

## TRADE AND THE POWER OF THREE

China, Japan and South Korea vow to cooperate on supply chain snags

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## HALF SAY NO TO MORE TIME IN THE OFFICE

Survey finds 51% of city employees might quit if not allowed to work from home

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## CHINESE JET SETS A GLOBAL COURSE

First domestic airliner completes a year of commercial flights

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## Top cat is on track

Enthusiastic fans of the beloved Japanese manga character Doraemon greet a train themed on the robotic cat's new gadget "100% Friends-Calling Bell" as it arrives at Siu Hong Light Rail station in Tuen Mun yesterday.

The MTR Corporation and Hong Kong-based art studio AllRightsReserved have collaborated to bring the cat's charm to passengers' journeys with three themed trains on the Light Rail, East Rail and Airport Express lines. Photo: Sam Tsang



## ENVIRONMENT

# WASTE-CHARGING SCHEME PUT IN POLICY DUSTBIN FOR NOW

Decision to hold off on controversial plan is welcomed by some but green groups left disappointed

Ezra Cheung and Emily Hung

A controversial waste-charging scheme has been shelved after 20 years of deliberations and delays, with many of those who would have been hit hardest by the policy welcoming the decision while environmentalists expressed concerns that climate goals would be missed.

Government officials earlier said waste charging was among the key methods for Hong Kong to attain carbon neutrality by 2050, as garbage was the city's third most significant source of emissions.

But Deputy Chief Secretary Warner Cheuk Wing-hing yesterday said as many as 80 per cent of residents were opposed to a citywide roll-out of the scheme on August 1, since its implementation would put great pressure on the cost of living and businesses, especially the catering sector.

"I declare the implementation of the scheme will be put on hold from August 1 after the chief executive endorsed the secretary for environment and ecology's suggestion to do so," Cheuk told lawmakers at a panel meeting.

"We will report to a Legislative Council panel in the middle of 2025 on the work progress, the public's participation in municipal solid waste reduction,

and the view of the government," he said.

Cheuk said authorities would gazette a notice that abolished the August 1 launch date. "We have to be very practical when implementing a policy, it would be irresponsible if we pushed ahead with the scheme when the public was all unprepared and confused, what we do now is timely and appropriate," Cheuk said.

Asked whether officials needed to apologise or step down for failing to implement the policy, he said there was a valid reason behind each postponement or suspension, and the environment minister had been very committed throughout the process.

Secretary for Environment and Ecology Tse Chin-wan said the government remained committed to the goal of waste reduction, adding "our efforts over the past few months haven't been in vain".

Authorities would hand out 20 government-approved garbage

bags to 840,000 households in public rental flats each month between June and November this year, he said.

Private residential buildings could also receive the free bags if their property management companies signed a charter, promising to provide recycling facilities and handling the recyclables properly.

He said authorities would double the number of food waste recycling facilities and add 100 mobile collection spots across the city within a year.

Tse also promised to lengthen the operating hours of Green@Community recycling facilities and increase the number of collection spots from 200 to 800.

The government would also look into offering shopping vouchers to residents who actively recycled at those facilities.

Officials would also conduct further studies on how to optimise the scheme, including addressing concerns about potential legal responsibilities and extra work placed on sanitation workers, Tse added.

But he declined to provide a clear timetable for implementation of the scheme because authorities not only had to strengthen the recycling network but also look at the public's readiness for the measure.

First proposed in 2004, the multimillion-dollar scheme was passed in the legislature in 2021

and initially expected to take effect at the end of last year. The government pushed back the plan to April, citing a shortage of waste collectors over the Christmas and Lunar New Year holidays, and then postponed it to August because of the low readiness of the public. Instead, a two-month trial run was conducted in April at 14 locations.

Authorities spent HK\$177 million on promoting the scheme over the past three financial years and earmarked another HK\$581 million for this year, with expected revenue of HK\$1.79 billion one year after implementation.

About 170 million designated bags are in stock, and cost around HK\$74 million to produce. Retailers will stop selling unsold bags and be asked to return them to the government.

But Tse stressed the bags produced would not go to waste as they would be used for educational purposes.

At yesterday's panel meeting, lawmakers almost unanimously voiced support for the suspension, praising the government for listening to people's opinions.

Some urged the government to review whether it was a viable way to achieve waste reduction.

Social welfare lawmaker Tik Chi-yuen called the move a "practical decision" but questioned why it took so long for the government to realise the

challenges the public faced. "This is not the first day the government has heard about those opinions," he said. "If you had done the preparation work two years ago, we would have implemented the scheme smoothly now."

Nevertheless, those likely to have been hit hardest by the policy, including low-income groups, care home operators and the catering sector, welcomed the suspension, as they had not yet found a solution to mounting costs. They urged the government to enhance the recycling network, sort out uncertainties over execution, and offer subsidies to offset extra waste-handling costs.

Six environmental groups on Sunday night made a last-ditch appeal to Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu not to delay the scheme.

Environmental group Friends of the Earth yesterday said the decision to once again delay the scheme was very disappointing.

"Claims of the financial burden of waste charging on the community ignores the reality that taxpayers are currently subsidising big polluters for the cost of waste disposal and managing landfills," chief executive Jeffrey Hung Oi-shing said. "Delaying waste charging will only continue to saddle society with the environmental and economic costs and the opportunity cost of not developing a circular economy."

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## POLICY

# Pilot scheme aims at accountability for nation's officials

Blueprint reviewed by Politburo calls for more oversight as part of effort to curb financial risks

Frank Chen frank.chen@scmp.com

The Politburo reviewed a pilot accountability mechanism for financial de-risking yesterday, the latest offensive in Beijing's campaign to address deep-rooted hazards in the financial system and the crisis-plagued property sector.

The blueprint for how to keep financial actors like watchdogs, state-owned financial institutions and local cadres more accountable comes at a time Beijing has redoubled its efforts to shore up the real estate market and strengthen local regulatory regimes, while also trying to meet its annual economic growth target of around 5 per cent this year.

"[The plan] is aimed at entrenching the party's leadership and consolidating the responsibilities of regulators, financial institutions and local authorities in the financial field," according to a readout of the meeting from Xinhua.

At the meeting of the high-level Communist Party body, chaired by President Xi Jinping, cadres at all levels were urged to establish a "correct concept of performance" for implementing directives on financial supervision and risk management.

More stringent implementation, oversight and punishment were also encouraged to ensure financial regulation had teeth.

Xi declared risk prevention and mitigation an "eternal theme" governing all finance policy at October's twice-a-decade central financial work conference. He has also urged stronger oversight from the party against risks, both from home and abroad, as a pillar of his ambitions for China to become a "financial superpower".

Fu Weigang, executive president of the Shanghai Institute of Finance and Law think tank, said the new accountability system was Beijing's reminder that officials could not pursue growth at the cost of bringing risks to the financial system.

"For years, quite a lot of local officials ignored financial discipline as they pursued reckless growth or their own promotion and created or exacerbated risks," Fu said. "Also, local cadres usually aided and abetted unchecked loaning and other financial misconduct by local banks."

