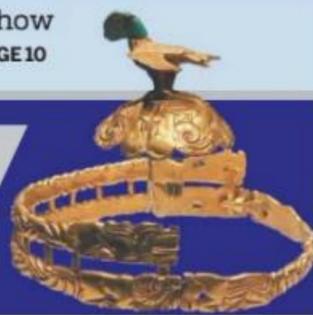




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Political solution in Ukraine stressed

Xi, Putin highlight need to safeguard intl fairness, justice

By CAO DESHENG
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President Xi Jinping has reiterated that the fundamental solution to the Ukraine crisis lies in promoting a new type of balanced, effective and sustainable security architecture, highlighting China's readiness to play a positive role in advancing a political settlement of the protracted Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Xi made the remarks while meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Zhongnanhai leadership compound in Beijing on Thursday evening. Both leaders had in-depth exchanges on strategic issues of common concern.

Xi elaborated on China's consistent position and efforts to promote the political settlement of the Ukraine crisis, saying that in dealing with any major issue, it is necessary to address both the symptoms and the root causes, and to plan for the present as well as for the long term.

China supports the convening of an international peace conference, recognized by both Russia and Ukraine, at an appropriate time with equal participation and fair discussion of all options, so as to push for an early political settlement of the Ukraine issue, he said, adding that the nation stands ready to continue to play a constructive role in this regard.

Putin briefed Xi about Russia's position on the Ukraine crisis, and expressed appreciation for China's objective, just and balanced position on the issue.

While welcoming China to continue to play an important and constructive role in the political settlement of the conflict, he said that Russia is committed to resolving the Ukraine issue through political negotiations, and is willing to



President Xi Jinping meets with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Thursday at Zhongnanhai in Beijing. The two leaders enjoyed sightseeing and drinking tea, while sharing their thoughts on major international issues. JU PENG / XINHUA

demonstrate sincerity and maintain close communication with China in this regard.

Both presidents pledged that in the face of the evolving world landscape with volatility and turmoil, the two nations will work with countries of the Global South to jointly safeguard international fairness and justice, and promote

world peace and common development.

Putin concluded his two-day state visit to China on Friday. Before flying back to Moscow, he visited Harbin, capital of Heilongjiang province, where he attended the opening of the 8th China-Russia Expo, and also met with the students and faculty of the Harbin

Institute of Technology.

Harbin was once home to many Russian expatriates and retains some of those historical ties in its architecture, such as the Saint Sophia Cathedral.

In a congratulatory letter sent to the 8th China-Russia Expo, Xi pointed out that with the joint efforts of both countries, China-Russia rela-

tions are solidly moving forward step by step, benefiting the people of both countries with tangible achievements in their cooperation.

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Xi: Build stronger tourism sector

By CAO DESHENG

President Xi Jinping has called for efforts to promote high-quality development of the tourism sector to accelerate the building of China into a country strong in tourism and bolster economic growth.

Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, made the remarks in an instruction on work related to the tourism sector.

He pointed out that significant progress has been made in China's tourism development, saying that the nation's tourism industry has entered the fast lane, becoming the world's largest domestic tourism market, the country with the largest number of outbound tourists, and a major destination for international tourists.

The country's tourism sector has evolved from being small and weak to becoming an emerging strategic pillar industry, he said.

Xi said that in the new era and on the new journey, tourism development faces new opportunities and challenges in China.

He underlined the need to improve modern tourism systems and accelerate the building of China into a country strong in tourism.

6 trillion yuan

The amount that domestic tourism-related revenue is expected to exceed this year, according to a report from the China Tourism Academy

Li Shulei, head of the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee, read out Xi's instruction at the National Tourism Development Conference, which was held in Beijing on Friday.

Addressing the conference, Li emphasized the need to deeply study and implement Xi's instructions and statements on tourism development and promote the integrated development of tourism and culture.

Efforts should be made to focus on systematic and scientific planning, strengthen cultural heritage protection and ecological conservation, improve market supply and tourism services, and deepen international tourism exchanges and cooperation in order to create new prospects for the country's tourism development, he said.

The consumption of services related to culture and tourism has become a pivotal pillar for stabilizing the Chinese economy.

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism issued a plan in November to boost domestic tourism, with a focus on offering a more diversified array of tourism products.

The China Tourism Academy estimated that domestic tourism will see remarkable growth both in visitor numbers and revenue in 2024.

According to a report released by the academy in January, China will see domestic visits reaching over 6 billion and tourism-related revenue exceeding 6 trillion yuan (\$828 billion) in 2024. The confident prediction is based on the good recovery of supply chains of tourism services and the tourism economy in 2023.

Cooperation encouraged at 'My China Album' event

By ZHAO HUANXIN in Washington
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China and the United States have a responsibility to jointly uphold peace, and there is no single justification to incite confrontation, Beijing's top envoy in Washington said on Thursday.

"China is willing to be a friend and partner of the US. In the era of war, we fought side by side; in the era of peace, we should also be each other's partner," said Ambassador Xie Feng.

Xie made the remarks at the "My China Album: Sharing Our Stories about China" event at the embassy, attended by more than 200 guests, including Harry Moyer, a Flying Tigers veteran, now age 103.

During World War II, Captain Moyer fought shoulder to shoulder with Chinese soldiers against invading Japanese forces.

Xie said that the foundation of the Sino-US relationship was laid by the two peoples, and its future will be created by them.

"Currently, China-US relations are still facing serious challenges. We need to forge a closer bond between our peoples and open our hearts to each other, so as to inject more warmth and impetus into this relationship," he said.

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Popular TV show turns Altay into trendy destination

By CHENG SI
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China's new hit TV show *To the Wonder* has made Altay in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region a new trendy tourism destination among young people, who are attracted by the breathtaking views and the simple and heartwarming lives of the local residents.

Adapted from *My Altay*, a collection of prose by Li Juan, the drama tells the story of Li Wenxiu, a young woman who returned to her hometown of Altay to live with her mother after failing in her dream of becoming a writer and having setbacks at work. She then found the meaning of life and her love in Altay.

The grassland views and free and easy lives showcased in the teleplay soon made Altay one of the top-tier tourism destinations among young people.

"It's like a place that's out of this world. I can't imagine how happy I would be to wake up every morning seeing such beautiful views. My husband and I are planning a trip to Xinjiang this summer and Altay will definitely be included in our itinerary," said Zhang Chen, a 31-year-old from Beijing.

The travel portal Qunar said that from May 7 — the day the TV show began its commercial airing, flight ticket bookings to Altay rose 20 percent compared with the same period in the previous month, and hotel bookings doubled during the period on its platform.

Homestay operating and booking platform Tujia said that bookings for homestays in Altay had

“The best travel season to Altay is usually from August to October, but its peak season will arrive earlier this year, around June, thanks to the impact of this trendy show.”

Huang Minghu, travel portal Tuniu's director for tour products in Xinjiang

surged by 200 percent from May 9 to Wednesday, compared with the same period in April.

"The best travel season to Altay is usually from August to October, but its peak season will arrive earlier this year, around June, thanks to the impact of this trendy show," said Huang Minghu, travel portal Tuniu's director for tour products in Xinjiang.

He said that Altay enjoys great advantages in developing tourism, including its breathtaking grassland and lake views, and original and well-preserved villages. The place is also a popular skiing destination in winter.

"TV shows and short videos can perfectly show the beautiful views of the shooting location. Xinjiang will enter its tourism peak season and more young people will be attracted to the region thanks to this hit show," he said.

Wei Changren, founder of



The TV show *To the Wonder* has dramatically propelled tourists' interest in Altay in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

btiii.com, a tourism-related financial news portal, said that Altay has not become famous overnight, but has long been a destination well-known for its natural beauty. However, it hasn't been very popular because of long travel times and higher costs of accommodation.

"It's not that convenient to reach the place, as many big cities don't have direct flights to Altay. Travelers may have to take buses or cars for hours after their flight," he said.

Though Altay still lacks the capability to receive large numbers of travelers, Wei believes that the development of its tourism sector enjoys great prospects.

"Altay has different charms in summer and winter, and these distinct seasonal views are attractive to travelers. From my perspective, authorities in Altay can take the hit show as an opportunity and continue developing good tourism

and cultural resources to attract travelers. The local tourism infrastructure can also be improved to enhance visitors' experiences," he added.

It's not the first time in recent years that a hit show has helped turn its location into a popular tourism destination. In January 2023, the TV drama *Meet Yourself*, starring Liu Yifei and Li Xian, made Dali in the southwestern province of Yunnan a trendy tourism destination.

Xiao Peng, a researcher from travel portal Qunar, said that it's common to see a TV drama boosting its location's potential as a tourist destination in recent years. Citing *To the Wonder* as an example, he said that the local authorities or tourism companies can optimize tour products combining natural views and cultural elements in Altay to improve people's travel experiences.

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CHINA

Olympic qualifier boosts youth's passion for sport

By HE QI in Shanghai
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The ongoing Olympic Qualifier Series in Shanghai, besides providing berths at this year's Olympic Games in Paris, has triggered the younger generation's passion for the four fast-rising street-style sports.

The four-day sporting gala features professional competitions of BMX cycling, skateboarding, sport climbing and breaking as well as an urban festival including a "sport initiation" section aiming to cultivate new fans in these sports, in particular, children and youth, through experiential activities and relevant coaching.

"The International Olympic Committee has placed the top events of these four emerging sports in Shanghai, hoping to attract more young people to participate while providing more cultural heritage for these four sports," said Gu Weifeng, the person in charge of the initiation.

Zhang Yanan, along with her 7-year-old son, a skateboarding enthusiast, is one of the families who traveled from miles away to experience the special vibe of the OQS.

"We just participated in a skateboarding practice activity and made an appointment for tomorrow's graffiti-drawing event. The activities here are very diversified," said Zhang, who traveled from Shandong province with four other families whose children are all skateboarding lovers.

Zhang's son, nicknamed Wangcai, started skateboarding at the age of five because he was attracted by the global image of skateboarding and the street culture behind it.

"I think exposure to more cultural content along with sports can have a positive impact on a children's overall development and aesthetic appreciation," Zhang said. "Moreover, skateboarding can gather the enthusiasts to play together, which is also a great social climate for children."

"The OQS is very international,

and there are many top athletes from different countries participating. It is a very rare and precious experience for children," Zhang said.

The initiation area set up activities for enthusiasts of different levels. "We have gathered high-quality coaches in Shanghai to help the inexperienced youth group participating in these four sports. We also have a graffiti area for young participants to draw their creative patterns on the helmets of BMX, skateboard boards, the handholds of sport climbing and the dance T-shirt," Gu said.

He added that champion athletes were invited to have on-site exchanges and interactions with teenagers and children.

"These linkages can truly promote these four emerging sports through the great platform and opportunity of OQS. We hope that more young people will participate in these sports in Shanghai and also across the country in the future," he added.

Local resident Shang Lianying expressed her wish to retain these venues after the OQS.

"These four sports are all very popular among children and young people nowadays. My son really enjoyed the on-site experience activities and had tried the other three sports as well," said Shang.

She came here with her nine-year-old son, who started sport climbing at the age of four.

"These experience areas are very helpful to the young sports lovers by giving them a chance to practice on a global stage," said Raviandi Ramadhan, 21, an Indonesian athlete in bouldering and lead combined of sport climbing.

Skateboarding referee Ben Hatchell from the US said the OQS is an open stage for everyone.

"I think if they want to do it for fun, anybody can play skateboard and have a good time!" Hatchell said.

Luo Bin and Li Junfeng contributed to this story.



People try rock climbing in an exhibition area at the venue for the Paris Olympic Qualifier Series in Shanghai on Friday.

GAO ERQIANG / CHINA DAILY

Robotic helper



A man with disabilities stands with the help of a robot at a service center in Hohhot, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, on Friday. The center held activities that included publicity and education about rehabilitation assistive devices and aging products, on-site consultation, and movie watching for the hearing and visually impaired. WANG XIAOBO / FOR CHINA DAILY

China's battle against pollutants praised

Organic emissions highlighted at 20th anniversary of Stockholm Convention

By LI MENGHAN
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China's efforts to control organic pollutants won recognition from foreign ecological experts on Friday.

"China's pivotal role in global chemical management cannot be overstated," said Rolph Payet, executive secretary of the Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions. "From ratifying amendments to implementing its national plans, China has exemplified dedication in tackling persistent organic pollutants."

"China's active participation in scientific processes under the Stockholm Convention, such as the global monitoring plan for persistent organic pollutants, underscores its commitment to not only national implementation but also to regional and global progress," Payet said.

He made the remarks at a meeting organized by the Ministry of Ecology and Environment to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Convention entering into force in China.

The Convention, formally known as the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, was adopted in 2001 and came into force in 2004, with China being one of the first countries to sign the convention. With 186 parties, the convention has achieved nearly universal participation and has broadened from initially addressing 12 types of persistent organic pollutants to covering 34 types.

Persistent organic pollutants are toxic chemicals that persist in the environment, accumulate through the food chain and have the potential for long-range environmental transport, posing risks to human health and the environment. Examples include certain pesticides, industrial chemicals and unintentional byproducts of industrial processes.

Being the biggest contributing part to the Convention's core budget, China has endeavored to regulate these pollutants and its domestic measures have greatly increased, said Inger Andersen, executive director at the United Nations Environment Programme. China has phased out 29 of the 34 types of the pollutants, cleaned up over 100,000 metric tons of persistent organic pollutant waste each year and brought down the emission intensity of dioxins in major industries, Andersen said.

"In basic terms, persistent organic pollutants can be categorized into two groups: those intentionally created by human activities as products, which China has striven to eliminate, and those like dioxins, which are byproducts commonly generated during processes with chlorine and carbon and are challenging to avoid completely," said Hu Jianxin, professor at the College of Environmental Sciences and Engineering at Peking University.

Hu added that by implementing strategies such as restructuring the national industrial framework and enhancing technological capabilities to capture and deposit these

persistent and inevitable substances, China has successfully reduced dioxin emissions while maintaining steady national development.

Zou Ciyong, deputy to the director general and managing director at the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, pointed out that to tackle industrial and environmental challenges, it is important to expand from downstream interventions and end-of-pipe approaches to a comprehensive and scientific look at the entire product chain, and "move from the elimination of legacy persistent organic pollutants to address the use of such pollutant chemicals in products and introduction of innovative process in production systems."

As the only province in China boasting all 41 types of industrial sectors categorized by the UN, Shandong has encouraged local enterprises to find green alternatives for materials like fire retardant, according to Zhou Liwei, vice-governor of the province.

In addition, while emphasizing the interlink between chemical management and sustainable agriculture, Maria Helena Semedo, deputy director-general of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, praised China for its achievements in phasing out the production, use, import and export of the majority of pesticide persistent organic pollutants through policies and programs, promoting safer alternatives and advocating greener agricultural production practices.

