial Revolution, or a surreal scene from a dream," he says.

"All together, these painters from different periods of time orchestrated a touching symphony of colors and forms, and of human nature's brightest side. It is a celebration of human society in continuous progress."

An exhibition held in 2018 at the Tsinghua University Art Museum in Beijing introduced to domestic audiences the assembly of Western art at the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum. Its selection of Western portraits toured Liaoning Provincial Museum in Shenyang, Liaoning province, and the Powerlong Museum in Shanghai earlier this year.

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CULTURE



A vivid demonstration of the richness and dynamism of Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region's culture is provided at the 2023 "Xinjiang Is a Nice Place" Intangible Cultural Heritage Exhibition.

PHOTOS BY XU HAUYU / CHINA DAILY

On Aug 23, this year's "Xinjiang Is a Nice Place" Intangible Cultural Heritage Exhibition, opened at the Xinjiang Institute of Technology in Aksu prefecture, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.

The pristine walls of the exhibition hall were covered in a dazzling array of colorful intangible cultural heritage artworks, and harmonious melodies played as visitors and craftspeople sang and danced together like old friends.

The five-day exhibition was nothing like the silent white cube-like spaces that many modern art exhibitions favor, but was more like a party, featuring inheritors from across the country.

In the Turpan city exhibition area, a man, Torshun, gave a performance of *nazikum*, a type of dance.

Dressed in intricately patterned attire and wearing a small floral cap, he danced to lively and upbeat music.

His exaggerated dance moves included bending his knees and leaning his body forward while swinging his arms vigorously and sometimes, he squatted down, extending his arms and bending his wrists to imitate a duck, making the audience laugh.

Nazikum is a nationally recognized form of intangible cultural heritage, and is usually performed during the agricultural off-season or at weddings, creating a lively and joyful atmosphere.

As the performance continued, a woman dressed in a red costume jumped into the booth and spontaneously began dancing the *yangko*.

Torshun stepped closer to her, squeezing his face to make funny facial expressions.

As the song finished, the woman rushed back to her own booth.

It turned out she was a performer from the Changji Hui autonomous prefecture, and was there representing the nationally recognized intangible cultural heritage of Xinjiang *shehuo*. Her vibrant outfit was traditional Hui attire.

"I don't know how to dance their style (*nazikum*)," she says, "our cultures are different, but music is universal. We always start dancing when we hear music."

According to Zhong Weishan, the team leader of the performance group from the Changji exhibition area, Xinjiang *shehuo* is a collective term for various kinds of folk celebrations. It includes the *yangko* dance, dragon and lion dances, and

'Xinjiang Is a Nice Place' opens for a third year

Gathering of intangible heritage and regional culture has become platform for exchange, **Xu Haoyu** reports.

drum performances, and often incorporates folk tales like *Journey to the West*.

As the sound of drums was heard, dancers began waving green fans and spinning blue-and-yellow umbrellas embellished with pink decorations. They smiled brightly while performing the *yangko*, triggering resounding applause.

In addition to their captivating song and dance performances, the Changji exhibition booth also featured aromatic delicacies and decorative steamed buns known as "flower buns"; that filled the air with an inviting scent.

Gan Huiqiong, an inheritor of flower bun-making, is good at shaping dough into all kinds of animals



Above: Wang Lanfang, from Shihezi, Xinjiang, shows cloisonne enamel, an ancient technique for decorating metallic objects. A Chinese opera performance by Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps. **Left:** Tricolor-glazed *sancal* ceramics from the Tang Dynasty (618-907).

and human figures.

"The process of making flower buns is time-consuming, and follows a strict sequence: mixing the dough, fermenting, kneading, shaping, and finally steaming," Gan says.

"Each step must be executed with precision, any carelessness can ruin the whole thing."

"Sometimes I get so busy that I work for over 12 hours straight, but I don't feel tired at all," Gan adds, smiling proudly.

The Jiangxi province exhibition booth, which featured porcelain from Jingdezhen, was crowded. Visitors were amazed by the exquisite craftsmanship, repeatedly examining tea bowls and cups, and capturing the intricate details with their smartphones.

"This exhibition has broadened my horizons, as inheritors of intangible cultural heritage across the

country have gathered here," says Chen Fanguo, a representative inheritor of Jingdezhen porcelain, a form of nationally recognized intangible cultural heritage from Jiangxi.

"We can learn from each other and inspire each other, enhancing our ability to preserve our respective crafts. I also welcome friends from Xinjiang to Jingdezhen to experience its thousand-year ceramic culture."

Chen's porcelain attracted a lot of attention and buyers. By the third day of the exhibition, only a few of his signature tea sets remained on display.