"The situation has become so rampant that Beijing feels the need to set up such an accountability mechanism to rein them in."

But Fu added that the emphasis on risk management did not run counter to Beijing's stance conveyed at Xi's meeting with business leaders last week.

"The accountability system is focused on financial risks, presumably the banking sector," Fu said.

"Beijing's pro-business drive is much broader and more comprehensive."

"Local officials, while told to control risks, are also being mandated by Beijing to optimise the business environment."

Since 2023, Beijing has overhauled the financial regulatory structure, creating the Central Financial Commission for direct party oversight and state organs like the National Financial Regulatory Administration to bolster existing institutions.

The role of the central bank has been remoulded, and lenders ordered to better serve national strategies and the real economy while watching for risks.

These changes have been made—in part—to address threats to financial stability, as distress in the property sector and high debts have ensnared developers, banks and local governments.

Last week, Premier Li Qiang said at a meeting on the financial work of local governments that the reform of their risk management systems must be completed quickly to create an overlapping effect with similar efforts from Beijing, and that local cadres must focus on systemic financial risks in all circumstances.

Ding Zhijie, director of the research centre of the State Administration of Foreign Exchange, said China had to promote financial de-risking and safeguard security as the bottom line—particularly as the country opened wider to the world.

"We need to guide financial institutions to help defuse the risk of [local government] financing vehicles through debt restructuring, swaps or other tools," he said at the Tsinghua PBCSF Global Finance Forum in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province yesterday.

"Financial institutions need to ensure policy implementation and help build a new development model for the property market."

## DEVELOPMENT

# Proposal to make South Lantau an ecological, sustainable holiday spot

Edith Lin edith.lin@scmp.com

South Lantau will be developed into a destination drawing thousands of people every day on holidays to raise public awareness on environmental conservation and boost the local economy, authorities have said.

The Development Bureau yesterday rolled out a proposal to turn four rural areas on Lantau Island into an "eco-recreation corridor" featuring "ecologically and naturally based sustainable" recreational and educational resources and programmes.

The plan was revealed a day before a two-month public consultation, with the bureau brushing aside concerns about damage to the environment.

"[Preliminary] technical assessments on ecology, environment, traffic and infrastructure were carried out to confirm that

the proposals will not have adverse impacts on South Lantau," the bureau said in a paper submitted to the Legislative Council. The government added that it would conduct detailed technical assessments as it took individual projects forward.

Cheung Sha, where Hong Kong's longest beach is located, will become the recreational hub of South Lantau with accommodation, such as beach campsites, under the government proposal.

The 2km beach in Lower Cheung Sha will feature a new water sports and recreation centre and a barrier-free walkway. More catering and water sports rental facilities are also expected to be stationed in the area.

Hillside in Upper Cheung Sha will be developed into an "adventure" holiday area, offering rope adventures, uphill chairlifts and accommodation.

Shek Pik village will include a heritage trail along the city's

third largest reservoir to showcase the history of the settlement's relocation so the massive water catchment site could be built.

The existing catchwater channel will be widened to feature artistic installations designed to blend in with the environment.

Shui Hau, which has a rare natural sandflat landscape and is an important breeding ground for endangered Chinese horseshoe crabs, will have an education centre to teach the public about ecology and rural culture.

The government also suggested the construction of a walkway along the shore of the sandflat, to stop visitors walking on it.

Pui O will be developed to feature a walkway and glamping sites to educate the public on biodiversity and ecology.

The bureau also suggested boosting public transport and the introduction of ferry services by building a pier at Cheung Sha, as

well as considering crowd-control measures, such as an online reservation scheme, to ensure a good travelling experience without damage to the environment.

The administration said it expected an extra 4,000 to 6,000 visitors would travel to South Lantau every day during holiday periods after the work was done. An average of about 2,700 people visited the four areas every day during holiday periods in 2022.

The government said it had explored a variety of approaches to implement its South Lantau proposal, such as inviting the private sector's participation. It added that some operators with the right experience had expressed an interest.

"This will not only introduce market creativity and resources, but also reduce the government's financial burden," the bureau said.

"[We] will continue to liaise with the potential private devel-

opers or investors and further consider different approaches and their financial viability with a view to formulating suitable implementation plans for the proposals."

But Roy Ng Hei-man, campaign officer for the Conservancy Association, said he

had reservations about the development of South Lantau. He noted that Pui O and Shui Hau were confirmed to have high ecological value in an earlier government study.

Ng added he was particularly concerned about the sandflat walkway at Pui O, whose

construction could affect the hydrology of the area and damage its ecology.

Ng said campsites were quite common in South Lantau but their operators were often accused of unauthorised landfilling and poor sewage treatment that damaged the environment. He appealed to authorities to provide details or even set no-go areas as they developed campsites.

Ng added he expected a Cheung Sha ferry service would pass through waters where finless porpoises were seen and raised concerns about how the marine ecosystem might be affected.

But executive director Timothy Chui Ting-pong of the Hong Kong Tourism Association said he was confident the government could strike a balance between development and conservation.

He said the city needed new attractions and could use its advantages of natural scenery to entice tourists and locals.



Note: The proposal is subject to further study. Source: Development Bureau

DAY BY DAY

MY TAKE - ZHOU XIN

Why relocation of rebel leader's statue is stirring online debate

In today's era where social stability is an important goal, the actions of the country's former peasant heroes are coming under scrutiny

Until a few days ago, a huge statue on the road from downtown Beijing to the Great Wall in Badaling could not be missed. It honoured Li Zicheng, the peasant revolt leader who broke into the Forbidden City on April 25, 1644, and forced the last Ming dynasty emperor to commit suicide.

Li's bronze statue is considered a contemporary piece of art. Standing atop a tall granite stone foundation on a busy intersection, it was not hard to guess that Li must be an important historical figure for China.

But the landmark statue of Li, who is also known as Dashing King, was quietly removed last week, with the official reason given as the need for road improvements.

The spirit of revolting against a powerful yet decadent dynasty lives on through China's revolutionary history. As Mao said, 'where there is oppression, there is resistance'

It will be relocated hundreds of kilometres away at a tourist spot in the inland province of Shaanxi, where Li was born and started his revolt against the mighty Ming dynasty.

While the relocation received little coverage from China's official media, it stirred interest and debate on the internet over whether the country should treat rebels such as Li as heroes.

For the People's Republic, which was founded in 1949 after a Communist Party victory against the corrupt Kuomintang regime, rebel leaders such as Li are traditionally enshrined as heroes.

Chairman Mao Zedong was a well-known fan of Li. Mao had shown sympathy for Li and other rebels in Chinese history, even the fictional ones, as he echoed their heroic actions to rise up against injustice and repression.

The spirit of revolting against a powerful yet decadent dynasty lives on through China's revolutionary history.