"Together, we must push the boundaries of innovation, science and technology to develop sustainable solutions to manage persistent organic pollutants," she said.

Health authorities warn about dengue

By WANG XIAOYU
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Health authorities have recently sounded the alarm about the domestic spread of dengue amid a surge of the potentially fatal, mosquito-borne viral illness in Latin America and an early infection cluster in the southern province of Guangdong.

As of May 9, the provincial capital Guangzhou had reported three local dengue cases, with those infected living in residential complexes within 200 meters of each other, the disease control and prevention center in the city said on Sunday.

An epidemiological investigation shows that the cluster was triggered by an infection from outside the city. All three patients are of middle to elderly age, exhibited only mild symptoms and are in recovery.

Qin Pengzhe, deputy director of Guangzhou's center for disease control and prevention, told local media that the emergence of the infection cluster was the earliest in recent years, and aligns with the global situation that is seeing an early onset and an early peak this year.

"As a result, we are dealing with a severe disease control situation," he said. "The increasing passenger volume on international flights has added pressure on preventing imported cases. The early onset of summer in Guangzhou with abundant rainfall could also create a favorable environment for mosquito breeding."

Dengue is spread through infected Aedes mosquitoes. August and September are the peak months in most regions of China, but the provinces of Hainan, Guangdong and Yunnan and the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region experience an extended peak from May to November, according to the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

"As the weather is turning warm and rainfall is increasing, China will gradually enter the peak season," it said late last month.

Liang Xiaofeng, president of the Chinese Pest Control Association, told China Central Television that dengue infections have been rising rapidly in some countries in Latin America and South Asia since the beginning of this year.

"With the changing climate, Aedes mosquitoes will fly north. So this year's dengue control work (in China) should start early and encompass wider regions," he said.

The World Health Organization reported last week that there were nearly 6.8 million suspected dengue cases in the Americas this year, three times the number in the same period of last year.

Qin said that the most common symptom of dengue is high fever lasting three to seven days. Other symptoms include headaches, pain around the eyes or bone and joints, as well as rashes on the face or body. Severe patients could experience shock and even die.

Public health experts said it is important to dump stagnant water, change water in household plants regularly and clear outdoor debris promptly to prevent accumulation of rainwater.

Ningbo woman keeps memory of martyrs alive

By LI LEI
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In a world where the contributions of lesser-known heroes often fade into obscurity, Sun Jiayi stands as a beacon of their remembrance.

Over the past two decades, Sun, a descendant of a military family in Ningbo, Zhejiang province, has devoted herself to honoring the sacrifices of forgotten heroes. The 39-year-old is the founder of the voluntary service project "Seeking Relatives for Martyrs" and deputy secretary-general of the Volunteer Association of Haishu district in Ningbo.

This month, she was honored with the China Youth May 4 Medal, a prestigious recognition in China bestowed upon exceptional young

people who have made significant contributions in fields such as science, technology, culture, education and social development. The medal is named after the May 4 Movement, a significant cultural and political event that occurred in China in 1919.

Her commitment to reuniting fallen soldiers with their families has deeply touched many and has brought comfort to the families of these soldiers.

In 2012, she embarked on a journey with her husband to Yunnan province, which borders Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam, visiting martyrs' cemeteries along the way. This trip marked the beginning of her decade-long quest to pay homage to many more who sacrificed their lives for their country.

"I knew what I was seeking and why I had to do it," she remarked.

The journey in 2012 was inspired by a pivotal event six years prior.

In 2006, she visited rural areas in her home province to honor veterans of the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45) and collected their handprints as a symbol of respect.

This initial encounter with the veterans planted a seed of passion in her to seek answers for the nameless heroes who selflessly served their nation.

In 2008, Sun met more veterans, including Wang Renyou, who fought against Japanese invaders. Wang's poignant words, "My youth knew no peace, no flowers, only gunfire and war," deeply resonated with Sun, propelling her to uncover

the stories of these unsung heroes and provide closure to their families.

Motivated by a desire to reunite fallen heroes with their families, Sun began documenting martyrs' cemeteries nationwide and sharing her findings on the microblogging site Sina Weibo.

In 2017, she initiated the "Seeking Relatives for Martyrs" project. Spending weekends visiting veteran soldiers and martyrs' families, she listened to their wartime stories and the journeys of martyrs' families seeking their lost ones. Sun also amassed a vast collection of books on war history, hoping to gain further insights from these sources.

Through her efforts, Sun identified a pattern: by matching unit numbers and sacrifice dates provid-

ed by the martyrs' families with historical records, she and her colleagues could deduce the likely burial sites of the martyrs. Cross-referencing this information with local martyrs' cemeteries significantly enhanced the efficiency of their search.

"During wartime, many martyrs didn't leave their names behind, and some names were inaccurately recorded," Sun explained.

The biggest challenge lies in the scattered burial sites across the country and abroad, leading volunteers to traverse mountains and rivers to gather information.

As more people became aware of the project, more volunteers joined the search, which led to the creation of a comprehensive database of martyr information.

Sun always carries a portable hard drive containing data on over 40,000 martyrs, including their names, birth dates, home address-

es, unit numbers, sacrifice dates and precise burial locations.

"If the families provide relatively complete information, we can help them locate their loved ones' burial sites in as little as two minutes," she said.

She has made this data accessible to her fellow volunteers and authorities. Her efforts attracted widespread attention, prompting families of fallen soldiers to seek her assistance.

Sun has established a network of 412 volunteers spanning different age groups. More than 30,000 messages seeking martyr's families have been circulated, resulting in 1,460 reunions.

"I embarked on this journey not out of bravery but out of empathy," she said.

"I couldn't bear to see heroes' souls wandering aimlessly or their families left in search of closure. It's a duty I carry with pride."

TOP NEWS

Key steps to stabilize real estate market

Mortgage rate lower, sending positive signals to struggling property firms

By LIU ZHIHUA, ZHOU LANXU in Beijing and WANG YING in Shanghai

China's real estate market is expected to become fully stabilized in the second half of 2024, ending a three-year adjustment period, if the latest rounds of highly supportive policy measures are well implemented to boost homebuyer confidence and ease liquidity stress among developers, experts said on Friday.

They also expect restrictions on housing purchases and loans will be gradually phased out, while more policy measures may be needed to reinforce market expectations and accelerate recovery of the sector.

Chinese authorities on Friday eased mortgage rules and vowed to fight the tough battle of dealing with the risk of unfinished commercial housing. They also asked to promote presold home deliveries, reduce housing inventories and improve financing for developers. Share prices of developers on A-share markets subsequently surged.

On Friday, the country removed commercial mortgage rate minimums for first and second homes nationwide, and lowered minimum down payment ratios for first and second homes, respectively, to 15 percent and 25 percent.

It also announced the establishment of a 300 billion yuan (\$41.51 billion) relending facility for affordable housing to encourage and guide financial institutions to support local State-owned enterprises in acquiring unsold completed commercial housing at appropriate prices — to be used as either sale-oriented or rental-oriented affordable housing — in accordance with market-oriented and law-based principles.

Starting from Saturday, it will reduce interest rates for personal housing provident fund loans by 0.25 percentage points.

In another development, at a news conference in Beijing on Friday, it was announced that new measures will be introduced to support local governments to recall or buy back unused residential land parcels held by property developers to help relieve their financial stress. Governments in cities with excess home inventories can organize local State-owned enterprises to buy unsold houses at appropriate prices and convert them into affordable housing, it said.

"Centering on lowering mortgage rates, loosening home purchase restrictions and encouraging local government purchases of unsold houses to convert them into affordable housing, the latest rounds of policy measures will provide strong support for both supply and demand sides in the real estate sector," said Wang Qing, chief macroeconomic analyst at Golden Credit Rating International.

"This will promote presold home delivery and alter the ongoing trend of a substantial year-on-year decline in completed areas of commercial properties since the start of the year. Additionally, it will effectively reduce inventory pressure, alleviate the financial strain on developers and better

manage default risks," Wang said.

The interest rate for new mortgages extended to residents was 3.69 percent by the end of March, said the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank. The actual mortgage rate, on an upward trend since 2021, was believed to be among the highest in history given the currently low inflation levels, which was a key factor underlying the downward pressure in the property market despite supportive policies in place, Wang said.

"That means there is considerable policy room for supporting the property market, and if these adjustments are made in a timely manner, the sector could stand a good chance of stabilizing," he added.

Yan Yuejin, director of the Shanghai-based E-house China Research and Development Institution, said the new development also signaled that efforts to optimize land utilization across various places are set to accelerate, which will help real estate developers convert their land inventory into cash and thus alleviate their liquidity stress.

"In the past, policies to improve land use typically focused on minimizing land idleness and waste. This time, however, it is clear that the emphasis has shifted toward primarily alleviating the challenges faced by real estate enterprises and reducing their debt burdens," Yan said.

Wang Xingping, senior analyst of corporates at rating agency Fitch Bohua, said the new policy measures were "unprecedentedly supportive" of the property industry.

Yet the prolonged property market downturn, in tandem with downward macroeconomic pressure, has severely dampened market confidence, Wang said, adding, "There's still a high possibility for more supportive policies aimed at stimulating sales in the short run, which will help to constrain the decline in property sales."

Chinese cities reported deeper home price drops in April both in year-on-year and month-on-month terms, which indicated that the property market remains in a process of adjustment, said Wang Zhonghua, a statistician with the National Bureau of Statistics' urban division.

Price declines broadened month-on-month in all the tier-three cities for both new homes and pre-owned properties, said Wang of the NBS.

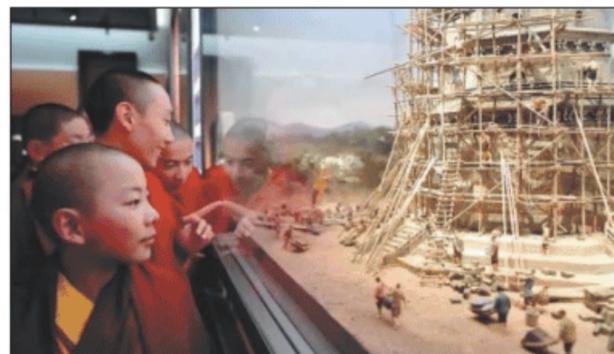
Lu Ting, chief China economist at Nomura, said the task of ensuring the delivery of presold homes holds the key to halting the "downward spiral" facing China's property market.

Households' unwillingness to buy properties has intensified real estate developers' liquidity stress, which, in turn, further impeded home delivery and discouraged home buying, Lu said. "It is therefore sensible for the central government to establish a fund specifically dedicated to guaranteeing housing delivery."

Liu Zizheng contributed to this story.

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Living one's faith



Young living Buddhas from the Xizang autonomous region appreciate an exhibition at Famen Temple in Baoji, Shaanxi province, on Tuesday. The tour group, visiting Shaanxi from Monday to Wednesday, comprises nine young living Buddhas from the Tibet Buddhism Academy in Lhasa, capital of Xizang. They are expected to complete their middle school education in mid-July. LI LIN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE



Vice-President Han Zheng and Russian President Vladimir Putin tour the exhibition hall of the 8th China-Russia Expo in Harbin, capital of Heilongjiang province, on Friday. SERGEI BOBYLYOV / AFP

Ties: Broader prospects highlighted

From page 1

Noting that this year marks the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Russia, Xi said that standing at a new historical starting point, the two countries' relationship will embrace new historical opportunities and demonstrate even broader prospects for development.

He expressed the hope that all sectors of the two countries will fully take advantage of the opportunity presented by the China-

Russia Expo to engage in in-depth exchanges, share opportunities and jointly contribute to advancing mutually beneficial cooperation.

Addressing the expo, Putin described Harbin as an important scientific and educational center that embodies the close ties between Russia and China. He said that Harbin has embodied the closest ties and intertwined destinies of the peoples of Russia and China and the mutual enrichment of cultures and traditions, Russia's Sputnik news agency reported.

Putin said that the regions of Russia's Far East and Northeast China have great cooperation potential, and Russia is ready to provide benefits to Chinese investors.

Russia is ready and able to continuously and reliably supply the Chinese economy, enterprises, cities and towns with clean and affordable energy, he added.

Vice-President Han Zheng attended the expo and met with Putin following the opening ceremony of the event. They jointly visited and talked with exhibitors.

Touching Shaanxi play staged in Beijing

By CHEN NAN
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An original Chinese play about a rags-to-riches family, *Mianpi*, which is named after one of the most popular local dishes of Shaanxi province, will be staged by Baoji Art Theatre at the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing on Sunday and Monday.

The noodle-like Chinese offering — made from wheat or rice flour — is usually served with garlic and hot chili oil, and has a large fan base in Shaanxi.

The play, commissioned by the Bureau of Culture and Tourism of Baoji, Shaanxi, tells the story of Wang Ranguo, a local villager in Baoji, who makes and sells *mianpi*. The delicious food and Wang's cooking techniques have won him lots of devoted consumers.

Despite many difficulties, such as Wang's declining health condi-

tion and business distress, he makes a living with his *mianpi*-making efforts and offers his two sons financial support to go to college. After his sons graduated from college, they returned to the village to develop the *mianpi* business through e-commerce, thus expanding the fan base of the local food nationwide.

"The Chinese play is set against the backdrop of rural China during the 1970s, which depicts the development of the country through one single family," says the play's director Jiang Tao, who is a professor at the Central Academy of Drama.

The play was written by scriptwriter Zhang Ji, who spent five years working on the script, and Wu Jing'an played the leading role, Wang. It premiered in 2023 and won the "Wenhua Award" at the Tenth Shaanxi Provincial Arts Festival the same year.

"I was born and grew up in Bao-

ji, a land which I am deeply in love with. From the place's lovely people to the culinary traditions, I am inspired," Zhang said. "The play spans over 40 years and I want to dedicate it to my hometown."

On Friday, the Baoji city government launched an event in Beijing to promote tourism in the ancient city, which, according to She Junchen, vice-mayor of Baoji, has a history of over 2,700 years and is known for its local dishes, folk arts and crafts and natural sceneries.

"Regional differences in Chinese cuisine are very diverse from region to region. For people in Baoji, *mianpi* is one of our favorites and brings back lots of childhood memories," She said. "A lot of tourists come to Shaanxi to taste a diversity of local foods. We want them to know more about Baoji by watching this Chinese play while tasting delicious *mianpi*."

Album: Two peoples can forge profound friendship

From page 1

Since its start in 2019, the "My China Album" video series has rolled out five editions, with the fifth featuring stories of Moyer, Ambassador Winston Lord — US ambassador to China from 1985 to 1989 and a member of the US delegation on the historic trip to China in 1972; and other noteworthy US citizens in 12 video episodes, collectively themed around "My Impressions of China — 100 Stories of China-US Friendship".