"Blue-and-white porcelain is closely related to tea culture. In recent years, as the popularity of tea culture has risen, so has the demand for quality tea sets," Chen says.

"Jingdezhen, which is known as the 'porcelain capital of China,' naturally attracts attention. As long as we carefully control the quality of each piece, we will gain greater recognition," he adds.

Co-hosted by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the People's Government of the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, the exhibition has been held for three consecutive years. This year, it was held outside of Urumqi city for the first time.

In his speech, Rao Quan, deputy minister of Ministry of Culture and Tourism, said that the national culture and tourism system has embraced the spirit of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China and the third central symposium on work related to Xinjiang.

He said that after three consecutive years, the exhibition of intangible cultural heritage has become a distinctive activity for enriching culture in Xinjiang, serving as a platform for cultural exchange and interaction, as well as an important showcase for achievements in the preservation of intangible cultural heritage and the cultural development of Xinjiang.

"Drawing upon the unique characteristics of culture and tourism, and making good use of the abundant related resources, we aim to carry out the 'Culture Enriches Xinjiang' initiative in a better way, and contribute to building a shared spiritual home for the country," he says.

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Ningxia farmer courts success as basketball livestreamer

YINCHUAN — A short distance away from the ongoing "CunBA" match in Xiji county, located in Northwest China's Ningxia Hui autonomous region, using his smartphone, a slender, deeply-tanned man was describing the game in the local dialect for viewers online.

"I woke up at 6 am, tended to the cattle, and came straight to the court to secure the best spot," shares Wang Fengqiang, a local basketball livestream presenter.

Starting on Aug 27, this major event, referred to as the Village Basketball Competition — or CunBA — marks the first national-level basketball game held in Xiji. The competition has drawn the attention of thousands of sports enthusiasts.

Eighteen teams hailing from nine provinces and regions are vying for two slots to participate in the national CunBA finals set to take

place in Guizhou province later this year.

"With such a significant game happening in my hometown, I'm too excited to sleep," Wang says.

Wang, who breeds cattle, originates from a small village in Xiji, within Xihaigu, a region once classified as "uninhabitable".

Despite its history of extreme poverty, Xihaigu has never lacked fervor for basketball. In the past, villagers used to stand on stools to watch village-level games, and every available tree branch would be occupied by a fan.

Wang, a basketball enthusiast, never misses a single match in the area. While attending a competition in the nearby Yuanzhou district in 2021, he chanced upon several farmers conducting courtside livestreaming sessions.

"Given the abundance of talented players, it seemed a shame that Xiji

If one of our teams makes it to the national finals, I'll sell another cow and follow them to Guizhou. It will be a dream come true for me!"

Wang Fengqiang, cattle breeder and livestreamer

lacked a livestreamer to promote its games," Wang recalls.

Determined to raise the profile of Xiji's players, Wang began livestreaming basketball himself. He broadcast live games in Yuanzhou for 28 consecutive days using his old mobile phone.

However, at the outset, there were few viewers.

Feeling disheartened, he shared his experience with his wife. To his astonishment, he found 10,000

yuan (\$1,370) deposited in his bank account the following day — his wife had sold a cow to buy him a better smartphone.

"My wife doesn't know much about basketball, but she understands my passion for it," Wang gratefully says.

He adds that his wife assumed all household responsibilities to allow him to livestream the five-day "CunBA" event.

Over the years, Wang, with the

support of his wife, has invested over 80,000 yuan into livestreaming, selling four cows to acquire a used car and better equipment.

Whenever a basketball game takes place in Ningxia, Wang is always present to deliver timely and vivid commentary. During the busy farming seasons, basketball enthusiasts in Xihaigu send him messages saying they are watching his show from the fields.

To fund his "extravagant" hobby, Wang only stays in hotels costing less than 100 yuan during trips and shares a room with others.

His persistence paid off. Now, Wang boasts a follower count exceeding 50,000, with some fans helping cover hotel expenses and providing meals.

In the ongoing CunBA games, two teams from the Xihaigu region have distinguished themselves in the preliminary rounds and will represent

Ningxia in the qualifying competition.

The intense matches have ignited the enthusiasm of local sports aficionados, drawing in thousands of spectators.

Villagers arrive an hour early to secure the best seats. Those unable to do so stand at the back, some even using soda cans to elevate themselves for a better view.

"I'll be livestreaming every game throughout the event," Wang confirms, adding that he aspires to convey the enthusiasm of the Xiji people and the lively basketball scene Xihaigu to more individuals.

Wang says: "If one of our teams makes it to the national finals, I'll sell another cow and follow them to Guizhou. It will be a dream come true for me!"

XINHUA

LIFE

Series with a vision for blind dates

Couples meet and throw their fate to the wind amid a new age of romance, **Xing Wen** reports.