As Mao said, "where there is oppression, there is resistance". Mao tried to draw lessons from Li's short-lived rule. On the eve of victory for Mao's communist revolution, when his army was ready to enter Beijing, the chairman urged his comrades to avoid the same fate as Li, whose regime in Beijing lasted only 42 days.

Mao was so interested in Li that he even gave his personal blessing for novelist Yao Xueyin to complete a masterpiece on the rebel leader. The novel later won the country's most prestigious state-backed literature award, but for some critics, it went too far in glorifying Li.

Li is not the only peasant rebel leader to be endorsed in China. Mainland history textbooks pay tribute to peasant uprisings from the first large revolt led by Cheng Shen and Wu Guang in 209 BC to the Taiping rebellion led by Hong Xiuquan in the mid-19th century.

While most of these uprisings ended in bloodbath and destruction, and failed to change China's social structure, the act of challenging injustice alone was enough to have them hailed as a "progressive force" in history.

However, in today's era where social stability is an important goal, the actions of China's peasant heroes such as Li are coming under scrutiny. Is it really righteous to revolt against perceived repression and injustice? Is it justified for people such as Li, a sacked low-ranking officer from the dynasty's post service, to take up arms against the government's army?

These questions can be raised in a historical context but the answers may still have implications for the real world. The message from the relocation of Li's statue, therefore, could be political as it could be seen as a slight negation of the daring spirit of challenging authority.

This is a marked departure from the days when revolution was blindly followed. In the most extreme cases, lines like "revolution is no crime, to rebel is justified" were chanted by young people during the Cultural Revolution, which unleashed chaos on Chinese society. But on the other hand, it is still unthinkable for China to officially brand people such as Li as villains or troublemakers as they are still part of the legitimacy of revolution.

Therefore, the authorities may have decided the best way to deal with Li's statue was not to destroy it, but to move it to a less obvious place.

HARRY'S VIEW ON WORKING FROM HOME > A6



VIDEO SPOTLIGHT

Japanese spoon could help satisfy the craving for salt

A new Japanese invention claims to help people reduce their salt consumption. The so-called electric spoon works by passing a weak electric charge to the tongue, drawing in the taste of salt, thus eliminating the need

for users to add extra salt to their food. Excess sodium intake has been linked to various health problems, including high blood pressure and strokes. According to the World Health Organization, the average adult in Japan consumes 10 grams of salt daily. The spoon was awarded the Ig Nobel Nutrition Prize, which honours unusual and whimsical research. The device is being sold for US\$127.



QR code for more information

AUCTION OF TRADITIONAL VEHICLE REGISTRATION MARKS

Date: 1 June 2024 (Saturday) | Place: Meeting Room N201, L2 New Wing, Hong Kong Convention & Exhibition Centre, Wanchai

Table listing 170 vehicle registration marks for auction, including numbers like YY 162, WT 926, AA 361, etc.

Time: 9:25 a.m. | 170 marks will be put up for auction in the following order:

Table listing 180 vehicle registration marks for auction, including numbers like WA 148, BS 9887, UJ 610, etc.

Time: 2:25 p.m. | 180 marks will be put up for auction in the following order:

\* Not Transferable. Note: Successful bidders are required to complete the registration of purchaser procedures, and pay the auction price through Easy Pay System (EPS) or by crossed cheque immediately.

POSTS FROM THE PAST



United States President Donald Trump has warned tariffs on Chinese goods might still rise "very substantially" as he said Washington was not yet ready for a trade deal with Beijing.



Tensions between China and Vietnam are escalating as both traded accusations over the sinking of a Vietnamese vessel near a controversial oil rig in a disputed area of the South China Sea.



The Hang Seng Index has surged to its highest point in nearly eight months as bullish investors charged into the market after US consumer confidence unexpectedly rose the most in six years.



Away from Legco crossfire for almost a decade, Allen Lee Peng-fei pulled few punches in his battle with legislative friends and foes questioning his decision to go off the air.

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LEADING THE NEWS

INFRASTRUCTURE

Priority for slopes at crucial points to cut landslide risks

News comes as Legco reveals cost of improving drainage in some districts has risen to HK\$9.5b

Vivian Au vivian.au@scmp.com

Authorities have inspected about 500 slopes next to sole and busy access points to identify crucial points to prioritise for landslide prevention work.

Engineers yesterday said they would carry out further inspections and maintenance of drainage systems on 1 to 2 per cent of the slopes by the end of this month in an effort to minimise the risk from storms.

The news came as Legislative Council papers, in a related development, revealed that the estimated HK\$8 billion budget allocated to pay for improved drainage in some districts had gone up by 18.7 per cent to HK\$9.5 billion.

The emergency maintenance works at Yiu Hing Road will hopefully be done by the end of next month

LAWRENCE SHUM, DEPUTY HEAD, GEOTECHNICAL ENGINEERING OFFICE, HONG KONG ISLAND

Lawrence Shum Ka-Wah, the deputy head of the Geotechnical Engineering Office on Hong Kong Island, said staff would prioritise man-made and natural slopes where problems would have greater impact on people's lives, such as sole access points.

"Around 1 to 2 per cent of the 500 slopes needed maintenance work, including ones on Shek O Road, South Lantau Road, New Clear Water Bay Road and so on," he said.

"It is not possible to guarantee that no landslides will happen after the maintenance work is done - it is hoped that the impact of any landslides will be reduced."

He highlighted illegal work or unauthorised construction on slopes, including at Redhill Peninsula in Tai Tam, posed safety risks.



Repair work near Yiu Tung Estate in Shau Kei Wan, which was affected by a landslide last September, continues yesterday. Photo: Eugene Lee

Half of the homeowners at Redhill Peninsula were found to have illegal structures after what the government said was a "once-in-500-years rainstorm" in September caused landslides.

Shum said that unauthorised structures in the area were under investigation by other authorities.

The department has also improved its early warning system for landslides with the launch of an alert advisory system earlier this month.

"When heavy rain persists in certain areas yet not reaching the landslide warning level, the department will issue a special advisory to list areas with higher risks to alert the public," Shum said.

The September downpour triggered major landslides in eastern parts of Hong Kong such as Shau Kei Wan and Shek O.

Massive boulders and debris blocked off Yiu Hing Road in Shau Kei Wan and Shek O's only access road was left unusable.

"The emergency maintenance works at Yiu Hing Road will hopefully be done by the end of next month," Shum said.

Debris, including a boulder the size of a double-decker bus, equivalent to the volume of an Olympic pool swimming pool, crashed onto Yiu Hing Road, which leads to Sai Wan Ho, and caused huge disruption to people's lives.

Shek O residents were cut off from the city after heavy rain forced the closure of the only road in and out.

The downpour also triggered Hong Kong's longest-ever black rainstorm warning.

The weather left drivers stranded in their cars and some shopping centres flooded.

The increased cost of carrying out the drainage work in some areas will be discussed by lawmakers today.

The improvement work includes projects in Mong Kok, Wong Tai Sin, Kwun Tong, Kowloon City, Eastern district, Sha Tin, Sai Kung and Tai Po.