They capture the heartwarming moments and memories of people-to-people friendships, showcasing the historic interactions and profound bonds between the peoples of the two nations.

Xie noted that such stories have shown time and again that the two peoples can forge a profound friendship despite all the differences in systems, cultures and languages.

He said that it is important to develop a proper perception of each other, and be friends rather than rivals.

"Seeing the other as a primary strategic competitor, the most consequential geopolitical challenge and a pacing threat, in disregard of our peoples' will for exchanges and cooperation and the world's expectations for a stable China-US relationship, would only push our two countries toward antagonism, plunge the world into division and turmoil, and ultimately lead to 'self-fulfilling prophecies,'" he said.

The envoy also said it is important to stay undistracted by domestic politics and avoid creating new hurdles for China-US relations.

He added that while China will not interfere in US domestic affairs, including its presidential election, it also firmly opposes any attempt to manipulate China-related issues, exploit China-US relations and damage China's interests during the election.

In his first comments on Washington's latest round of tariffs imposed on electric vehicles and other Chinese imports, Xie said the move was driven by domestic politics.

"This is protectionism in the name of fair competition. The real aim is to contain China's new energy sectors, hamper China's high-quality development and get an advantage in the elections by competing to be tougher on China," he said.

The launch of the "My China Album" event serves to amplify the crucial role that people-to-people exchanges have been playing in enhancing China-US relations, said Qu Yingpu, publisher and editor-in-chief of China Daily.

Over the past five years, China Daily has been a partner of "My China Album", focusing on stories of China-US friendship, of endearment and goodwill, and reciprocal kindness between the two peoples, Qu said in a video speech.

For example, the 2019 edition focused on the 40th anniversary of



Xie Feng (front, center), Chinese ambassador to the United States, poses for a group photo with winners of awards of the fifth edition of the "My China Album" event, at the awards ceremony at the Chinese embassy in Washington on Thursday. YIFAN XU / CHINA DAILY

the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the United States, and the following year, it featured people from China and the US helping each other combat the COVID-19 pandemic.

The 2021 edition of the album, released in May, 2022, captured the thrill of athletic competition featuring the Beijing Winter Olympics, and the 50th anniversary of giant pandas in the US became the most popular theme of the 2022 edition.

"We believe stories of this kind are monumental and worthy of being recorded and retold," said Qu.

"The more we have explored the domain of China-US people-to-people exchanges, the more deeply we

UN expert calls for lifting of restrictions

By ZHAO JIA
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A United Nations expert on Friday called on countries to lift all sanctions and other restrictions against China, saying that unilateral sanctions, being contrary to international law and ultimately resulting in human rights violations, must not be used as a foreign policy tool and means of economic coercion.

Speaking at a news conference in Beijing on Friday, Alena Douhan, the UN special rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights, shared her preliminary findings following a 12-day official visit to China.

"During my visit, I received numerous reports on the unilateral sanctions' adverse impact and the consequent socioeconomic implications affecting people's lives," she said.

Douhan concluded her fact-finding trip days after the United States announced additional tariffs on a range of imports from China, including electric vehicles and lithium-ion batteries.

China has been subjected to unilateral sanctions and other restrictions by a number of countries starting from 2017, with mounting pressure from the US on Chinese tech firms, imposition of export controls, designation of company officials and the launch of administrative and civil charges.

Douhan said that currently the US entity list includes more than 700 Chinese entities.

"The unilateral sanctions against China do not conform with a broad number of international legal norms and are introduced to apply pressure on the state," she said.

Douhan said that broad sectors of the economy in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region were particularly affected by US sanctions. She said the US uses a nonbinding document of unclear status and introduces the presumption of guilt in Xinjiang for any stage of supply chains, adversely affecting the overall economy of the region and beyond.

She further noted that the idea of presumption of legality of unilateral sanctions and the presumption of guilt of companies with any exposure to Xinjiang or designated entities "violate fundamental principles of international law, the provisions of the UN General Assembly and UN human rights resolutions, and constitute an attempt to supplement legal standards with a so-called rules-based order."

feel obligated and duty bound as China's national English-language news media. We are more committed now," he said.

Steve Blake, chief representative for environmental group WildAid in Beijing, said the "China Album" project offers a "really great" opportunity for people like him to tell a story about China.

"There's so much you hear in the news about challenges between the US and China, but there are millions of people just like me that have a personal story to tell, that our lives have been changed by our experience, whether we're Chinese people in America or Americans like myself in China," he said.

COMMENT

Martin Sieff

China-Russia relations only promote peace

Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to China, which concluded on Friday, was filled with important symbolism and messages, with the two sides releasing a joint statement saying they would further strengthen their comprehensive strategic partnership in the new era and advocate for democratization of international relations.

The statement, made on the 75th anniversary of the establishment of Beijing-Moscow diplomatic ties, encompassed areas ranging from bilateral trade and energy to global hot-button issues. It also expressed grave concerns on the containment policy pursued by the United States and its allies.

It was, of course, the first foreign state visit Putin made since being re-elected for another term as president of Russia. The first such visit by the leader of a major power to another country after he or she is elected or re-elected is taken to indicate the exceptionally close relationship and high regard the leaders of the two countries have for each other.

That is certainly the case between Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping who have already held more than 40 extended sets of discussions and summits with each other over the past more than a decade.

However, to fulfill their narrow geopolitical goals, which include weakening Russia, curbing China's development and driving a wedge between Russia and China, the US and NATO continue to fuel the Ukraine crisis and form blocs in the Asia-Pacific.

Beijing, on its part, seeks to avoid any such conflict but doesn't compromise on its core interests. And Moscow has been reiterating its stance on upholding the one-China principle and opposing Taiwan island's pro-independence activities.

That's why Russia and China have enjoyed warm and steadily improving relations for more than a quarter of a century. And over the past more than a decade, Putin and Xi have been consistent and constructive in building upon the aspirations of their peoples. The close China-Russia friendship rests on a far stronger foundation than the friendship of the leaders, long-lasting and successful though it has been.

Perhaps that's why China has been questioned by the West for "failing to stop" Russia from "continuing" the Ukraine crisis. The fact, however, is that China, as a responsible major country, is committed to maintaining regional peace and stability.

Accordingly, it has been reiterating that despite not being a party to the Ukraine crisis, it is engaged in shuttle diplomacy and is making serious efforts to promote peace talks between Moscow and Kyiv. In the joint statement on Thursday, both China and Russia once again emphasized that nuclear-armed nations should avoid direct military confrontations. This is a reflection of China's peace efforts and Russia's restraint.

It's time for the US-led NATO to reflect on the Ukraine crisis. It is NATO, not the declared, cautious, defensive, reactive alliance of the Cold War era, but the triumphalist, expansionist and ideologically driven military organization that has been fueling the Ukraine crisis.

Moreover, on April 23, US Congress overwhelmingly passed a \$95 billion aid package to double down the US administration's supply of arms and military equipment to Ukraine, Israel, and China's Taiwan island. The US aid package for Israel comes at a time when Tel Aviv has been ignoring the international community's call for stopping the brutal assault on Gaza, which has already claimed more than 35,000 lives, a majority of them women and children. Equally worse, the US has on three occasions vetoed UN resolutions calling for a cease-fire in Gaza and blocked a UN Security Council resolution that would have recognized a Palestine state.

Also, by continuing to supply arms to Taiwan, the US has been violating the three joint Sino-US communiqués, which form the cornerstone of Sino-US relations.

As principled US critics have pointed out, the aim and inevitable result of the aid package are not to safeguard peaceful people against any kind of aggression, but to further bolster irresponsible, overwhelmingly discredited regimes that are pushing their own peoples toward certain destruction by their warmongering foreign policies and increasingly hysterical and fearful suppression of all calls for peace and moderation at home.

The leaders of Russia and China have decades of experience in building a constructive partnership between their two great nations — the economic giants of Eurasia. And since 2001, this has found structured expression through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which has proven to be as peaceful, as NATO has shown itself to be aggressive, unpredictable and destructive toward non-US allies.

The result: India and Iran have joined the SCO, and almost all the other major countries in East Asia and the Middle East have either established or are seeking to establish deeper and more constructive ties with it.

The lesson is clear: Russia and China both seek to develop their respective domestic economy while raising the standard of living of their peoples. And Putin's latest visit to China is another confirmation that China's ties with Russia will benefit both peoples and economies, and promote global peace and development.

The author is a senior fellow at the American University in Moscow. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

He Weiwen

Section 301 a tool to target China

The Joe Biden administration imposed punitive tariffs on Chinese-made electric vehicles, solar photovoltaic panels, EV batteries, steel, aluminum and medical equipment on Tuesday. Following a four-year review under Section 301 of the US Trade Act of 1974, the tariff on EVs imported from China will be raised from 27.5 percent to 102.5 percent.

The US administration is supposed to use Section 301 to take "corrective" action against trade practices it deems unfair or those that violate international trade rules.

But now the United States is using Section 301 as a weapon to check the development of China's industries. In fact, China needs to prepare for another round of investigations under Section 301 targeting its maritime trade, and logistics and shipbuilding sectors, which were initiated in April in response to a petition filed by five leading US national labor unions on March 12.

The US was the world's largest shipbuilding nation during World War II, and till the 1970s it had the world's largest shipbuilding industry. But thanks to Japan's fast resurgence, the US had to cede the top position to the East Asian country by the 1980s — at that time Japan accounted for half of the global shipbuilding orders. In the late 1990s, the Republic of Korea rose

as a formidable latecomer and grabbed a big share of the global market, which resulted in the shrinking of the US' shipbuilding industry. At that time, China's shipbuilding industry was very small and had nothing to do with the decline of the US as a shipbuilding nation.

The Chinese shipbuilding industry's ascent began in earnest in the 2010s. And by the end of last year, China accounted for 50.2 percent of all merchant tonnage (42.32 million gross registered tons) produced globally, pushing the ROK and Japan to the second and third place. The US, on the other hand, accounted for less than 1 percent of the total tonnage produced globally in 2022 as its total production was only 0.6 million gross registered tons.

In the past 80 years, the global shipbuilding leadership has passed from the US and the United Kingdom to

Japan, to the ROK, to China. This is an economic trend, and has nothing to do with China's trade policies.

In the meantime, the US had been focusing on a number of new industries including information and communications technology, big data, artificial intelligence, supercomputing, biotechnology and, like shipbuilding during World War II, accounted for half of the world's semiconductor output. Similarly, China used to be the world's largest maker of shoes and apparels, but its share in both sectors has been declining over the past 10 years. This shows, among other things, that the US' shipbuilding industry declined because of the industry gradient transfer phenomenon, not because of competition with China.

The US labor unions have all the right to voice their concern and find the real reasons behind the US shipbuilding industry's decline, and the US Trade Representative Office is obligated to help them. But instead of doing that, the USTR is using Section 301 to target China's industries.

The US Trade Act of 1974 is a US law which has no jurisdiction in other

countries. Hence, the US and China, both being World Trade Organization members, should refer their trade disputes to the WTO dispute settlement mechanism.

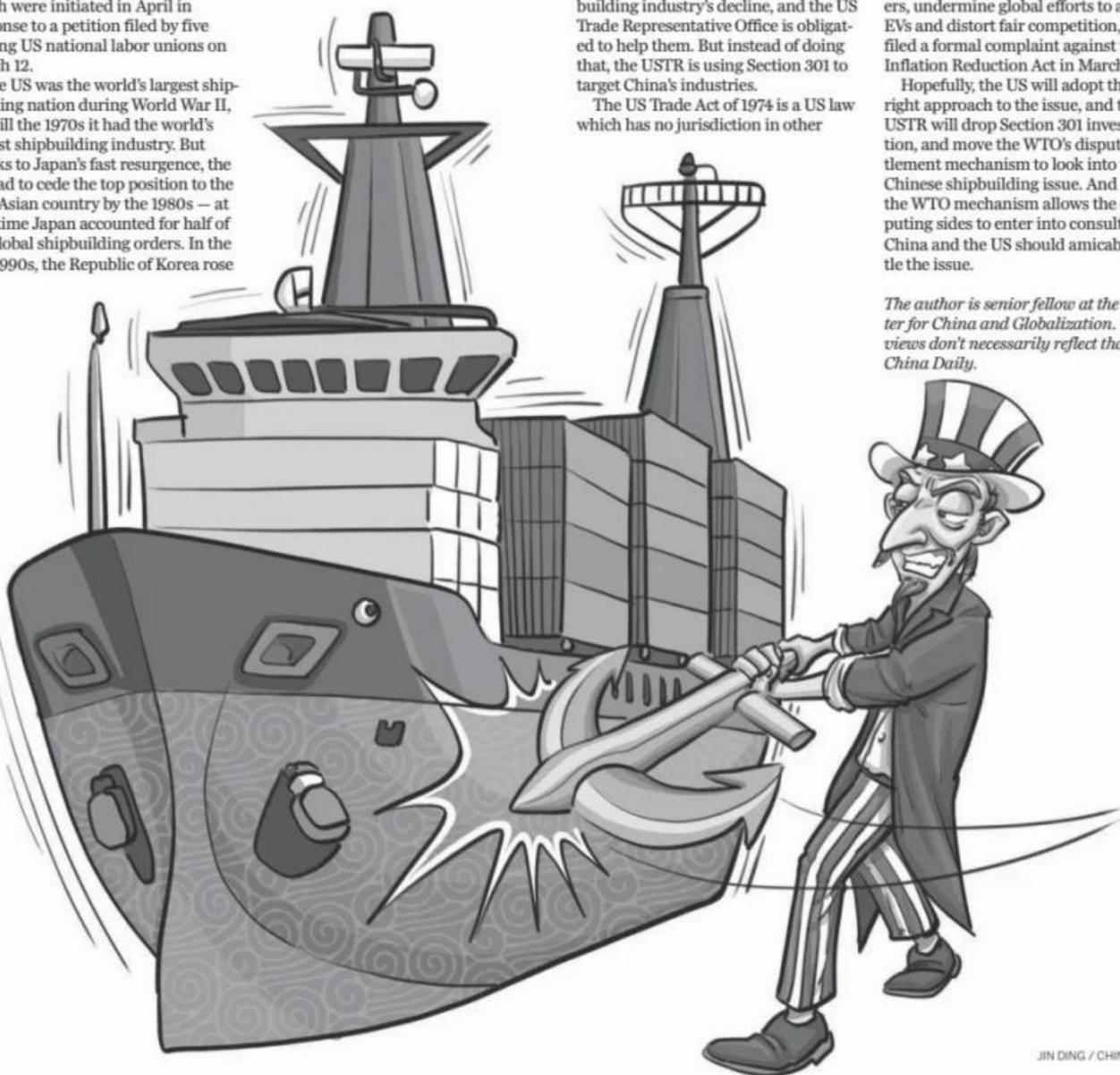
And Clause 23 of the WTO disputes settlements' rules states that no member has the right to declare that another member has violated a rule — only the WTO dispute settlement mechanism can do that. Members have the right to submit complaints to the mechanism, though, seeking redressal.