Two strangers, a man and woman, much like the people we encounter every day, meet for the first time on a blind date. During dinner, they talk, engage in playful banter, tease and offend each other, and finally begin heartfelt conversations. Every moment of hesitation, nervous laughter, instances of excitement, subtle avoidance, and fleeting moments of uncertainty are caught on camera in close-up shots of their expressions.

In recent years, reality shows bringing together carefully selected young men and women under the same roof over a span of time have become popular. Watching to see if there are any sparks of attraction among these attractive men and women has the appeal of a romantic drama for an audience yearning for whimsical love stories. The inspiration of the genre on dating shows is reinforced by the latter's meticulously choreographed setups and carefully edited scenes.

Love, If You Dare, a recent documentary, adopts a different approach.

It takes patience and the ability to overcome awkwardness to finish each hourlong episode, but if you persist, you will be rewarded as it skillfully navigates the unscripted, often uneasy, yet undeniably human moments that shape our connections with others by documenting blind dates like the one outlined above.

Since 60 episodes were released on the video-sharing platform Youku recently, snippets from the show have gone viral on short-video platforms, racking up hundreds of millions of views and triggering fierce debates.

Many viewers have been enticed to watch the show as it gives a real-world peek into the messy and mundane scenes of the blind date, instead of spinning romantic fantasies or stirring up scripted conflicts like other dating-related shows. It has gained a score of 7.9 out of 10 on the review site Douban.

However, Cheng Gong, the show's director, offers a different perspective. He believes person-to-person communication between strangers that delves into profoundly meaningful topics along the way is a rare and even surreal scene in today's society.

"In this age of information explosion, where numerous distractions vie for our attention, big data algorithms serve a diverse range of content tailored to our preferences. Living fast-paced lives, individuals have lost the patience to deeply comprehend



Top: The documentary *Love, If You Dare* records the first blind date between participants with the pseudonyms Shanzha (left) and Xiaoheli. **Above left:** Single mother Wang Nan dates with single father Meng Xiaojiang. **Above right:** Shi Wen, a model, standing on a subway on her way home after a date. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



“For two strangers to come together and engage in a frank and extended conversation for hours is now a demanding endeavor.”

Cheng Gong, documentary director

Left: Wang Xiaonan, producer of the documentary, *Love, If You Dare*, and the content director of Youku Culture. **Right:** Cheng Gong, the documentary's director.



another person," he says.

"For two strangers to come together and engage in a frank and extended conversation for hours is now a demanding endeavor."

Along with his filming crew, Cheng dedicated almost three years to the preparation and production of the show, which for him has a Utopian quality.

"I'm quite an old soul. I feel that in the past, when I was young and in love, I would spend the entire day thinking about someone. That day could have been agonizing or seem-

ingly endless, but it held a unique beauty," he says. "I personally want to preserve this particular kind of beauty, which seems much rarer now."

Marriage registrations in China have consistently decreased over the past nine years, hitting their lowest point last year since 1986, with a mere 6.833 million couples registering, according to a report released by the Ministry of Civil Affairs in June.

Apart from economic factors such as high housing and living costs that contribute to low marriage rates, there is still much room to explore how people have come to perceive and pursue love and engage in relationships differently over the past decades.

Wang Xiaonan, producer of the show, says that the increasing number of convenience services such as doorstep food deliveries have fostered greater personal independence, reducing people's reliance on, and therefore need for, partners.

She also notes that she finds young people today are more cautious with their emotions and are less daring in love, fearing potential hurt.

"Through the show, I want to encourage everyone to bravely open themselves up, feel the chemistry when people connect with one another, and have the guts to dive into love without holding back," she says.

That has struck a chord with viewers.

"I feel that we should put down our phones more often and engage in real-world interactions to experience different kinds of chemistry. I believe this is the most endearing aspect of being human," says a viewer.

That the short clips from the show have had a wider reach compared to the main program only serves to highlight this fact. "It aligns with the way people consume information nowadays — many individuals lack the patience for lengthy dates," says Wang.

She says the way these short videos were spread has had a dual effect. On the one hand, their sensationalized headlines and the fragmented talk makes them susceptible to misinterpretation, which is likely to trigger wide discussions. On the other hand, they fail to reflect the dynamics of the subtle changes in the interactions among the couples.

Therefore, she says, in future programs she plans to add an observation room where experts can thoroughly analyze these conversations, which she hopes will help generate deeper reflection and greater discussions about relationships and what it means to be human.

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Work along ancient Silk Road builds friendship

XI'AN/ALMATY — Ding Yan, a researcher at the Shaanxi Academy of Archaeology, gives the pottery fragments a few swipes with his brush and examines them with his expert eye. They have been buried for thousands of years at the Rahat site in Kazakhstan, but now the dirt is being removed and the details are being revealed.