"The latest estimated price tag has included inflation and other costs," a source told the Post.

The work is expected to start in the third quarter and will be completed in stages from the first quarter of 2028 to the third quarter of 2030.

DIPLOMACY



Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol and Premier Li Qiang take their seats at the trilateral summit in Seoul. Photo: AFP

PLEDGE TO WORK TOGETHER TO KEEP SUPPLY CHAINS STABLE

China, Japan and South Korea summit also discusses Beijing's concerns over regional security

Alyssa Chen alyssa.chen@scmp.com

China, Japan and South Korea pledged to boost cooperation to keep supply chains stable and to work together on denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula during their first trilateral summit since 2019.

Premier Li Qiang, South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida discussed issues including the economy and trade at the meeting in Seoul yesterday, as well as people-to-people exchanges, public health, and regional peace and stability.

The dialogue had been suspended for more than four years because of the Covid-19 pandemic and strained ties between the neighbours.

In a joint statement, the three

leaders said they would "continue to work to ensure a global level playing field to foster a free, open, non-discriminatory, transparent, inclusive and predictable trade and investment environment".

"We also reaffirm our commitment to keeping markets open, strengthening supply chain cooperation and avoiding supply chain disruptions," the statement said, adding that there was a consensus to continue communication on export controls.

The importance of a stable supply chain had featured prominently in a meeting between Li and Yoon on Sunday. Noting that the two countries' supply chains were "deeply intertwined", Li told Yoon that they should oppose turning economic and trade issues into political or security ones and work together to maintain stable supply chains, according to a foreign ministry readout.

The summit comes as Beijing is pushing back against tightening US export rules that target China's semiconductor industry over national security concerns.

Japan and South Korea have strengthened ties with each other and with the US in recent years and play a central role in Washington's strategy to deny China access to advanced chip-making equipment and technology.

Beijing is also uneasy over the closer security cooperation between Washington, Tokyo and Seoul. Japan and South Korea are poised to sign up for Pillar 2 of the Aukus security partnership that promises access to sensitive knowledge and military expertise across a range of cutting-edge technologies.

During the trilateral talks, Li expressed Beijing's concern over Tokyo and Seoul joining US efforts

to form a bloc aimed at containing China, stressing the need for "honest dialogue" to build greater mutual trust and resolve doubts.

"We must uphold the spirit of strategic autonomy and maintain our bilateral relations. We need to promote multipolarity in the world and oppose the formation of blocs or camps," Li was quoted as saying by Associated Press.

Zhang Yun, an associate professor of international relations at Nigata University in Japan, said the emphasis on supply chain stability "could be about tacit non-compliance from Tokyo and Seoul when it comes to US-led efforts to use trade protectionism to achieve its so-called economic security against China".

He said the US' economic pressure on China, such as increased tariffs and export controls with other countries, could harm Japan and South Korea

since the supply chains in East Asia were highly integrated and interdependent.

Zhu Feng, executive dean of Nanjing University's School of International Studies, said trilateral cooperation between the neighbouring countries had "reached a crossroads" amid the US' strategic competition policy towards China.

He said it was politically significant that the trilateral summit had resumed.

"The issue now is to what extent Tokyo and Seoul will follow Washington's strategy - will they completely follow the US lead, or will they still maintain some of their own interests and strategy?" Zhu said. "This is something we need to observe going forward."

The statement also acknowledged the importance of denuclearisation on the Korean peninsula and stressed the willingness to make positive efforts for a political settlement of the Korean peninsula issue.

POLITICS

Outspoken press department chief made vice-minister

Kawala Xie kawala.xie@scmp.com

Outspoken diplomat Hua Chunying, who has been heading the foreign ministry's press department, has been promoted to vice-minister, Beijing announced yesterday.

The promotion makes Hua, 54, who has been a foreign ministry spokeswoman since 2012, the youngest of the five foreign vice-ministers and the only woman among them.

She was promoted to assistant foreign minister and the director general of the ministry's press department in 2021. According to the ministry website, she still leads the press department, although it

is not clear if she retains this post following her promotion.

Hua has been seen as embodying China's "Wolf Warrior" diplomacy, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic when she called on the United States to open up its lab in Fort Detrick, Maryland, for investigation in response to accusations that a lab in Wuhan was the origin of the virus.

Hua joined X, formerly Twitter, in 2020 as part of Beijing's wider push to promote its own narrative, and has some 2.5 million followers on the platform.

On X, she often blasts Western officials over their criticism of China. In 2020, she exchanged a series of tweets with then-US State Department spokeswoman

Morgan Ortugas, rejecting the accusation that China's Covid-19 policies lacked transparency.

As US-China relations have worsened in recent years, Hua has often been seen attacking US policies, including over the Israel-Gaza war. Last month, she posted several photos and video screenshots criticising what appeared to be a police crackdown on large-scale US campus protests against support for Israel.

"Remember how US officials reacted when these protests happened elsewhere," she said in one post that appeared to show video of police arrests.

She has often accused the US of having a "double standard", comparing the US Capitol riot on January 6, 2021 with the storming

of the Legislative Council building in Hong Kong in 2019 - asking why the US called the protesters on Capitol Hill "rioters" while those in Hong Kong were deemed "democratic heroes".

She has also accused the US of using the alleged overcapacity issue as "a new narrative trap against China".

Washington and its allies are ramping up measures to target what they call Chinese products flooding the global market.

Hua joined the ministry in 1992 and has held several diplomatic roles, serving as counsellor in the department of European affairs in 2010. Her overseas stints included a term at the Chinese mission to the European Union in Brussels.



Hua Chunying faces the media at a press conference in Beijing.

ENVIRONMENT

Waste-charging saga exposes faults in policy execution, analysts say

Ng Kang-chung kc.ng@scmp.com

Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu's administration has won praise for being politically wise in suspending a controversial waste-charging scheme amid opposition from various sectors but analysts have also warned the saga has exposed inadequacies in policy execution.

Veteran China watcher Professor Lau Siu-kai yesterday also said he believed Beijing might seek to micromanage more and could take a closer look at the government's opinion gathering and analysis ability in the days to come.

At a Legislative Council panel meeting yesterday, Deputy Chief Secretary Warner Cheuk Wing-hing said the waste-charging scheme would not be implemented on August 1 as scheduled.

The decision was made, Cheuk said, after various surveys revealed the public had huge reservations, pointing to limited coverage of recycling facilities.

Lau said: "I think the incident will dent the government's authority a little bit. But I do not think it will be too severe since the scheme has not yet been implemented. The government might gain some points because of its willingness to change course amid public opposition."

Lau, a consultant for semi-official Beijing think tank the Chinese Association of Hong Kong and Macau Studies, also said the central government would probably advise Lee to tread carefully even on seemingly "trivial" practical issues to prevent them from morphing into big political trouble.

Chan Wai-keung, a political scientist from the Hong Kong Community College of Polytechnic University, said shelving the scheme seemed to be the wisest and most politically cost effective way to handle the issue.