In August 2018, China lodged a complaint with the dispute settlement mechanism against the US for imposing extra tariffs on Chinese imports based on a Section 301 investigation. In September 2020, the mechanism ruled that the US' tariffs violated WTO rules and were thus illegal.

Claiming the US' subsidy policies discriminate against foreign automakers, undermine global efforts to adopt EVs and distort fair competition, China filed a formal complaint against the US Inflation Reduction Act in March.

Hopefully, the US will adopt the right approach to the issue, and the USTR will drop Section 301 investigation, and move the WTO's dispute settlement mechanism to look into the Chinese shipbuilding issue. And since the WTO mechanism allows the disputing sides to enter into consultation, China and the US should amicably settle the issue.

The author is senior fellow at the Center for China and Globalization. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

Mario Cavolo

Surge in foreign tourist arrivals a positive trend

Since China announced a variety of policies and plans including offering visa-free travel for citizens of a dozen or so countries and increasing international flights to attract more foreign tourists to the country, there has been clear evidence that the measures are bearing fruit. While it is true that the huge number of domestic tourists is the more exciting and dramatic story, the number of inbound foreign tourists, too, is increasing. With China Tourism Day to be observed on May 19, let's analyze some of the trends and good news.

In the first quarter of this year, the number of foreigners visiting China increased by more than three times compared with the same period in 2023, with a total of 466,000 foreign visas issued, marking a 118.8 percent year-on-year increase.

Travelers to China who take some time out to seek the right information will realize that the politically driven

negative narratives about China coming out of certain countries including Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States are simply untrue. This will make it easier for them to explore this fascinating country, its people, history and culture.

China has streamlined its visa application procedure, and has been increasing flights and promoting people-to-people exchanges. In fact, the topic of international tourism is so important that it was discussed by the Chinese and US presidents, too, during their meeting in San Francisco in November last year. Cultural exchanges and communication are part of the international interactions we all need and wish to enjoy despite political differences.

The Chinese government and other supportive voices have to work harder to debunk the disinformation propaganda which is making foreign tourists unnecessarily wary about visiting China. For example, some Western media and scholars claim that the Chinese government's tightening grip on societal regulations could potentially cause discomfort for foreign travelers in China. But there is no credible basis for such negative propaganda.

As a foreigner living in China for 25 years, I can assure overseas travelers that there is no ominous "tightening grip on

societal regulations" to spoil their stay. In fact, most foreigners living in China find they have more freedom, stability and safety in their daily lives in China than they had or would have back in their home country.

There is also the persistent rumor that foreigners can't use China's mobile app payment systems, but the truth is that these concerns have been addressed. My brother, a US citizen, visited China for the first time earlier this month and easily set up a universally accepted and convenient Alipay account with his foreign debit/credit card.

This year has seen a big increase in foreign tourists to China thanks to the expanded 144-hour visa-free transit policy, along with the 15-day visa-free entry policy for citizens of more countries including France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Malaysia. In the first quarter of this year, the number of visa-free entries by foreign nationals reached 1,988,000, marking a 266.1 percent year-on-year increase.

The cities of Shanghai, Beijing, and Guangzhou and Shenzhen in Guangdong province, Sanya on the island province of Hainan, along with Chengdu in Sichuan province, are among the favorite destinations of foreign visitors. Across these popular cities, and many other destinations, the cultural and historical attractions serve well to stimulate cultural and other exchanges, and help boost China's growth.

Foreign tourist arrivals are expected to rise further this year, according to the latest UN World Trade Organization Tourism Confidence Index Survey, and this trend is likely to continue because of China's continued efforts to make foreigners' travel experience more convenient.

A related piece of information is well worth mentioning here: the number of foreign nationals living in China has reached 85 percent of the pre-pandemic level. More foreigners living in China means more foreign friends and family members coming to visit them.

Another trend to note is the increase in the number of vloggers traveling to China and their increasing contribution to the tourism industry, by posting videos of their adventures in the country on social media platforms around the world.

It's good to know that a large number of foreign visitors have been marveling at how safe China is no matter which part of the country they are in. Unlike many other countries where crime and instability are a big concern, China is now the safest, and most stable, successful and capable country in the world, a destination to appreciate, enjoy and remember for the rest of your life.

The author is an American writer living in China and non-resident senior fellow at the Center for China and Globalization. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

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BUSINESS

Tariff impact on steel may be minimal as trade small

By LIU YUKUN
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The impact of additional tariffs by the United States on the Chinese steel industry is likely to be minimal given the small size of direct trade, said analysts, noting the move is more about political posturing than economic issues.

However, certain industries that are considered large steel consumers, like electric vehicles and port cranes, are also subject to additional tariffs, which might affect China's indirect export of steel to the US, they said.

The remarks came after the Joe Biden administration announced on Tuesday additional tariffs on imports of certain products from China, including a more than threefold increase in the Section 301 tariff rate for Chinese steel imports, which will be 25 percent from this year.

The China Iron and Steel Association said on Thursday that China's exports of steel products to the US account for a very small proportion of its total steel exports, and the amount of steel imported by the US from China is also a fraction of its total steel imports.

It said the impact of the US additional tariffs on the Chinese steel industry will be limited.

China accounted for less than 1 percent of US steel imports in the first two months of 2024, and the US accounted for just 0.8 percent of Chinese steel exports, said a recent report from S&P Global, an energy and commodities market analysis provider.

The report said given the upcoming US presidential elections in November, the timing suggests the additional tariffs are a political move rather than purely economically driven.

"China's steel exports to the US have been on a downtrend in recent years. In 2023, China's steel exports to the US totaled only 815,000 metric tons, while in the same year, Chi-

na's total exports of steel were as high as 95 million tons," said Ge Xin, deputy director of the Lange Steel Information Research Center.

Zhou Mi, a senior researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, said the impact of additional tariffs is unlikely to be significant given the already significant range of tariffs imposed on Chinese steel.

"Many steel companies have already considered the risks of additional tariffs from the US when venturing abroad. Direct steel exports to the US have been shrinking in the past years, and Chinese steelmakers are diversifying their export markets," Zhou said.

Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University, said: "The United States has been imposing tariffs on Chinese products. However, most of this burden will be passed on to US consumers. And Chinese companies have other options for exporting and building factories, such as India and Mexico."

The US' finished steel import market share was around 21 percent in 2023, data from the American Iron and Steel Institute showed. Canada, Mexico and Brazil were the main sources of US steel imports last year.

"However, attention should be paid to the indirect impact of this move. The products subject to the additional tariffs this time also include electric vehicles and port cranes. These are also large steel users. It may affect the scale of indirect export of steel products," Lin said.

The CISA said the World Trade Organization has long ruled that the Section 301 tariffs violated WTO rules. Instead of correcting this, the US has further increased tariffs. The non-market behavior of the US has distorted the global steel trade order, which is detrimental to the healthy development of the global steel industry.



Employees check steel rolls at a steel plant in Tangshan, Hebei province. LIU MANCANG / XINHUA

Briefly

Steady growth seen in natural gas output

China maintained a steady expansion in the production of natural gas during the first four months of 2024, data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed on Friday. The country produced 83 billion cubic meters of natural gas in the January-April period, up 5 percent from a year earlier. China's natural gas imports also grew at a fast clip during this period, NBS data showed. A total of 43 million metric tons of natural gas was imported in the first four months, up

20.7 percent year-on-year.

AI lab set up for disability-related tech

The China Disabled Persons' Federation and iFlytek, one of the leading AI companies in the country, signed a cooperation agreement in Hefei, capital of East China's Anhui province, on Thursday to jointly build a laboratory of general artificial intelligence to assist people with disabilities.

XINHUA — CHINA DAILY

HIGHER GROUND



An employee works on the production line of a furniture manufacturing company in Yongzhou, Hunan province. LIU GUIXIONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

April data confirm recovery is uneven

Persistent pressures, weak demand spark calls for fresh stimulus steps

By OUYANG SHIJIA
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China's economy continued to rebound in April while pressures persisted amid an uneven recovery, highlighting the need for further stimulus measures to consolidate the recovery trend, officials and experts said on Friday.

"Chinese economy continued to recover in April with improvement in key indicators including industrial production, while the broader economy is still facing challenges from a more complicated external environment, mounting uncertainties, lack of effective domestic demand, operational pressures on enterprises and potential risks," said Liu Aihua, a spokeswoman for the National Bureau of Statistics.

She told a news conference in Beijing on Friday that more efforts will be made to better implement the existing policies and further consolidate the economic recovery trend.

China's value-added industrial output grew by 6.7 percent year-on-year in April after a 4.5 percent rise in March, NBS data showed.

"China's multitrack economy continued to exhibit strong manufacturing activity relative to consumer demand in April, with the housing correction still in search of a floor," said Louise Loo, lead economist at British think tank Oxford Economics.

Citing the official data, she said China's industrial production accelerated sequentially with a 1 percent month-on-month growth in April, helped by improvements in electronic

China's multitrack economy continued to exhibit strong manufacturing activity relative to consumer demand in April, with the housing correction still in search of a floor."

Louise Loo, lead economist at British think tank Oxford Economics

equipment manufacturing and high-tech manufacturing. Among the latter, the NBS highlighted the robust growth in 3D printing equipment, new energy vehicles and integrated circuit products, all of which grew north of 30 percent year-on-year.

However, Loo cautioned that production-side outperformance may prove transient, given rising tariff risk, as other data already indicating moderating new orders, and an eventual "catch-down" of manufacturing activity with still-weak domestic demand.

Retail sales, a key indicator of consumer spending, rose 2.3 percent year-on-year in April versus the 3.1 percent rise in March, according to the NBS.

Loo attributed the weaker-than-expected retail sales data to a function of unfavorable annual base effects and the relative lull

in in-between holiday retail patterns in April, especially as the five-day May Day holiday fell in the first week of May this year as against the April 29-May 3 period last year.

NBS data showed China's fixed-asset investment increased by 4.2 percent in the January-April period year-on-year, while in the first quarter, it grew by 4.5 percent.

"Investments could pick up more meaningfully after a temporary lull, given the pipeline of sovereign bond issuances which should provide further impetus to infrastructure and manufacturing investments," Loo said.

Zhou Maohua, a researcher at China Everbright Bank, said: "China's domestic demand recovery is set to gather further steam in the following months with gradual improvement in consumer spending and investment, underpinned by China's move to drive large-scale equipment renewal and the trade-in of consumer goods, front-loaded fiscal efforts and property easing policies taking effect gradually."

Looking ahead, Zhou said the Chinese economy will likely accelerate in the second quarter given the steady recovery in domestic demand, the resilience in the export sector and a low comparison base the previous year.

Meanwhile, Zhou warned the latest data show domestic demand is still weak and recovery is uneven, and called for more policy easing to shore up the world's second-largest economy.

"The People's Bank of China, the nation's central bank, will prefer tools other than benchmark rate cuts to maintain an accommodative liquidity environment, including cuts to banks' reserve requirement ratio," Zhou said.

Gotion unveils all-solid-state EV battery

By CHENG YU in Beijing and ZHU LIXIN in Hefei

Chinese electric vehicle battery maker Gotion High-Tech Co Ltd unveiled its all-solid-state battery on Friday, eyeing "production in small quantities" by 2027, as Chinese companies strengthen their efforts on the potentially game-changing technology.

With an energy density of 350 Wh/kg, the battery, dubbed Gemstone, surpasses the performance of mainstream ternary lithium batteries by 40 percent, the company said.

Pan Ruijun, chief engineer of the all-solid-state battery project, told China Daily that Gotion High-Tech aims to manufacture the battery in small quantities by 2027 and mass produce the same by 2030.

"The company has achieved breakthrough in the manufacturing techniques of such batteries and has promoted prototype batteries to automotive-grade cell manufacturing," Pan said.

Currently, China leads in power batteries, including lithium-ion ones, which are widely used in EVs.

Compared with lithium-ion batteries that use liquid electrolytes, solid-state batteries use solid electrodes and boast higher theoretical energy density and safety. Solid-state batteries can be categorized into semi-solid-state and all-solid-state types.

The Hefei, Anhui province-based company also launched its latest generation of Stellar batteries that are able to support a 600-kilometer driving range after just 10 minutes of charging, as well as an ultra-fast-charging battery that is able to recharge to 80 percent in 9.8 minutes.

Currently, technologically advanced countries, including China, Japan and South Korea, are betting big on solid-state battery technology, which could give them a lead in the next round of global competition in the EV segment of the automotive industry.

CATL, or Contemporary Amperex Technology Co Ltd, said in April that it is aiming to produce all-solid-state batteries in small quantities in 2027, the first time ever that the world's largest manufacturer of electric car batteries has outlined a timetable for the cutting-edge batteries.

Japan, which has dedicated its national efforts to developing solid-state batteries since 2018, is currently the country with the highest number of related patent applications. Toyota also set a target last June for commercializing such batteries as early as 2027. The Japanese firm now has received more than 1,300 patents in the field of solid-state batteries.

"China is a pioneer of power batteries, but given the disruptive potential of the all-solid-state batteries, the country has risks (like being left behind by other countries pioneering new technologies)," said Ouyang Minggao, an academician at the Chinese Academy of Sciences and a Tsinghua University professor, at a conference on all-solid-state batteries recently.

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New list to aid outbound data flows

By SHI JING in Shanghai
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The general data list of cross-border data released by the Lin-gang Special Area of China (Shanghai) Pilot Free Trade Zone on Friday will facilitate outbound data flows by companies and contribute to high-quality economic development, executives and experts said.

Designated data used in three sectors — intelligent connected cars, mutual funds and biomedicine — have been allowed for cross-border flows under regulation, according to the list, the first of its kind rolled out in the country.

The list marks a major step forward after management rules for cross-border data flows were released in Lin-gang in February,

classifying cross-border data into core data, important data and general data.

According to the management rules, general data are permitted for free cross-border flows following advance applications by users to the Lin-gang administration.

Core data is banned from cross-border transmission, while the cross-border flows of important data require security assessments in advance.

Companies registered in Lin-gang, or the remaining area of the Shanghai FTZ, can apply for general data cross-border flow services as long as the data transfer activities are conducted in Lin-gang.

The list, which will be initially applicable for one year, is further

divided into 11 data application scenarios.