This site was home to an ancient civilization that thrived on the Silk Road at the northern foot of the Tianshan Mountains. It is some 3,000 kilometers from Ding's usual workplace in Xi'an, capital city of Northwest China's Shaanxi province, but this has not impaired his enthusiasm for the work here.

Despite the language barrier and the differences in natural environment and living conditions, he feels at home among the brushes, hand shovels and pottery shards with their distinctive earthy smell.

Ding will be working at the site for the next three months. "We will carry out the excavation work together with our colleagues in Kazakhstan, to understand the distribution and changes to culture in the early Iron Age in the middle reaches of the Ili River," he says.

In Xi'an, Wang Jianxin, another scholar from Northwest University, who has been involved in joint archaeological work under the Belt and Road Initiative for a long time, is busy preparing for an international academic conference. The

70-something chief scientist with the Collaborative Research Center for Archaeology of the Silk Roads, has a full schedule.

After the international academic conference, Wang will travel to Uzbekistan to participate in joint expedition and academic exchanges with archaeologists from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.

Xi'an, a city founded more than 3,100 years ago, served as the capital for 13 dynasties, including the Tang Dynasty (618-907), when the city was known as Chang'an.

It was also the place where Zhang Qian began his journey to Central Asia during the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) as an envoy. Zhang's pioneering expedition opened up a route that later became the Silk Road.

In recent years, a number of Chinese scholars have set out from Xi'an to explore the cultural relics of the ancient Silk Road, together with scholars from countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative.

Wang began his archaeological and research work on the ancient Silk Road at the end of the last century. After 10 years of excavation and research on the Silk Road in China, he felt an urgent desire to do the same overseas.

"Only by mastering more comprehensive firsthand information can Chinese scholars bring a 'Chinese voice' to the international archaeology community," says Wang.

Zhang traveled to Central Asia in search of the ancient nomads called the Greater Yuezhi, who had migrated west after being defeated by the Xiongnu people.

Since 2009, Wang has followed in Zhang's footsteps, leading an archaeological team from Northwest University to Uzbekistan to carry out joint archaeological work along the Silk Road.

For more than 10 years, Wang's team has been conducting explorations in Central Asia, and has formed an archaeological team with professionals from Uzbekistan. They have made a series of finds, including a batch of settlements of ancient nomadic and agricultural cultures in the western Tianshan Mountains.

At the Rahat site, the archaeological work carried out by Chinese and Kazakh scholars has also yielded fruitful results. Since 2017, the Shaanxi Academy of Archaeology and the Issyk State Historical and Cultural Reserve-Museum have formed a joint team to carry out archaeological investigations and excavations at the site and at others nearby.

Archaeologists from China and Kazakhstan first conducted investigations and trial excavations at the Rahat site, and then cleaned up and excavated the remains of tombs, ash pits and ditches, unearthing a large number of relics, including ironware, stone tools and pottery pieces.

Gulmira Mukhtarova, director of the Issyk State Historical and Cultural Reserve-Museum, has also been participating in the work at the Rahat site. "From the unearthed relics, we can observe the traces of people's lives along the ancient Silk Road, which will help us study the site in depth and make an important contribution to the historical research in this area," says Mukhtarova.

The flow of expertise is not all in one direction, according to Mukhtarova. Eight Kazakh scholars have traveled to China to participate in archaeological excavations and exchange experiences there.

In April, the General Assembly of the Alliance for Cultural Heritage in Asia was held in Xi'an. A joint declaration on cultural heritage protection in Asia was issued at the assembly. According to the declaration, alliance members will carry out collaborative archaeological projects on themes such as the origins of civilizations and the Silk Road, and make a joint declaration on world heritage.

Also in Xi'an, China and five Central Asian countries reached a series of agreements on cooperation at the China-Central Asia Summit held in May, including cooperation in conducting joint archaeological and cultural heritage protection and restoration.

The cooperation has not only yielded fruitful results in terms of archaeology, but has also fostered



Above: Researchers from China and Kazakhstan work at the Rahat site on a joint archaeological project last month. **Left:** Ding Yan, a researcher at the Shaanxi Academy of Archaeology, examines finds at the site. PHOTOS BY XINHUA

goodwill and enthusiasm that has been appreciated by Chinese archaeologists working overseas. "People say *nihao* (hello in Chinese) and smile at us, and government officials give the thumbs-up sign to archaeological experts from China," says Wang.

"The joint archaeological work carried out within the framework of

the Belt and Road Initiative is of great significance," says Mukhtarova. "The Chinese and Kazakh archaeologists have learned from each other in our excavation practice, resulting in a successful experience for Belt and Road people-to-people exchange."

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