"It is not going to hurt John Lee's governance or authority much. He does not own the policy, so to speak, but only inherited it from the previous administration," Chan said.

He said he also believed the

government had planned to drop the scheme much earlier, noting a newspaper article by pro-Beijing heavyweight Lo Man-tuen last month. Lo called for the scheme to be scrapped, saying it had been raised by the "radical opposition camp" back in 2005.

But Chan stressed the saga showed an "execution gap" among officials. "Action is the key to all success," Chan said. "Having smart minds to come up with good ideas or policies is not enough. If we cannot put them into action to achieve tangible results, they are just nothing."

He cited several practical measures in recent years that ended up degenerating into a fiasco.

Last month, the examination authorities were forced to give up using an app they had developed at a cost of HK\$9 million to check attendance records of candidates sitting university entrance exams after being hit by a series of glitches.

Authorities were forced to push back implementation of new electronic tunnel toll payments at the eleventh hour last year after criticism from the

public on the rushed launch and red tape in processing motorists' applications for special sensor tags.

Chan also accused officials of a lack of skills in explaining policies. "Officials seem to rattle off comments without an ounce of thought behind them, with no concept of how their comments may be perceived," Chan said.

He pointed to Theresa Wu King-yan, an assistant director for the Environmental Protection Department, who caused a public-relations nightmare in January after suggesting people "saw" a broomstick into two pieces so it would fit in the

designated rubbish bags because HK\$11 - the price of a waste disposal sticker for large items - seemed a bit much to pay.

Environment minister Tse Hin-wan later explained that the mop handle could be recycled.

Chan said: "It also showed that such a senior official in charge of the scheme was also confused as to why the government rolled out the policy. It is not about money. It is about reducing and recycling waste."

Director of the department Samuel Chui Ho-kwong also stepped into controversy over his remarks that were perceived as blaming people for refusing to cooperate.

He said if residents were willing to learn about the policy they would figure their way out of the confusion. "If you want to make it clear, you will. If you don't, then nothing will help," Chui said in January.

Chan said officials did not seem to have the ability to use the right words to avoid misinterpretation.

The waste-charging scheme, first floated about 20 years ago, has been repeatedly pushed back. The

HK\$11 Cost of a special sticky label for large or oddly shaped items being disposed of by residents under the government's halted waste-charging scheme

government originally intended to launch it at the end of last year but the date was postponed to April 1.

After admitting the public remained confused about the details, authorities moved the citywide start date back to August 1.

The scheme earlier also caused concerns among care homes for the elderly, patient advocacy groups and the restaurant industry over a possible rise in costs.

Dr Yau Wing-kwong, chief executive of the Environmental Association green group, agreed it was politically unwise to push ahead with the scheme as scheduled.

"If you cause a mess after pressing ahead, it can cause more harm than good politically," he said. Chinese University political scientist Dr Hung Wing-lok, however, believed the abrupt scrapping of the scheme could cost the government politically because some people might think it had not planned well enough beforehand.

"It is obvious that they need more channels to listen to real voices from the bottom in the future," Hung said.

## FOCUS

## C919 sets course for foreign markets

China's domestically produced airliner has already made sales to carriers at home, but now it must navigate the procedures for certification in Europe

Frank Chen  
frank.chen@scmp.com

Near Shanghai's Pudong Airport, China's busiest gateway for international aviation, a husk of a jet sits forlorn on a slope. It has been immobile for years, gathering dust and rust, only able to look on with longing as modern jets – mostly of Western make – roar overhead.

This model of the ill-fated Y-10 – the country's first attempt at a home-grown airliner – has spent far more time on display at the main assembly site of Commercial Aircraft Corp of China (Comac) than it ever did gliding above the clouds.

In its brief life cycle, the Y-10 rode the early ups and downs of China's aviation industry in the 1970s and 80s, a volatile period after Beijing first broached the idea of developing a commercial jet. That experiment ended in no purchase orders, with the display model in Shanghai one of only two Y-10s still in existence.

But the story of the quest for a home-grown jet continues at the production facility nearby, where units of the C919 – the Y-10's spiritual descendant – roll off the line. More than 30 years after funding constraints and design flaws clipped the wings of the Y-10, a new generation of airliners is bringing a decades-long ambition into reach.

The single-aisle C919, 15 years in the making, can carry 192 passengers for trips of up to 5,555km. Since its maiden commercial voyage in May 2023, it has burnished China's credentials as a global player in aviation manufacturing, a position befitting its status as the world's second-largest market for air travel.

Comac still hopes for 2025 [EU] certification, but there are ... discrepancies in standards

JIE YUWEN, CIVIL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION OF CHINA

But this auspicious start, from domestic certification to the beginning of commercial operations, is likely to be the easiest leg of a long journey to international relevance.

Many obstacles remain before the C919 and Comac can climb to the same stratospheric success as rivals Airbus and Boeing. Airworthiness certification by foreign authorities and proving the plane's profitability were the two major milestones yet to be reached, analysts said.

"Comac has a lot of convincing to do," said Li Hanming, an aviation analyst and founder of a transport consultancy that operates in the United States.

"The best way to showcase the C919's virtues and viability for the global aviation industry is to let Chinese airlines run it well."

Aside from some early stumbles, the C919 has had a largely smooth take-off period. The jet is one year into its commercial run with China Eastern Airlines, with four aircraft flying domestic routes between Shanghai and three major cities. As of early May, the model had carried 245,000 passengers on 1,800 flights.

Building on the momentum from the plane's international debut at the Singapore Airshow in February, the C919 is gearing up for its first commercial flight beyond mainland China: a chartered flight from Hong Kong to Shanghai set for Saturday.

For Beijing, the C919 is a source of patriotic pride and a symbol of success in advanced research and manufacturing.

It was 10 years ago, almost to the day, when President Xi Jinping toured Comac's Shanghai headquarters. Sitting in the pilot's seat of a model C919 cockpit, he



exhorted a scrum of pilots and engineers to do their utmost to craft a modern Chinese jet.

"In the past, some said the best choice for us is to rent [passenger aircraft] from others, and that the last option is to make our own," Xi said. "But we have reversed this notion."

The next decade saw more than 100,000 engineers and workers brought together on the C919. They came from 36 tertiary institutions and 200 businesses across China, with total investment reaching hundreds of billions of yuan.

Political significance aside, Beijing's pursuit of its own airliner also makes commercial sense, as it can use its huge market and state capacity to ensure the C919 is viable.

More than one-fifth of the world's new planes would fly in domestic airspace between now and 2041, Beijing-based Cinda Securities noted in a report last year. New plane demand in China will hit 9,284 during that time, worth about US\$1.47 trillion.

Comac's own estimates put the country's demand for narrow-body jets between now and 2041 at 6,288, a supply with a potential US\$749.3 billion in value.

Plans are afoot to supercharge production as orders pour in. The three biggest state-owned carriers – China Eastern, Air China and China Southern Airlines – have already struck deals with Comac for 100 C919s each.