Specifically, data of intelligent connected cars concerning cross-border production and manufacturing management, research and development for design purposes, diagnostic data for global after-sales services, and maintenance information for secondhand cars across the world, have been included in the new list.

Yin Dan, chief information officer of SAIC Volkswagen, said the company has significant outbound data demand regarding vehicle warranty, maintenance, fault diagnosis and spare parts orders.

The list has addressed most of its demands and will lower its data compliance costs, he said.

With respect to biomedicine

companies, five scenarios including de-identified study participant basic personal information in clinical trials and R&D, information on product complaints and contract management information for business partner management have been permitted for cross-border data flows under the new list.

Liu Bing, head of digital technology at Haleon China, said that data exports in the pharmaceutical industry have strong public interest attributes and are extremely dependent on international cooperation.

The scenario-based general data list has taken into full account the actual needs of most pharmaceutical companies while safeguarding data security and personal privacy, she said.

Mutual fund companies' industry research reports, macroeconomic analysis reports, supplier manage-

ment data and risk management data have all received the green light for cross-border data flow under the new list.

According to asset manager Fidelity International, the new list can prevent repetitive investments by multinational asset management companies, lower communication costs and improve operational efficiency.

This is part of China's efforts to advance high-standard opening-up as more foreign financial institutions have entered the country, the company said.

Lu Sen, head of the data department of the Lin-gang administration, said the list has helped companies with the precise identification and compliance of data flow, which were major hurdles earlier.

However, it does not mean that all other cross-border data transfers are banned. The list will be extended over time, preparing for a negative

list for cross-border data flows in the future.

Efforts will be made to extend the list to cover international trade financing letter of guarantee, international trade settlement letter of credit businesses, reinsurance and shipping businesses, Lu said.

Shen Yi, a professor of international politics at Fudan University, said the new list is quite exceptional from a global perspective, and has provided a limited white list that will serve economic development needs based on real business scenarios.

"Cross-border data flows are the prerequisite for industry development now. But the compliance cost for such activities cannot be overwhelming for companies. The new list, which is down-to-earth and elastic, can play an important role in stimulating economic growth. It is also a good choice to make such an experiment in Lin-gang," he said.

WORLD

AL calls for UN peacekeepers in Gaza

At summit, leaders urge intl community to assume responsibilities for peace

By JAN YUMUL in Hong Kong
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The 33rd Arab Summit has concluded with a "Bahrain Declaration" that called for international protection and deployment of United Nations peacekeeping forces in the occupied Palestinian territories until implementation of the two-state solution.

Leaders of the 22-member Arab League called on Thursday for an immediate halt to Israeli aggression in the Gaza Strip, complete withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza, lifting of the siege, removal of all obstacles, and opening of all crossings to ensure the entry of adequate humanitarian aid into the Palestinian enclave.

It condemned Israeli control of the Palestinian side of the Rafah crossing to tighten the siege on civilians in the Gaza Strip.

The declaration supported Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' call to convene an international peace conference and take irreversible steps to implement the two-state solution.

It came as Israel vowed on Thursday to "intensify" its ground offensive in Rafah, in defiance of global warnings over the fate of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian civilians sheltering in Gaza's far-southern city.

Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said "additional forces will enter" the Rafah area and "this activity will intensify".

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, or UNRWA,

said in a news release on Thursday that Rafah has "emptied of at least 600,000 people in just the last week" and that another 100,000 have been uprooted from the north of the enclave as the Israeli military announced evacuation orders.

UNRWA said families "keep fleeing where they can, including to rubble and sand dunes", in search of safety, but that "there's no such thing in Gaza".

The conflict broke out after the Hamas attack on Oct 7 on southern Israel, which resulted in the deaths of more than 1,170 people.

Israel then launched a military offensive on Gaza, where at least 35,303 people have been killed.

'Exceptional' declaration

The Bahrain Declaration and meeting in the Bahraini capital Manama had been hailed as significant and "exceptional" by experts, especially given that Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Morocco had normalized ties with Israel through the United States-brokered Abraham Accords in 2020.

"We stress the need for Israel, the occupying power, to cease all its illegal actions that violate the rights of the Palestinian people and undermine the two-state solution and the prospects for a just and comprehensive peace in the region, including the construction and expansion of settlements, the confiscation of Palestinian land and the displacement of Palestinians from their homes," the declaration read.

Jasim Husain, a Gulf analyst and former member of Bahrain's parliament, told China Daily that the



Displaced Palestinians walk around a puddle in front of destroyed buildings and tents in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip on Thursday, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and the militant group Hamas. AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

summit was "exceptional" and that it was historic for many leaders, including the Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad "to be in the same area".

"The main outcome of the conference is the call for an international conference on Palestine in order to declare two-state solution. A Palestinian state (existing) alongside Israel," said Husain, noting that there were "no endorsement and no threats of breaking ties with Israel". Another "outstanding" point

was the speech by Abbas, who told the summit that Hamas' "unilateral decision" to launch the Oct 7 attack had "provided Israel with more pretexts and justifications to attack the Gaza Strip", Husain noted.

The Arab leaders also called on the international community to fulfill its legal obligations and take decisive measures to end the Israeli occupation of the Arab territories.

Rasha Al Joundy, a senior researcher at the Dubai Public Policy Research Centre, told China Dai-

ly that Arab leaders are urging the international community to assume its responsibilities to advance the peace process.

While noting that the UN Security Council is being "paralyzed by vetoes from the US", Al Joundy said Arab states want to "use their relationship with Israel to send aid to Gaza, and keep the channels open with Tel Aviv to mediate and send messages to the political leadership there".

Xinhua and agencies contributed to this story.

50 arrests made over campus protests

By AI HEPING in New York
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Classes at the University of California, Irvine, were held remotely on Thursday after 50 people were arrested during a pro-Palestinian protest on the campus that saw police clash with some demonstrators.

All those arrested on Wednesday afternoon were taken to the Orange County jail and released on citations, according to the university. At least two people who were taken into custody identified themselves as UCI faculty members, police said.

UCI officials said one student was injured and three police officers were taken to hospital. As of Thursday morning, two of the officers had been released.

Most of the protesters were arrested after failing to follow a police order to disperse.

A university spokesman said

police were called to the campus when about 500 people expanded an encampment that was in front of a lecture hall for weeks, using pop-up tents, wooden pallets, coolers and other supplies. A small group of protesters barricaded themselves inside the building.

Orange County sheriff's deputies and Irvine police, along with other neighboring agencies, responded.

The situation on the campus intensified over the past week after some protesting students received suspension notices from the university, including some who were involved in negotiations with UCI administrators.

Protesters have called for the university to divest itself from investments in companies that profit from the conflict in Gaza, disclose the university's assets and investments and end joint academic programs with Israel, among other demands.

Sarah Khalil, fourth-year student and chair of Students for Justice in Palestine at UCI, said the university's response to Wednesday's protest was "unforgivable" and "irrational".

The clearance of the encampment will not end student protests, she said. "We still want divestment, we still want a liberated Palestine, and we're not going to stop until Palestine is free."

On Tuesday, the University of California's chief investment officer, Jagdeep Singh Bachher, announced that investments from companies that students are targeting in their call for divestment total \$32 billion, which is nearly one-fifth of the system's overall assets.

Last month, Michael V. Drake, president of the University of California, said the institutions would not boycott or divest from Israel.

UCI Chancellor Howard Gillman said in a statement that although the encampment had violated uni-



Pro-Palestinian students face police officers at La Sapienza University on Thursday in Rome. Such demonstrations have swept the West over the ongoing conflict in Gaza. ANTONIO MASIELLO / GETTY IMAGES

versity policies since it was set up in late April, the violations did not rise to the level requiring police intervention until Wednesday afternoon. He called it "a last resort".

At the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, on Wednesday, police

arrested 11 people after they did not move from the lawn outside the university's law school to the student union lawn, which was reserved for them.

Agencies contributed to this story.

French forces deployed to secure New Caledonia

NOUMEA — Hundreds of military and armed police reinforcements had arrived in New Caledonia as part of a massive operation to regain control of the capital Noumea, the top French official in the Pacific Island territory said on Friday.

Extra forces began landing on Thursday at the French army-controlled La Tontouta International Airport and could be seen moving through Noumea in red berets toting rifles, gas masks and riot shields.

The number of police and gendarmes on the island governed by France will rise to 2,700 from 1,700 by Friday evening.

Anger over France's plan to impose new voting rules spiraled into the deadliest violence in four decades in the archipelago of 270,000 people, which lies between Australia and Fiji — 17,000 kilometers from Paris.

After rioting that began on Monday resulting in five deaths and hundreds of arrests, Thursday night was relatively calm, France's High Com-



A car burns on a road outside Noumea on Thursday in the French territory of New Caledonia. DELPHINE MAYEUR / AFP

missioner Louis Le Franc told reporters in a televised news conference.

The violence is the worst seen in New Caledonia since violence involving independence radicals rocked the French overseas territory in the 1980s.

On Friday morning, journalists saw flames and smoke pouring from a shopping center, smoldering buildings, dozens of burned-out cars and residents dragging the remnants of vehicles off the roads.

The New Caledonia government said in a statement on Friday the island has food stocks for two months, but the problem is distribution.

The rioting erupted over a new bill, adopted by lawmakers in Paris

on Tuesday, that will let French residents who have lived in New Caledonia for 10 years vote in provincial elections. Some local leaders fear the move will dilute the indigenous Kanak vote.

The Pacific Conference of Churches on Friday joined regional inter-governmental groups in calling for France to withdraw the constitutional bill, and said the United Nations should lead a dialogue mission to New Caledonia.

In a statement, the churches said there had been a breakdown in dialogue between the French government and Kanak people.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Briefly

CHINA Li extends sympathy to Slovakia's PM

Premier Li Qiang on Friday extended his sympathy to Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico over his injury in an attack. In his message, Li said he was shocked to learn that Fico was shot and wounded. Li expressed his sincere sympathy to Fico and wished him a speedy recovery. Fico sustained four gunshot wounds in an attack on Wednesday when he greeted supporters after chairing a government meeting in the central Slovak town of Handlova.

UNITED NATIONS 'Improved prospects' for global economy

The United Nations reported improved prospects for the world economy since its January forecast on Thursday, pointing to a better outlook in the United States and several large emerging economies including Brazil, India and Russia. According to its mid-2024 report, the world economy is now projected to grow by 2.7 percent this year — up from the 2.4 percent forecast in its January report — and by 2.8 percent in 2025. A 2.7 percent growth rate would equal growth in 2023.

JAPAN Sixth round of toxic water release begins

Japan started on Friday the sixth round of release of nuclear-contaminated wastewater from the crippled Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant into the Pacific Ocean. Despite furious opposition at home and abroad, Tokyo Electric Power Company, the plant's operator, started releasing the toxic water in the morning, the second round in fiscal 2024. Like previous rounds, about 7,800 metric tons of such water will be discharged until June 4.

INDIA 12 killed in lightning strikes in West Bengal

At least 12 people were killed and several others injured on Thursday due to lightning in India's eastern state of West Bengal, officials said. The casualties in the lightning strikes were reported in Malda district, about 300 kilometers north of Kolkata, capital city of West Bengal. Every year with the onset of monsoon season, hundreds die in lightning incidents in India.

XINHUA—AGENCIES

Germany and Sweden disagree with tariffs on EVs

STOCKHOLM/BERLIN — German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson have cautioned against tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles following Washington's announcement of hefty levies.

Scholz and Kristersson expressed reservations about possible European tariffs on Chinese EVs when asked on Tuesday at a news conference in Stockholm about whether they support the European Union to follow suit.

On Tuesday, the United States announced new tariffs on a variety of imports from China, including EVs, in addition to existing tariffs under Section 301. The additional levy will raise tariffs on Chinese EV imports to 100 percent this year. Last October, the European Commission launched an anti-subsidy investigation into the imports of EVs from China.

"50 percent of electric car imports from China come from Western brands that produce cars there and, in that regard, that's maybe a difference compared to North America. There is an exchange from both sides. European and even some North American manufacturers are successful on the Chinese market, and we have to take that into account," said Scholz, stressing the importance of trade between the West and China.

“The politicians are now calling for trade restrictions on Chinese car manufacturers. This is an absurdity.”

Oliver Zipse, BMW CEO

"When it comes to import duties, I think that we (Sweden and Germany) essentially have a consensus that it is a bad idea to start dismantling global trade," Kristersson said. "A broader trade war where we stop each other's products is, in principle, not the future for large industrialized countries like Germany and Sweden."

According to statistics from the European Federation for Transport and Environment, around 20 percent, or 300,000, of all-electric cars sold across the EU last year were made in China. More than half of them come from Western carmakers such as Tesla, Dacia and BMW, which produce them in China for export.

Major German carmakers also signaled opposition to the possible tariff increases.

"The politicians are now calling for trade restrictions on Chinese car manufacturers. This is an absurdity," BMW CEO Oliver Zipse told German media Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung on Tuesday.

Proposing restrictions on EVs shows a sign of shortsightedness, as it risks incurring countermeasures from trading partners, leading to a more limited availability of essential raw materials for European EVs, Zipse said.

He said European carmakers should refrain from repeating past mistakes in the auto industry.

"The European market previously feared the Japanese flooding with cheap cars, then the Korean. And now it is the Chinese," he said, stressing that the European market is not "flooded" with cheap Chinese electric cars, which only have a share of 0.8 percent in Germany.

Zipse warned against superficial statistics. For example, around 20 percent of EVs in Europe were imported from China last year, while "more than half did not come from Chinese companies at all".

Regarding the EU's anti-subsidy investigation on Chinese EVs, Hildegard Mueller, president of the German Association of the Automotive Industry, said new tariffs and barriers were not the right way forward.

"We believe that building up new tariffs and sliding into mutual protectionism is the wrong way to go," Mueller said. "Rather, we need to talk to each other so that it is equally possible for companies in both countries to approach mutually, produce there and sell there."

XINHUA

WORLD

Synergy in ties with Malaysia reaps benefits

EVs, energy and digital economy seen as new growth factors for collaboration

By YANG RAN
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Over the past 50 years, friendly cooperation between China and Malaysia has steadily advanced the relationship to a historic peak, said Malaysian diplomats and business leaders, adding that the deepening economic collaboration and people-to-people exchanges will propel future bilateral relationships to new heights.

"Malaysia was the first country in Southeast Asia to establish diplomatic relationships with China," said Niqman Rafae M. Sahar, minister counselor of trade for the Malaysian embassy in China.

"China is a very important trading partner to Malaysia. It has remained Malaysia's largest trading partner for the past 15 consecutive years, representing 17.1 percent of Malaysia's total trade with the world. If people want to see why is China so special to Malaysia, this is one of the reasons."

Loh Wee Keng, chairman of the Malaysian Chamber of Commerce and Industry in China, has experienced firsthand the changing dynamics of economic collaboration between China and Malaysia.

"When MayCham was founded in 2003, we only had less than a hundred members and only one office in Beijing. Since then, the number of members has continued to grow to over 600 now, and we have four offices in different Chinese cities to better serve our members. This is a testament to the growing volume of economic collaboration between the two nations," Loh said.

The range in bilateral trade has also grown wider in past decades, said Loh who started his business in China in 1995.

"When I first came here, bilateral trade was mostly done by governments and mainly revolved around big commodities, like rubber and palm oil. But over the years, I can see a lot of differences, especially after China and ASEAN signed the free trade agreement," Loh said.

According to data from MATRADE, Malaysia's major exports to China have expanded from limited commodities to electrical and electronic products, chemicals and chemical products, and manufactured metals.

"China's exports to Malaysia have changed from low-value products like garment and fashion wear in the early days to electrical products, high-tech products like machinery, and now to almost everything, including cars, drones and furniture," Loh said.

In the past 50 years, China and Malaysia's trade cooperation began with basic raw material exchanges. "Now, the focus has shifted toward high-tech and high-quality products. While Chinese goods were used to be known for being cheap, they now offer great value for money and competitive technology that can compete with developed coun-



Niqman Rafae M. Sahar



Loh Wee Keng

tries," Loh said. "I decided to explore opportunities in China in its early reform and opening-up phase, with everyone optimistic about China's upward development trajectory. Back then, China was seen as a rising lion just waking up. Today, China leads the world in various fields."

The two sides can do more things in the coming years, Niqman said. "For example, e-commerce is a big industry in China with a market size of billions of dollars. That's where Malaysian companies can come and collaborate together with Chinese peers. And that's why Chinese customers can buy our Musang King durian online."

Potential areas

Niqman also listed energy and renewables, health and halal products as potential areas.

Loh said green energy, AI and the digital economy are areas that hold the most potential for deeper collaboration.

"China now leads the world in areas, including EVs, AI and big data. When Chinese companies invest in Malaysia in these sectors, both countries benefit. For Chinese firms, Malaysia offers lower production costs than at home, and Malaysia's global trade networks and experience can help them expand internationally," Loh said.

"In turn, Malaysia stands to gain from China's advanced technology in these areas. By attracting Chinese investment and transferring technology, Malaysia could become a tech hub in ASEAN. At the same time, China's investments not only create jobs in Malaysia, but also boost the country's economic growth."

This economic synergy between China and Malaysia helps to foster positive bilateral relations, he said, adding that people-to-people exchanges are also increasingly vital in strengthening the relationship.

Tourism stands out as a key area. Following the bilateral visa waiver implemented last year, there has been a notable surge in cross-border tourist visits.

Educational cooperation is also deepening. "Previously, Malaysian students used to choose Hong Kong and Singapore for further studies. However, the Chinese mainland is now becoming a top choice due to its advancements in fields such as medicine and aviation," Loh said.

China also sees a significant number of students choosing to study in Malaysia. In 2023, China led with 26,627 student applications for Malaysia, showcasing a significant preference for studying there.



People remove fallen tree limbs on top of a car on Thursday after a severe thunderstorm passed through downtown in Houston. At least four people were dead after strong storms hit the largest city in the US state of Texas. DAVID J. PHILLIP / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Houston storms kill 4, cause widespread power outages

HOUSTON — Fast-moving thunderstorms pummeled southeastern Texas on Thursday for the second time this month, killing at least four people, blowing out windows in high-rise buildings, downing trees and knocking out power to more than 850,000 homes and businesses in the Houston area.

Officials urged residents to keep off roads, as many were impassable and traffic lights were expected to be out for much of the night.

"Stay at home tonight. Do not go to work tomorrow, unless you're an essential worker. Stay home, take care of your children," Houston Mayor John Whitmire said in an evening news conference. "Our first responders will be working around the clock."

The mayor said four people died during the severe weather. At least two of the deaths were caused by falling trees, and another happened when a crane blew over in strong winds, officials said.

Streets were flooded, and trees and power lines were down across the region. Whitmire said wind speeds reached 160 kilometers per hour "with some twisters." He said the powerful gusts were reminiscent of 2008's Hurricane Ike, which pounded the city.

Hundreds of windows were shattered at downtown hotels and office buildings, with glass littering the streets below, and the state was sending Department of Public Safety officers to secure the area.

"Downtown is a mess," Whitmire said, adding that there was a backlog of 911 calls that first responders were working through.

The Houston Independent School District canceled classes on Friday for some 400,000 students at all its 274 campuses.

The storm system moved through swiftly, but flood watches and warn-

ings remained for Houston and areas to the east. The ferocious storms moved into neighboring Louisiana and left more than 170,000 customers without power.

Flights were briefly grounded at Houston's two major airports. Sustained winds topping 96 km/h were recorded at Bush Intercontinental Airport.

About 855,000 customers were without electricity in and around Harris County, which contains Houston, according to the PowerOutage.us project. The county is home to more than 4.7 million people.

The problems extended to the city's suburbs, with emergency officials in neighboring Montgomery County describing the damage to

transmission lines as "catastrophic" and warning that power could be impacted for several days.

Heavy storms slammed the region during the first week of May, leading to numerous high-water rescues, including some from the rooftops of flooded homes.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Coral reef bleaching near record level

LONDON — Nearly two-thirds of the world's coral reefs have been subjected to heat stress bad enough to trigger bleaching over the past year, the leading agency monitoring coral reefs said on Thursday.

The United States' National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, or NOAA, announced last month that the world's coral reefs were in the throes of a fourth mass bleaching event, as climate change combined with an El Nino climate pattern has pushed ocean temperatures to record highs.

Now, the agency reports some 60.5 percent of the world's reef areas have been affected and that number is still rising.

"I am very worried about the state of the world's coral reefs," NOAA's Coral Reef Watch coordinator Derek Manzello said in a monthly briefing. "We are seeing (ocean temperatures)

play out right now that are very extreme in nature."

Triggered by heat stress, coral bleaching occurs when corals expel the colorful algae living in their tissues. Without these helpful algae, the corals become pale and are vulnerable to starvation and disease.

Scientists have documented mass bleaching in at least 62 countries and territories, with India and Sri Lanka recently reporting impacts.

The last global event, which ran from 2014 to 2017, saw 56.1 percent of reef areas subjected to bleaching-level heat stress. Previous events in 1998 and 2010 hit 20 percent and 35 percent of reef areas respectively.

While the current event has affected a greater swath, Manzello said the 2014-17 event is still considered the worst on record due to its severity and persistence. But 2023-24 could soon surpass it.

Corals in the Atlantic Ocean have been hit hardest by soaring ocean temperatures, with 99.7 percent of the basin's reefs subjected to bleaching-level heat stress in the past year, NOAA said.

"The Atlantic Ocean has been off the charts," Manzello said.

One assessment published in April found there had so far been between 50 percent and 93 percent coral mortality at Huatulco, Oaxaca, in the Mexican Pacific.

The situation is likely to worsen this summer, as heat stress is once again accumulating in the Southern Caribbean. In some areas, the heat stress threshold for bleaching to occur has already been passed.

"This is alarming because this has never happened so early in the year before," Manzello said.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA



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Above: The Victoria Falls is one of Zambia's natural wonders. ULDIS ZILE / GETTY IMAGE **From below:** A Chinese artist delivers folk song *Jasmine Flower* at the opening ceremony of the China-Zambia Culture and Tourism Year in Beijing on May 11. A colorful dance performance during the Beijing event. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

China and Zambia look to the future as ties celebrated

Culture and Tourism Year kicks off with songs, dances and glimpses of African country's natural and cultural beauty, **Yang Feiyue** reports.

Edward Chabu flew all the way from the Zambian capital Lusaka to Beijing to attend the 2024 China-Zambia Culture and Tourism Year, which kicked off on May 11.

The Zambian music lecturer sang and danced onstage in multicolored traditional attire and makeup, and amazed the audience, especially with his rendition in Mandarin of the Chinese folk song *Jasmine Flower*, which he sang with a Chinese artist.

"In addition to the duet that shows our friendship, we have prepared four shows and cut them short and pieced them together for the audience," says the musician in his 20s.

"They are all traditional performances featuring instruments from different parts of Zambia. We want to show our country's culture as much as possible to the Chinese audience."

Chabu studied music at the Nanjing University in Jiangsu province between 2016 and 2021 and is now a music lecturer at the Evelyn Hone College in Lusaka.

"China is my second home, and I am here with my fellow musicians to share our musical traditions," Chabu says.

"I hope China and Zambia will continue to share stories through song and dance, and I'd love to see more Chinese people travel to Zambia to enjoy its music and explore the country," he adds.

The bilateral culture and tourism year seeks to boost relations through people-to-people connections and spur cultural and artistic cooperation between China and Zambia, according to authorities.

Sun Yeli, China's minister of culture and tourism, Rodney Sikumba, Zambia's minister of tourism, and Ivan Zyuulu, Zambia's ambassador to China, address the opening ceremony.

Approximately 100 people from both sides of the tourism industry were present.

"Zambia appreciates what the People's Republic of China has done in the last 60 years to help it develop," says Sikumba.

China has worked together with Zambia on the construction of the Tazara Railway (an 1,860-kilometer railway that connects Tanzania and Zambia), and a series of infrastructure projects, such as the Mukuku Bridge (over the Luapula River) and the Kenneth Kaunda International Airport in the capital.

"All these projects stand as monuments to the enduring friendship and collaboration between China and Zambia," Sikumba says, adding that this was further evidenced by the state visit of Zambian President Hakainde Hichilema at the invitation of President Xi Jinping in September last year.

During the visit, the two countries issued a joint statement on establishing a comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership.

In it, they applauded the results of cooperation in culture, tourism, education, public health, youth, think tanks, media and sports, and agreed to enhance cooperation. Both sides also decided to designate 2024 as the Year of Culture and Tourism.

The Chinese side expressed appreciation for Zambia's visa-free policy for Chinese tourists. The Zambian side thanked China for listing Zambia in the second group of pilot countries for outbound group tours by Chinese travel agencies, and welcomed Chinese tourists to Zambia. Both also agreed to further facilitate exchanges of personnel.

As a result of the state visit, Zambia has proceeded to ease visa restrictions, allowing visitors from China to enter the country visa-free, Sikumba adds.

Matongo Matamwandi, CEO of Zambia's leading travel organization, the Zambia Tourism Agency, promotes the country's tourist attractions at the opening ceremony.



“Your architectural marvels, and your innovative approaches to sustainable tourism hold valuable lessons for us.”

Rodney Sikumba, Zambia's minister of tourism



Top above: Chinese visitors show great interest in Zambian handicraft items at the Beijing event. **Left:** A work by Zambian artist Enock Sela. **Above:** Rodney Sikumba, Zambia's minister of tourism, addresses the opening ceremony.

Matamwandi says that Zambia is famous for its natural beauty, diverse wildlife and vibrant culture, including the Victoria Falls, home to one of the world's largest curtains of falling water, 20 national parks inhabited by more than 1,800 animal species, and 73 tribes coexisting in peace and harmony, with their colorful cultures and traditions.

"We've seen a very high increase in the Chinese travelers to Zambia," says Valerie Mpuku, tourism promotion manager at Zambia Tourism Agency.

"China is one of the key source markets, so we're going to grow the numbers and take advantage of China's large population and traffic to come to appreciate our beautiful country," Mpuku says, adding that discussions about facilitating travel and offering special services to Chinese tourists are under way.

At the opening ceremony for the culture and tourism year, eight paintings of African tribal masks and sculptures by Enock Sela drew the attention of curious Chinese participants.

"I came to the event out of gratitude," says Sela who now works as an artist in Shanghai.

The artist in his 20s is from the small Zambian village of Kashikishi — located in the country's northwestern part — and has chosen to stay in China after finishing studies at a university in Jiangxi province.

"The paintings are a representation of my beautiful country, which is blessed with cultural and innovative elements, while the sculptures represent China becoming my second home," Sela says.

"When I discovered these disposable materials in my Shanghai neighborhood, they reminded me of my childhood and inspired me to make art," he says.

"The most obvious is dry grass. I discovered this material in China, but it is used to make mats in Zambia, which my family used when we sat outside in the evening under the light of the moon while my mother told us stories, a memory that's with me until today," he adds.

He hopes his work will pique the interest of more Chinese travelers to explore the beauty of Zambia and its people.

Sela says he's lucky to have the support from Chinese agencies to open a studio in Shanghai where he and his peers can showcase their culture through their work.

He hopes the bilateral culture and tourism year will bring more Zambians to the country, so they can also discover its vast opportunities.

"I wish to continue to learn about Chinese culture and use every resource available to me to enrich the cultural exchange between China and Zambia, as well as pass knowledge and opportunities on to the younger generation of Zambians," Sela says.

Sikumba says Zambia is also eager to learn from China's rich cultural heritage and impressive tourism development.

"Your centuries-old traditions, your architectural marvels, and your innovative approaches to sustainable tourism hold valuable lessons for us," he says.

"This yearlong celebration will provide ample opportunities for us to exchange ideas, share best practices, and forge new partnerships."

He says he'd reiterate that as the two countries commemorate 60 years of China-Zambia friendship, it's time for renewing the commitment to deepening the two countries' cultural and tourism ties for the next 60 years.

"By working together, we can unlock new avenues for tourism growth, create meaningful exchanges, and inspire our people to explore the wonders that our nations have to offer," he adds.

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Helping films attract global audiences

By XU FAN
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With box office receipts soaring between the Spring Festival and May Day holidays, Chinese filmmakers have begun intensifying efforts to expand their footprint overseas.

On April 20, the China Film Group Corp, one of the country's largest studios, unveiled a lineup of 78 films designed to attract international buyers from more than 10 countries, including the United Kingdom, the United States, France and Australia.

The list, which is comprised of upcoming films and recent blockbusters, includes Tsui Hark's martial arts film *The Legend of the Condor Heroes: The Great Hero*, the 8th-century-set animated hit *Chang'an*, and the patriotic film *My Country, My Parents*.

Liu Chun, vice-president of the China Film Group Corp, says that they prepared for two months to organize a special screening event of the films during the 14th Beijing International Film Festival, which closed on April 26, in the hope of more Chinese films being shown abroad.

Speaking about the criteria for selection, Liu tells China Daily that the entries had to cater to the tastes of international audiences, while also being distinctly Chinese.

"We held a similar screening for nine Russian distributors last October and have since received positive feedback. Considering the increasing number of foreign filmmakers and insiders coming to China this year, we expect to spread more Chinese stories around the world," he says.