To expand on its domestic success, Comac has embarked on a quest for international adoption, with work ongoing to obtain airworthiness certification for the C919 from the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA).

Once endorsed, Comac can pitch its plane to foreign buyers as an alternative to the traditional duopoly of Airbus and Boeing. They face challenges in meeting global demand – the EU's Airbus is struggling to ramp up its output,

and US-based Boeing is in a tailspin following a bout of high-profile accidents.

"We have aimed for 2025 to get the all-clear from the EASA," said Jie Yuwen, deputy director of the Civil Aviation Administration of China's (CAAC) Airworthiness Certification Centre in Shanghai.

He signed off on the C919's domestic certification papers, clearing the way for it to fly fare-charging flights a year ago. He was speaking last month, just after returning from the EASA office in Cologne, Germany.

Gu Xin, director of the centre, also confirmed the 2025 timeline. "We very much look forward to certification next year. We are working hard, as this requires cooperation from both sides," Gu said.

"Certification from the EASA means identifying [if] there is any safety problem with the C919 and putting everything on the table for discussion. We are confident the plane, having been certified to fly in China, is also safe to fly elsewhere."

Gu said he and his colleagues had meticulously reviewed more than 6,100 reports related to the C919's domestic certification.

The goal of overseas certification by 2025 was an ambitious one – perhaps too ambitious, some industry observers said.

Mayur Patel, head of Asia for OAG Aviation, a global air travel data provider based in Singapore, said the EU's certification process was stringent.

"It could be a bit optimistic to expect the all-clear any time soon, but I would be cautiously optimistic that the C919 will ultimately be certified [by the EASA]," he said.

Li, the aviation analyst, said Comac needed to assure the EU it had benchmarked the C919's safety performance and redundancy systems against internationally recognised standards for its domestic certification.

"I'd say the EU's validation can be granted in around 2026 if the EASA is satisfied that the CAAC adopted the same rules – so the Europeans won't need to do all the tests themselves – and if there is trust and good communication," Li said.

"The EASA is watching closely to see how well the C919 is faring in daily operations with airlines in China."

But recent reports suggest the C919 is still under a cloud of suspicion.

Citing the EASA, Reuters said the Chinese jet was too new to be approved by 2026 and that the EU watchdog would take "whatever time is needed" to give the airliner the go-ahead.

Jie has confirmed that the 2025 goal remained unchanged, though he admitted the obstacles were numerous.

"Comac still hopes for 2025 certification, but there are some

discrepancies in standards and methodology between the CAAC and EASA," he said.

He revealed that China did not have equivalent rules to Europe regarding supercooled water droplets, volcanic clouds and new design elements that identified, compiled and mitigated human errors – but added that the CAAC was updating its safety protocols to include them.

"Comac may need to tweak or optimise the C919's design accordingly, and that may entail more time and communication with the EASA," Jie said.

Noting that aviation administrations in China, the EU and US adopted similar standards, Gu argued that the EASA would have no reason to defer approval if it could not find an issue. "There are overlapping general provisions and assessment criteria in the three jurisdictions," he said. "Our standards are not that dissimilar to those in the West."

Chinese aviation officials concede that courting foreign airlines could be a more daunting task than convincing the EU regulator.

Gu said the threshold for a plane series to be commercially successful was deliveries of 1,000 units or more. "Technical success is no guarantee of marketability. Even for the A320 and 737, the cash cows for Airbus and Boeing, some variants never sold well," he said. "Commercial success is rare."

John Grant, founder of London-based JG Aviation Consultants, said airlines had yet to develop interest in the C919.

"The C919 will have some appeal for regional airlines in China, but it has little attraction to those outside the region who are committed to either Boeing or Airbus," he said. "For airlines, the choice of aircraft is a fundamental consideration, the most important cost element. They require complete confidence in an aircraft type and its performance, operational support and flexibility across a range of sector lengths."

Li, the aviation analyst, said the limited numbers of C919s meant higher flying and service costs compared to mainstream models.

"In the foreseeable future, only Comac and a smaller number of third-party entities can service the jet, but Airbus and Boeing run sprawling maintenance networks worldwide," he said. "Comac may need time to establish service centres in Europe."

Some analysts also pointed to shortcomings in the C919's design vis-à-vis its competitors.

Shukor Yusof, founder of Endau Analytics in Singapore, said there were concerns over the C919's comparatively high use of steel over composite materials, which could make it heavier and less fuel-efficient than Western

some of their fleet and the assessment, negotiation and procurement of new [planes] take time. The C919 is on their radar," he said.

Comac has attempted to make such a transition as smooth as possible, with intentional design decisions to model the C919 after the A320 to ensure its jet is marketable and easy to operate.

The cockpit layout is directly inspired by the A320, and a pilot can manoeuvre the plane using a sidestick controller. Cabin crew qualified to operate on the A320 and Boeing 737 will only need three days of training to work on the C919, according to Comac.

"The consideration is [for the C919] to feel instantly familiar, so foreign pilots can adapt quickly," said Jie of the Shanghai Airworthiness Certification Centre.

China Eastern pilot Xiao Cheng said steering the plane was like "driving a car with automatic transmission". He has 500 hours of flight time in the jet.

"The sidestick is integrated with multiple controls and is as responsive as the steering wheel of a car. The pilot can get all critical information at a glance from the five 15-inch LCD screens mounted across the cockpit," Xiao said. "It's very hi-tech."

But further complicating the C919's international prospects is Beijing's desire to reduce the plane's proportion of imported parts. Talk of a fully home-grown passenger jet echoes discussions of the ship of Theseus – the wooden vessel of Greek myth, which in a famed thought experiment had its pieces replaced one by one until nothing of the "original" remained.

In this scenario, the C919's engine, landing gear and avionics – all sourced from Western suppliers, including GE and Honeywell of the US and Safran of France – would be progressively swapped out for indigenous alternatives in a long, arduous process of intensive research and development.

Aero Engine Corporation of China is positioning its CJ-1000 engine as a future replacement for the LEAP-1C, which Comac currently procures from CFM, a GE-Safran joint venture. But at present this idea is little more than academic, given the yawning gap between China and the West in advanced turbofan engines.

Jie admitted it would be many years before this conversion could be completed, as changes to major components would require recertification. Analysts also say a higher proportion of domestically produced parts may affect the plane's overseas prospects.

But there may be no other choice, given Washington's penchant for onerous trade and technology restrictions. Caught in the middle of a geopolitical rivalry, the C919 is vulnerable to unpredictable supply chain adjustments, and total grounding or a full stop in production could occur if the West were to curtail exports.

"For any country, aviation technology is the cachet of R&D and so strategic it will not be exported or shared. You can't buy it or swap your market for tech transfers. There are few countries in the world capable of developing and launching aircraft or engines," Gu said. "We have for decades relied on perseverance. There are slogans plastered at C919's assembly facility at Comac – long-term efforts for long-term research and long-term work for long-term contributions – and these words sum up our fighting spirit."