According to Liu, Middle Eastern and African countries are most fond of martial arts tales, while European countries prefer arthouse films, while the North American audience is more accustomed to watching English-language films.

"But overseas markets are constantly changing. Through the Beijing Film Festival screenings, we hope to gain insights into their evolving preferences," he adds.

Despite previously believing that foreign audiences might be interested in movies featuring traditional

culture, Liu says they have discovered that popular commercial movies based on the ideas of striving or cooperation have also resonated with theatergoers abroad.

For example, *YOLO*, a film depicting an oversized woman striving to gain self-confidence, has grossed over \$7 million in multiple overseas markets, including North America, Australia, Singapore, New Zealand and Malaysia.

The Wandering Earth II, a sci-fi epic that shows humanity uniting to confront a catastrophe threatening the existence of the Earth, has so far grossed over 100 million yuan (\$13.8 million) through overseas release in 44 countries and regions.

Liu says that the Chinese-language films that captured overseas attention in the early days were primarily action blockbusters, featuring stars like Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan, with Ang Lee's Oscar-winning film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* propelling the genre to a glorious moment in the early 2000s.

However in 2019, *The Wandering Earth* became a huge success, showing that Chinese filmmakers can blend Chinese culture and values into hard-core sci-fi, setting them apart from Hollywood blockbusters. This fresh approach appeals to some global audiences, according to Liu.

"We have also noticed a growing interest among foreign audiences in films that portray the real-life situations of Chinese people today," he adds.

Further elaborating on their awareness of current trends, Liu reveals that the lineup includes movies such as *The Captain*, which is inspired by a real-life miraculous plane landing that saved 119 passengers, and *Ping Pong: The Triumph*, which recounts the victory of Chinese athletes at the 1995 World Table Tennis Championships.

"The future challenge for Chinese filmmakers is to discover themes that resonate with international audiences while including Chinese culture and elements to help Chinese narratives navigate overseas," he says.

Additionally, he revealed that international cooperation could become an effective way of raising the influence of Chinese movies, as exemplified by *Meg 2: The Trench*, the highest-grossing of the 37 coproductions approved by China in 2023.

The Sino-US film, which grossed \$398 million at the global box office, has a successful formula. With the Chinese production company leading the investment and the creative process, the project successfully attracted top-notch filmmakers from Hollywood to collaborate on making a blockbuster, he adds.



A poster of Tsui Hark's martial arts film. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

LIFE



Clockwise from above left: Xu Zixuan (left), who plays the role of Clarice, and Yang Qi, who plays Beatrice, during a rehearsal for the Chinese stage adaptation of the Italian comedy *The Servant of Two Masters* at the NCPA on Monday; Dong Wenliang (front) playing the lead role of the servant Truffaldino in rehearsals; Yang (left) and Xu during the rehearsal. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

ONE MAN, TWO BOSSES, IS A FUNNY SCENARIO

Classic Italian comedy gives theater audiences plenty to enjoy, **Chen Nan** reports.

Desserts are always a great choice to end a meal. For those who want to wrap up their busy and exhausting day, we present you with this special sweet treat, a comedy, which is even better as a dessert with a side of laughter," says actor Dong Wenliang, talking about the new Chinese stage adaptation of Carlo Goldoni's *The Servant of Two Masters* — a masterpiece of comedic theater.

As a member of the NCPA Drama Ensemble, the resident drama troupe of the National Centre for the Performing Arts, Dong is going to play the lead role of servant, Truffaldino, in the comedy, *The Servant of Two Masters*, which will premiere at the NCPA on May 31 with shows running until June 3.

Considered one of Italy's finest playwrights, Goldoni wrote *The Servant of Two Masters* in 1745. The play has delighted audiences for

centuries, and the classic comedy has been translated into different languages.

Set in Venice, it tells the story of the crafty Truffaldino, a servant who secretly works for two masters to make more money. He must do his best to serve both without either one knowing he is serving the other. The two, who accidentally share the same servant, were once lovers, and have been looking for each other for years.

The god of destiny makes fools of them all through a strange combination of circumstances.

Truffaldino's secret is nearly revealed on many occasions, but each time, his tact helps him throw others off the scent. Similarly, the lovers fail to reunite with each other every time. After a hilarious series of misunderstandings and mistakes, the story comes to a happy ending, with the lovers finally getting married.

“With its fast-paced physical comedy, witty wordplay, and colorful characters, *The Servant of Two Masters* is very entertaining and will have audiences laughing from start to finish.”

Wang Jiannan, director

“With its fast-paced physical comedy, witty wordplay, and colorful characters, *The Servant of Two Masters* is very entertaining and will have audiences laughing from start to finish,” says director Wang Jiannan, who works with the National Theatre of China.

Wang adds that what also makes the play a classic is that Goldoni preferred to try new ideas and styles, different to the mainstream style of writing comedy, known as

commedia dell'arte, which was popular during his day. It is characterized by improvised dialogue and a cast of stock characters. This style emerged in Italy in the 15th century and rapidly gained popularity throughout Europe.

“Goldoni wanted to write representations of real life and people. He was credited with creating an innovative form of Italian character comedy,” says Wang.

“When I did rehearsals, I

couldn't help relating the classic story to our modern lives. There are many young people working two or even more jobs. I wonder what they experience in their lives and if they also have similar situations to Truffaldino,” says Dong, 43, who was born in Beijing and graduated from the National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts. He is an actor with the Beijing Quju Opera Troupe. Beijing Quju Opera is a traditional form of opera that is considered the only opera local to Beijing.

Dong has been playing roles in dramas produced by the NCPA since 2018, such as Shakespeare's comedy *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; and *The Crossroad*, which is based on real-life stories of soldiers serving with the Northwest Field Army, one of the main forces of the People's Liberation Army during China's War of Liberation (1946-49).

Yang Qi, who joined the NCPA

Drama Ensemble in 2016 — the same year the ensemble was born — plays the role of Beatrice, one of the masters of Truffaldino, and who disguises herself as a man to look for her lover, Florindo, who is in exile.

Yang says that it is the first time for her to play a man onstage, which is both fun and challenging at the same time. She also adds that she rarely does comedy, which she finds very hard.

“The style and flavor of this 18th century classic is faithfully maintained in a modern rendering,” she says. “I am not a humorous person and I barely make any joke in real life. During the rehearsals, I observed other actors like Dong, who is a very funny man, and tried to train myself to form the comic sensibility.”

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Training program to boost stage talent

By CHEN NAN

The Beijing People's Art Theatre announced the launch of a training program for young directors and scriptwriters.

The program will take place from May to August at the theater with three-month courses by veteran directors and scriptwriters from the Beijing People's Art Theatre.

“It's the first time in the history of the Beijing People's Art Theatre, which spans more than 70 years, that we are launching a training program for directors and scriptwriters. We are very excited,” said Feng Yuanzheng, veteran actor and president of the theater, in Beijing on May 8.

Sixteen young directors and scriptwriters will be trained by more than 30 artists, including scriptwriters He Jiping and Meng Bing. After a monthlong intensive training period in class, the young scriptwriters and directors will work together on new scripts and stage productions.

The stage productions will be performed by young actors and actresses from the theater during



Left: Young director Liu Chongzuo is a student of the training program. **Right:** Feng Yuanzheng, veteran actor and president of the Beijing People's Art Theatre, gives the first class.



the last month of the training program.

“From January, we started to recruit students for this training program. Our goal is clear: scriptwriters and directors, who have already staged work, and who were born after 1990,” says Feng. “A growing proportion of the audience, who come to our shows at the Beijing People's Art Theatre, are very young, born after 1990 and even 2000. We want to train these talented young scriptwriters and directors because they understand what the young generation is interested in, and what they want to

experience in theaters.”

Feng also adds that young people have always been the main force for the theater. For example, Cao Yu's debut play, *Thunderstorm*, was published in 1934 when he was 24. Arguably China's greatest 20th century playwright, Cao wrote the play during his final year at Tsinghua University. It has become a great success and a classic production of the theater.

The first class was given by Feng, who introduced the history of the Beijing People's Art Theatre. A director himself, Feng taught the students how to communicate with actors and scriptwriters.



The 16 young scriptwriters and directors participating in a three-month training program at the Beijing People's Art Theatre. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

“I can still remember my beginning years after joining the Beijing People's Art Theatre. I was young and ambitious. Many veteran artists, like Feng, coached me and supported me. They used their own experience in theaters to allow me to grow and develop fast,” says director Xu Ang, who also teaches in the new training program. “But it's true that a great

scriptwriter or a great director cannot be taught. Besides talent, they also need to be creative, curious and full of imagination.”

Young director Liu Chongzuo, who graduated from the Central Academy of Drama in Beijing in 2022, is one of the students in the ongoing training program.

“When I saw the advertisement for the training program, I applied

immediately, because of the excellent reputation of the Beijing People's Art Theatre, and the great artists who will teach us. I was very nervous during the interviews but luckily I was admitted,” says Liu. “The theater has its own history and tradition, and unique style of stage productions. I will put my theater experience aside and learn from scratch.”



From left: A bronze dragon head, unearthed from the Sanxingdui Site in Guanghan, Sichuan province, from late Shang Dynasty (c. 16th century-11th century BC). Bronze mirror holders with dragon patterns of the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) unearthed from Luoping county, Yunnan province. A Hongshan Culture jade pig-dragon from Niuheliang Site in Chaoyang, Liaoning province. PHOTOS BY JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY

Fantastical flying beasts

Major Beijing exhibition traces history of the dragon through 8,000 years of imagery, **Wang Ru** reports.

In China, the dragon has special and enduring cultural connotations. With this year marking the Year of Dragon, the fifth animal in the traditional Chinese zodiac, there are dragon decorations everywhere. In fact, the first dragon images were being made about 8,000 years ago. Since then, a dazzling number of exquisite artifacts have been created using this motif.

An ongoing exhibition at the Chinese Archaeological Museum in Beijing has gathered together many such artifacts. The exhibition kicked off on May 1, and will run until Dec 31. It is a display of 112 objects unearthed at 30 important archaeological sites around the country.

These include the Archaeological Ruins of Liangzhu City, a UNESCO World Heritage Site which dates back for 4,300 to 5,300 years in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province; the Erlitou Site, widely believed to be a late capital of the Xia Dynasty (c. 21st century-16th century BC) in Luoyang, Henan province; the Yinxi Ruins, a late Shang Dynasty (c. 16th century-11th century BC) capital in Anyang, Henan, and the Sanxingdui Site in Guanghan, Sichuan province, which dates back to over 3,000 years.

At the opening ceremony on April 29, Ma Yuan, deputy secretary-general of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said that through artifacts, photos, videos and 3D displays, the exhibition elaborates on the origins, development and evolution of dragon culture, as well as the historical value and modern significance of the dragon as a national totem.

According to Guo Wu, a researcher at the Institute of Archaeology at CASS, the dragon is one of the most important Chinese totems. It is believed to be closely connected to the formation of the Chinese state and civilization. As a result, the dragon can still be seen everywhere

and is beloved by the people.

"We want to show images of the dragon's 8,000-year history in China to allow visitors to understand how it has gradually evolved alongside the formation of China, and what it is like today," says Guo.

The exhibition opens with photos of the earliest-known dragon image from the Chahai Site in Puxin, Liaoning province, which is made out of stacked stones from about 8,000 years ago. The image is 19.7 meters long and has a recognizable head, body and tail, and is inferred to have been used in sacrificial ceremonies.

Guo says archaeological evidence reveals that before the Xia and Shang dynasties, people from different areas made dragon totems, although those images differed, as features of animals they liked or believed to be mysterious, like the crocodile, the snake, the pig and the bear, were integrated with those of the dragon.

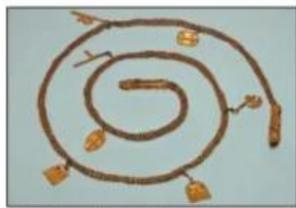
For example, a dragon image from the Taosi Site in Xiangfen county, Shanxi province, which dates from about 4,000 years ago, has a body similar to a snake, while one from Hongshan Culture, a key Neolithic culture that existed between 6,500 to 5,000 years ago in northern China, has fangs and a mane. An image from the Lingjiatan Site in Hanshan county, Anhui province, which dates back to between 5,800 and 5,300 years ago, has horns on its head. All these features can be seen in the exhibits, says Guo.

Meanwhile, the dragons found on Shang Dynasty relics reveal that the Shang people incorporated many of these features into their depictions, ultimately leading to the creation of a fixed dragon image, Guo says.

"Shang dragons often exhibit characteristics like horns on their heads, bodies resembling snakes or crocodiles, fangs and manes. ... This means that with the rise of monarchies controlling large areas, dragon depictions transitioned from being



Above: A C-shaped jade dragon on display attracts attention. Below: A gold crown decorated with dragon element of the Warring States Period (475-221 BC). Far below: A gold saddle decoration with dragon patterns from the Tang Dynasty (618-907).



A gold necklace from the Western Jin Dynasty (265-316) unearthed in Inner Mongolia autonomous region blends different cultural features.

varied and scattered to becoming unified for the first time," says Guo.

The exhibition highlights a number of dragon artifacts from before the Xia and Shang dynasties, including a C-shaped jade dragon, one of the typical formats of jade dragons made by the Hongshan Culture, which was discovered in Inner Mongolia autonomous region.

"The jade dragon's snout protrudes forward and lifts upward, and it has a relatively long mane on its back. ... The dragon is presented in a soaring and upward-flying state, and embodies the aesthetics of ancient people, who adopted a minimalist approach in its making," says Li.

Another typical Hongshan Culture jade pig-dragon (a jade dragon with the features of a pig) is also on display. Visitors are not only able to see the image, but can also get to know exactly where it was found through photos of the site.

"We have added archaeological background information for the artifacts. You can find out in which tomb at the Niuheliang Site in Chaoyang, Liaoning province, the dragon was discovered, down to details such as the fact that it was placed on the chest of a dead person. In this way, we offer complete infor-

mation about the artifacts, so visitors can quickly understand the lineage of dragons in China," says Guo.

Over time, the dragon has evolved into a cultural symbol, with people attributing spiritual qualities to the mythical creature, among them uprightness and a relentless pursuit of self-improvement. These qualities are also regarded as part of the spirit of China, according to Guo.

He mentions that another influential change to the dragon image took place during the Southern Song era (1127-1279), when Chen Rong painted dragons in a way that conveyed their twisting and turning movements in the sky, with parts of their bodies hidden by clouds. This particular representation of dragon has endured through the ages and is still widespread today.

Moreover, says Guo, dragon totem artifacts are a reflection of the characteristics of Chinese civilization.

"Since (the dragon) has a long history, it shows the continuity of Chinese civilization. The changes to its image show creativity. It also shows peacefulness, as the dragon was originally believed to be connected with celestial phenomena associated with agriculture, and was often thought to control rainfall, which was vital to agricultural society.

"As a result, people worshipped the dragon to pray for good weather for their crops. It's totally different from the Western concept of the dragon."

Dragon artifacts also demonstrate the inclusiveness of Chinese civilization. For example, a gold necklace from the Western Jin Dynasty (265-316) unearthed in Inner Mongolia blends different cultural features. The necklace has dragon heads on both ends, and is decorated with small models of traditional Chinese weapons like shields, *ji*, or polearms, and *yue*, a kind of axe.

Guo says it has obvious Scythian (nomadic tribes that flourished between the 7th century BC and 4th

century AD), Gandharan and Indian elements, and that the dragon and the weapon decorations are typically Chinese. As a result, the necklace is evidence of cultural communication.

Many of the exhibits are extremely precious and it was not easy to assemble them.

Some are newly unearthed and are being exhibited for the first time. For example, the dragon pieced together from clam shells dating to about 6,300 years ago, was found at the Caitaopo Site in Chifeng, Inner Mongolia last year.

"This is a dragon artifact that dates back to the early period of Hongshan Culture. Unlike the jade pig-dragon of the late Hongshan Culture period, which has a curled body, this one seems to be elongated, filling in a gap in early Hongshan dragon imagery," says Guo.

Another from the Lingjiatan Site, which was unearthed in 2022, takes a special form. The artifact is tubelike, with one end carved like a dragon head lifting its head, and the other end a pointed cone shape.

"This is the only example of this form of dragon found so far, and we haven't been able to determine what it was used for," says Guo.

With a chronological sequence spanning 8,000 years of dragon culture, and its collection of the most representative artifacts, Ma says the exhibition is expected to play a crucial role in promoting and disseminating dragon culture during the Year of the Dragon.

"I had never seen so many artifacts with dragon elements brought together in the past," says Wang Mingda, a veteran archaeologist who worked at Liangzhu for decades. "I have seen and even handled some of the exhibits as part of my work, but I have never seen them all together before."

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Seminar held on bringing archaeology and museology together

By WANG RU

Cultural heritage experts and officials gathered in Beijing to discuss the integrated development of archaeology and museum studies at a seminar organized by the History Research of China, the Institute of Archaeology at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the Chinese Archaeological Museum on April 29 and 30.

The opening of an exhibition of dragon artifacts was also announced during the seminar, with the experts invited to visit.

Archaeology and museum studies are closely related disciplines that have continued to evolve in their respective fields, making significant contributions to the study and preservation of civilization, according to Chen Xingcan, director of the Institute of Archaeology at CASS.

"In the era of globalization and informatization, we are faced with unprecedented opportunities and challenges. How to promote the integrated development of archaeology and museum studies, and how to better serve society and benefit

people have become important issues for us," says Chen.

Guo Dashun, a veteran archaeologist, recalls the history of promoting the integrated development of archaeology and museum studies in China.

He says that in 1984, noted archaeologist Su Bingqi (1909-97) proposed the establishment of archaeological experimental stations, places to store, organize and study artifacts and popularize knowledge of them among the public.

The station was a prototype for the combination of archaeological findings with museum displays.

According to Liu Chaoying, vice-chairperson of Chinese Museums Association, archaeology and museums have been interdependent for a long time.

She says that archaeology takes place behind the scenes, while museums take center stage. Archaeology is primarily concerned with the systematic study of archaeological sites, while museums play a more prominent role in the exhibition and dissemination of artifacts

and knowledge gained from archaeological research.

The interdependence has produced archaeological museums in China, a new type of museum in the country often built by archaeological institutes to display their work and findings.

For example, the Chinese Archaeological Museum affiliated to the History Research of China, has held the artifacts found during field excavations by the Institute of Archaeology at CASS for nearly seven decades, and has become a typical representation of the integrated development of archaeology and museums, says Chen.

Gong Wen, a former archaeological researcher and now director of the museum, says the participation of archaeologists in museums may bring new vigor to the field of the latter.

"It was archaeologists who dug up artifacts by hand at sites. As a result, they often possess a different angle to museum researchers when viewing artifacts. Therefore, their contribution is a new and special force driving museum development in

the country," says Gong.

She also mentions that more archaeologists have become associated with museums across the country.

The Palace Museum in Beijing was China's imperial palace complex from 1420 to 1911, during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties.

In recent years, it has become a good example of combining archaeological studies and museum development, says Zhang Xiaowei, an associate researcher at the museum.

In 2013, the Palace Museum set up its own archaeological institute, responsible for archaeological studies within the palace complex and outside.

"Although the Palace Museum has 1.86 million artifacts, about 80 percent are from the collections of Ming and Qing imperial families. They are already there. However, unearthed artifacts, which are relatively rare, enrich the collections, and are especially precious," says Zhang.

Moreover, archaeological work provides new content and methods



Archaeology and museum professionals visit an exhibition of dragon artifacts during the seminar on the integrated development of archaeology and museum studies in Beijing on April 29. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

of exhibition. For example, excavations of the foundations of the garden in front of the Cining Gong (Palace of Benevolent Peace) in the western sector of the museum, enabled visitors to visit the site and observe the process of archaeological work, a new method of museum display in the Palace Museum, says Zhang.

"We want them to see beneath the splendid palaces, and what the foundations are like and what the ancient

building crafts were like. It was our first attempt to highlight architectural foundations, and was welcomed by the public," says Zhang.

She also says the museum has held comparative exhibitions of ceramics from the palaces and those found at the archaeological sites of ancient Jingdezhen kilns in Jiangxi province, which produced porcelain for the Ming and Qing courts, to show people how imperial porcelain was made and selected.

LIFE



Main photo: A chestnut farmer works in the fields of Kuancheng county, Hebei province, during the September harvest. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

ROOTED IN SUSTAINABILITY

Ancient cultivation system lauded as global green model sows seeds of success, **Alexis Hooi** and **Zhang Yu** report in Chengde, Hebei province.

Farmer Liu Jingyi would play at the family chestnut tree just outside their yard when he was a child, climbing up its branches and into the hollow of its trunk.

"It was a big tree, the trunk about a meter wide, probably more than 600 years old and very much a part of our lives," says Liu, now 79.

Liu is a fifth-generation cultivator of chestnut trees in Aiyukou village of the Kuancheng Manchu autonomous county in Chengde, North China's Hebei province.

The village is a center of chestnut cultivation. More than 400 Aiyukou households covering nearly 700 hectares of farmland together yield about 1,000 metric tons of the nuts a year, with many of the trees hundreds of years old. About 50,000 hectares in Kuancheng are used to farm chestnuts, with an annual output value of 860 million yuan (\$119 million), according to latest industry figures.

Local residents are justifiably proud of their sweet and plump chestnuts, grown with tried and tested farming practices stretching back to the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220). Two iconic Kuancheng chestnut trees, which forestry specialists said were planted in the year 1303, still bear fruit.

The county is now poised to tap the latest green development trends following a global nod to its model of sustainability.

In November, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization included the Kuancheng Traditional Chestnut Eco-Planting System on its list of Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems, citing its rich cultural content that embodies "the ecological view of respecting nature and the social organization form that promotes agricultural production".

Long history

Since 2005, the organization has designated at least 86 systems in 26 countries as agricultural heritage sites under its program. China ranked first in the world in the number of the heritage systems by 2023, with its total of 22 entries.

"Kuancheng chestnut forests are distributed on the foothills and the lower parts of hillsides, existing in harmony with the local flora and fauna and setting an important example for the development of eco-agriculture in a mountainous, semi-arid area with limited resources," says Shang Heli, economic crops director at Kuancheng's agriculture and rural affairs bureau.

respecting nature and the social organization that supports agricultural production in turn reflects its rich cultural connotations, according to the UN.

"A code of conduct for protecting the natural environment and promoting the harmonious coexistence between humans and nature has been gradually established by the local community, with aspects such as clothing, dwellings, festivals and ceremonies showing people's respect for and adaptation to their physical environment," it said.

A "cultural symbol value" of chestnuts has also been gradually formed in the area, as shown in the food culture of the chestnut.

chestnut and fruit industry areas, and work toward a network that brings together leading enterprises, cooperatives, farmers and markets, under a comprehensive ecological industrial chain to increase local farmers' incomes," he says.

"The third step is to build on our branding, help expand sales channels in multiple directions, and leverage our farm-culture heritage, to further promote our chestnuts and better serve the people of Kuancheng," Wang says.

Improving livelihoods

Helping to lead the charge in tapping Kuancheng's agricultural strengths for the next green stages of development is homegrown company Shen Li Food. The food processing group works with 200,000 local farmers to offer more than 70 chestnut and related products that are exported to more than 30 countries and regions, including the United States, Germany and Japan. Business innovation measures include long-term R&D and technological tie-ups with academic institutions to ensure that nutrition and production levels meet the highest standards, according to the company.

"We work side by side with the farmers and local residents to grow our chestnut industry, bringing real benefits to the economy and improving livelihoods. The UN heritage listing will allow more people across the world to enjoy our produce," says Han Guodong, the company's deputy general manager.

Young Kuancheng residents like 40-year-old entrepreneur Liu Jianxia are also looking to their roots to ride the latest developments, promoting Kuancheng's chestnuts at home and abroad.

Her three shops, two in the city center and one in the county, selling chestnuts and other food products, help rake in more than 2 million yuan a year.

Other than focusing on e-commerce trends, such as livestreaming, Liu's investments in innovative practices include modern food processing equipment and attractive product packaging to keep up to speed with evolving consumer tastes. "I received a lot of local support, such as government financial aid, for my education all the way up to the tertiary level, where I majored in business management," she says.

"We've reaped a lot from our chestnuts, which are deeply embedded in our history, culture and way of life. It seems only natural to share the rich bounty of our home with everyone."

"We've reaped a lot from our chestnuts, which are deeply embedded in our history, culture and way of life."

Liu Jianxia, entrepreneur

"Evolved from ancient times, chestnut cultivation here encompasses rationally allocated soil terraces, customized irrigation pits and channels, natural fertilization and pest control, and complementary crops, such as mushrooms and grain, as well as free-ranging poultry, grown and bred under the trees that altogether offer a closed-loop, comprehensive, efficient and ecological farming tradition passed down generations," he says.

"Behind this harmonious symbiosis between chestnut cultivation and the natural environment is a flexible smallholder farming and cooperatives network that constitutes a stable and highly adaptable social and economic operation mode," says Shang, who was closely involved in the county's application for inclusion on the UN heritage list. Kuancheng's ecological view of

The crop "can be regarded not only as a staple food but also a fruit and a medicine. The chestnut is seen locally as the spiritual symbol of auspiciousness, and the determination and chestnut-related legends, stories and literary works, as well as ancient chestnut trees, serve as historical and cultural symbols", according to the UN heritage listing.

Heritage protected

In July 2022, President Xi Jinping sent a congratulatory letter to the World Conference on Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems, saying that it is the common responsibility of humankind to protect agricultural heritage.

China has actively responded to the program initiated by the FAO and the country has been protecting and inheriting agricultural heritage, Xi highlighted.

Local authorities, recognizing the pillar agricultural sector, will "improve policy mechanisms and give full play to the county's advantages, study and formulate chestnut industry development regulations and work plans, and comprehensively promote the protection and inheritance of Kuancheng's traditional chestnut cultivation system", says Wang Xin, deputy director at the county's agriculture and rural affairs bureau.

"We will also look at increasing capital investment, expanding and strengthening



From top: Workers check chestnuts at the Shen Li Food facility in Kuancheng on March 26. Chestnuts await checking and packaging at the food facility. A worker monitors the production line at the facility. Food entrepreneur Liu Jianxia holds a tray of over-roasted chestnuts at her shop in Chengde, Hebei, on March 27. PHOTOS BY WANG HAORAN / CHINA DAILY



Online
Watch the video by scanning the code.

Plump chestnuts are gathered in a basket during the September harvest in Kuancheng county. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

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LIFE



Left: The waterway is regularly monitored in the Puyuan ancient town in Jiaxing, Zhejiang province. **Right:** A boy interacts with a black swan in Puyuan. **Below:** Tourists enjoy a break at the ancient town.



Ancient towns span history and the future

Vibrant culture celebrates rich heritage and draws tourist bonanza as visitors savor the experience

Photos by LAN HONGGUANG | Xinhua

Throughout many centuries of history, the Grand Canal of China that traverses north and south has nurtured countless towns and villages along its path. These ancient towns, preserved through the ages thanks to their symbiotic relationship with the canal, stand as the finest witnesses and custodians of civilization.

The Grand Canal runs through the heart of Jiaxing, Zhejiang province, stretching more than 110 kilometers, bringing centuries of prosperity and splendor to the region.

Eighteen canal towns in the province, such as Wuzhen, Xitang and Puyuan, have flourished alongside the water, where literary figures like Mao Dun and Feng Zikai once resided, and traditional customs such as silk weaving and stone carving thrived due to the presence of water.

In recent years, Wuzhen and Xitang have each welcomed millions of visitors annually, drawing global attention to the ancient towns in Jiaxing.

Wuzhen is celebrated for its authentic water town scenery and rich cultural heritage accumulated over millennia.

Although small in size, Wuzhen serves as a bridge between history and the future, China and the world. It is the birthplace of Mao Dun, where contemporary literature



In a traditional costume, a woman carries a birdcage in Puyuan.

seamlessly intertwines with the water-town culture. The Wuzhen Theater Festival brings together artists from around the world to revel in drama, while the World Internet Conference in Wuzhen sheds a technological light on the ancient town.

About 50 km from Wuzhen lies Xitang, famous for its abundance of timeworn bridges, alleys and corridors.

It is also known as the birthplace of Wuyue culture — the regional culture of Jiangnan (south of the lower reaches of the Yangtze River), including Shanghai, as well as Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Anhui provinces in eastern China.

Not far from Xitang is the country's "knitwear fashion capital" — Puyuan. The ancient town boasts a knitwear production chain ranging from design, manufacturing to sales and marketing after decades of development.

After years of preservation and development, the fashionable ancient town of Puyuan has opened to the public, showcasing stone bridges reflecting on the water's surface, pavilions lined up in harmony, and the lingering charm of Jiangnan region at every turn.

Since last year, Jiaxing has focused on the core ancient towns of Wuzhen, Xitang, Puyuan and Yanguan, stringing together all 18 ancient towns in the area through comprehensive efforts in conservation, restoration, and innovative development.



From left: A woman finds a peaceful moment with a book in water town Wuzhen, Zhejiang. Livestream hosts share their experience of the town. Wearing traditional clothing, a customer relaxes at a Wuzhen teahouse.