Patel said this was a good time for the C919 to try nibbling away at the two heavyweights' market share, as Airbus faced a production bottleneck as carriers reassessed the safety of Boeing's 737.

"European airlines are retiring

Illustration: Lau Ka-kuen

Airlines in Asia are already deliberating on it as a potential addition to their fleets

SHUKOR YUSOF, FOUNDER OF ENDAU ANALYTICS

"Some airlines in Asia are already deliberating on it as a potential addition to their fleets. Asia is more likely to be C919's proving ground than Europe. I would not be surprised if a major airline outside China places an order within the next 24 months," Yusof said. "Overall, the aircraft flies well, is quiet and offers value for money."

In Europe, executives with Irish budget carrier Ryanair have repeatedly affirmed their interest in the Chinese jet since signing a memorandum of understanding with Comac in 2011.

Patel said this was a good time for the C919 to try nibbling away at the two heavyweights' market share, as Airbus faced a production bottleneck as carriers reassessed the safety of Boeing's 737.

"European airlines are retiring

A flight attendant serves passengers on the first commercial flight of the C919 from Shanghai to Beijing. Photos: AFP, Frank Chen



Jie Yuwen and Gu Xin, the deputy director and director of the CAAC's Shanghai certification centre.

6,288

Comac predicts there will be demand for this many narrowbody jets between now and 2041 in China, worth some US\$750 billion

# AI and deep tech start-ups show bright spot for global investors

**HSBC's three-day immersive innovation programme in California focuses on the transformative impact of dynamic firms on global business**

High interest rates, geopolitical and recessionary concerns in recent years have weighed on the number of private companies launching initial public offerings (IPO) – where they issue shares for sale to the public for the first time on financial markets – and weak exit market conditions have also slowed global venture funding.

However, according to the international policy forum Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the global economy is proving resilient, with worldwide gross domestic product growth of 3.1 per cent projected for this year – maintaining last year's pace – followed by a further pickup to 3.2 per cent next year. These predictions come as inflation continues to ease, and private sector confidence is improving.

The same optimism is reflected in a survey carried out in March and April by HSBC Global Research, which shows that nearly 80 per cent of global investors expect a pickup in venture capital (VC) and private equity activities over the next 12 months.

Last month global consulting firm EY reported that, for more than a decade, private markets have enjoyed a remarkable period of sustained growth, with only 2022 recording a slight drop. It said assets under management had risen from US\$9.7 trillion in 2012 to an estimated \$24.4 trillion by the end of 2023.

And despite the broader market headwinds, 70 per cent of investors in listed tech companies plan to maintain their tech sector weightings, while 16 per cent intend to increase their stakes, according to the HSBC survey.

Many VC experts remain optimistic that entrepreneurs with the right ideas and plans, especially in advanced technologies – including artificial intelligence (AI), where computer systems can copy intelligent human behaviour, industrial data, and robotics – offer enormous growth potential.

AI tops the agenda of many conversations, especially generative artificial intelligence (gen AI), which leverages machine learning to create new content and accomplish an increasing number of tasks.

In collaboration with HSBC Innovation Banking, HSBC Global Private Banking curated a three-day "All-in on Innovation" programme from May 15 to 17 in California, the United States, offering ultra-high-net-worth (UHNW) clients in Asia, who are passionate about the technology sector, a great opportunity to connect with top venture capitalists, promising start-ups and like-minded entrepreneurs. They were given insights on how to thrive in the era of rapid technological change and gain inspiration from tech innovation.



Lok Yim, regional head of Global Private Banking, Asia-Pacific, HSBC, says the "All-in on Innovation" programme in California has helped its wealthy clients to exchange ideas with like-minded investors and gain inspiration from the tech community.

Lok Yim, regional head of Global Private Banking, Asia-Pacific, HSBC, said: "We are pleased to partner with HSBC Innovation Banking to curate this exclusive platform for our UHNW clients to exchange ideas with like-minded investors and draw inspiration from the authentic ingenuity that defines the tech community."

"Our clients choose HSBC because of our profound understanding of the market and our alignment with their sophisticated personal and business needs. This programme epitomises our unparalleled expertise in offering services beyond private banking."

"By tapping into the extensive knowledge and network within HSBC Group, which spans commercial banking and investment banking on a global scale, we demonstrate our commitment to catering to every aspect of our clients' financial journey."

## Past tech advances show history repeats itself

Many insights were shared and ideas were exchanged during a series of keynote speeches, presentations and panel discussions.

History has shown economic cycles and technological breakthroughs tend to be in locked steps, with the latter serving as an "inflection point" to propel a whole new set of entrepreneurs and a whole generation of companies to success.



Michael Kim, founder of VC firm Cendana Capital, and Sherry Lin, senior adviser to US family office Argentum Peak, take part in discussions at the "All-in on Innovation" event.



HSBC's "All-in on Innovation" programme in California saw its tech-focused ultra-high-net-worth clients connect with leading venture capitalists, start-ups and entrepreneurs.



Scott Kupor, investing partner of US private capital firm Andreessen Horowitz, talks during the event about how innovations often appear after major market corrections.

One speaker, Scott Kupor, investing partner of US private capital firm Andreessen Horowitz, said current economic conditions and the advent of AI and deep tech, such as big data, machine learning and robotics, bear great similarity to past events such as the launch of Netscape, producer of the world's first commercialised web browser that went public in 1995, the introduction of the social networking service Facebook in 2004, and the maturation of Software as a Service cloud computing. All these innovations emerged on the back of major market corrections.



Entrepreneur Elias Torres, founder and CEO of Novy.ai, speaks during the "All-in on Innovation" event about how his company uses AI to help its clients increase productivity.

Another speaker at the event, Elias Torres, a serial entrepreneur, who is the founder and CEO of the technology firm Novy.ai, is a case in point. He shared how he has been able to employ the newfound power of AI to help his clients increase productivity and drastically improve customer experience while keeping costs in check – things that are especially important during times of economic challenges.

Financial data and software company PitchBook reported in January that a record US\$29.1 billion in funding was spread across 691 generative AI deals last year. This represented a 268 per cent increase in deal value over 2022's total.

## Challenges can help identify next unicorns

Unfavourable business conditions mean that most new companies will choose to remain private, while those that are looking for funding will need to really stand out from the crowd.

However, budding entrepreneurs could actually use these tougher times as an opportunity to see whether they have what it takes to succeed, said Michael Kim, founder of VC firm Cendana Capital, which works with select global seed and pre-seed funds.

Referring to the peaking of VC in tech start-ups in 2021 and 2022, he said he saw many new companies being able to raise a lot of funds, but they were not businesses that had the substance to become successful and profitable.

"You had a lot of people starting companies, [but] they were not necessarily the ones that were passionate, the ones that would walk through walls to get their companies alive," he said.

Essentially, the success of a company depends on what it can offer, and start-ups with the most potential are those with ideas that can make an impact.

Peter Hébert, co-founder and managing partner of Lux Capital, which invests in hard science and advanced technology companies, said that Kurion, a small business venture it had supported, played a vital role in helping to resolve one of the world's biggest crises – the 2011 Fukushima disaster.



Peter Hébert, co-founder and managing partner of Lux Capital, shares stories about how his company supports start-ups with big ideas at the "All-in on Innovation" event.

A 9.0-magnitude earthquake off the northeast coast of Japan triggered a tsunami and meltdowns at a nuclear power plant.

He said in only eight weeks, the nuclear waste clean-up company designed, built and delivered an external reactor water cooling system to lower the temperature of the molten reactor without the deployment of helicopters and trucks, while safely decontaminating the water.

Kurion has since been bought by Veolia, a French transnational company which specialises in water and waste management and energy services.

Michael Romano, chief business officer of the VC firm, Lightspeed, said: "If you look at the percentage of technology as it relates to the top five companies in the S&P [stock market index] ... technology and tech-enabled companies – many of which were originally venture-backed – are increasingly taking up a larger percentage of the total share."



Michael Romano, chief business officer of the venture capital firm Lightspeed, says tech and tech-related companies are increasingly prominent on public indices at the "All-in on Innovation" event.

Another recent development is that a growing number of family offices – privately held companies that handle fund and wealth management for high-net-worth families – are taking an interest in VC funds that support transformative technologies. These institutions tend to be more liquid and their wealth allocations are based on the founder's vision and passion.

Professional services company PwC reported last year that almost one-third of the capital received by start-ups worldwide in 2022 came from family offices. Although these institutions are exercising caution in funding nascent businesses because of the continuing market uncertainty, they remain an important source of capital in the start-up ecosystem.

Identifying the right start-ups to support requires specific expertise that a family might not have, so there are strong advantages in choosing a VC fund that has a clear mandate, dedicated staff and procedures to achieve an agreed goal.



David Sabow, head of Innovation Banking, HSBC USA, says the bank offers specialised teams that support a wide range of innovation businesses and their investors.

"If you don't have the ability to build an internal team that has expertise, and are looking for the best venture partners, I will seek an experienced fund to funds [which] could guide you to put [in] a small amount, if that's what you want to do – and learn from them," Sherry Lin, senior adviser to US family office Argentum Peak, said.

David Sabow, head of Innovation Banking, HSBC USA, said: "Venture capital is increasingly a global story. Not only have global markets significantly increased their share of VC investment over the last five years, the sources of capital supporting the VC asset class have increasingly come from every corner of the world."

"As one of the largest international banks in the world, HSBC is uniquely positioned to connect family offices, sovereign wealth funds and institutional investors with the general partners funding the next wave of global transformation. Our Innovation Banking teams in the US, UK, Tel Aviv and Hong Kong deliver globally-connected, specialised banking experts to support a broad range of innovation businesses and their investors."

The event also included two immersive tours in Palo Alto to Playground Global, an early-stage investment company known for nurturing groundbreaking ideas, and Stanford Medical Centre, part of Stanford University, where participants witnessed life-saving transformations through AI-powered medical operations.

Maggie Ng, general manager and head of Wealth and Personal Banking, Hong Kong, HSBC, said: "This thought leadership programme is our latest initiative to connect our private banking clients with the realm of frontier technologies and innovations which drive growth in every industry."

"Drawing on resources from HSBC's global network, this immersive tour is carefully designed to provide valuable insights from visionary venture capitalists and start-up entrepreneurs, inspiring our UHNW clients on their wealth journey. It complements our established service approach, which is based on insights, knowledge, and professional expertise."



Maggie Ng, general manager and head of Wealth and Personal Banking, Hong Kong, HSBC, says the "All-in on Innovation" thought leadership programme helps to connect its private banking clients with a realm of frontier technologies and innovations.

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# HONG KONG

## EMPLOYMENT

### HALF SAY NO TO MORE TIME IN OFFICE

Survey finds 51% of employees would consider quitting if not given the flexibility to work from home

Fiona Chow  
fiona.chow@scmp.com

Half of the city's workers would consider quitting their jobs if employers asked them to spend more time in the office instead of offering flexible arrangements, a survey has found.

Recruitment agency Randstad Hong Kong said yesterday that 51 per cent of the 751 local employees and jobseekers responding to a global survey wanted the choice to work from home and would threaten to resign if that condition was not met.

The figure was 14 percentage points higher than the global average, with 37 per cent of respondents deeming work-from-home arrangements as "non-negotiable". A higher proportion of older Hongkongers prioritised work-life balance than younger ones.

The survey sampled 27,000 respondents aged 18 to 67 from more than 30 countries across Europe, North America, South America and Asia between October and November last year, in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic that turned hybrid work into a global culture.

Working remotely, including

from home, became a widespread practice during the three years of the pandemic amid social-distancing rules.

"Flexibility should be understood in its entirety and complexity, and not just where and when employees are working. Rather, employers can explore offering greater autonomy to let people choose what's best for them based on their professional desires and personal needs," Randstad Hong Kong managing director Benjamin Elms said.

"By offering this kind of trust, companies can attract top employees who feel like they are

part of a team that shares the same values."

The survey found 42 per cent of respondents worked for companies that "expected them to be in the office more", but a similar proportion said they would reject employers that lacked flexibility and were too rigid.

Older employees prioritised non-restrictive work models more than their younger counterparts, with half of baby boomers saying the choice to work from home was "non-negotiable", compared with a fifth of millennials and a third of Gen Zers.

The survey, which looked at the gap between employees' expectations and their actual experience, also showed that other factors for creating a more friendly workplace, such as gender equality in salaries, a diverse workforce and family

leave, were of near-equal importance to respondents.

Two in three Hongkongers believed the responsibility for improving workplace conditions lay with employers, with the top priority being family leave, followed by equality in gender pay. The survey also showed that two in five jobseekers would reject a job if the hirer's position on social and environmental issues did not align with their values.

Randstad said the results showed a need for employers to understand that workers had different expectations, and there was no "one-size-fits-all solution" that would help retain talent.

HARRY'S VIEW A2

**37%**

This proportion of people globally called working from home rights essential, lower than the figure for Hong Kong, the survey found

### 70% of lifts could trap users during voltage dips

Adding devices that let elevators restart would cost at least HK\$500,000 each

Oscar Liu  
oscar.liu@scmp.com

Nearly 70 per cent of lifts in the city are not equipped with devices that allow them to automatically start operating after voltage dips, authorities have said, adding that installing just one in an old building costs at least HK\$500,000.

Chan Pak-cheung, deputy director of the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department, said yesterday the city had 73,000 lifts but only 22,000 were fitted with voltage dip mitigation devices. Lifts installed after 2009 must be equipped with them.

"Most lifts affected by voltage issues are primarily older models operated by electronic control panels," Chan said. "The cost of installing such devices in older lifts can potentially be over HK\$500,000 for a single one."

Chan revealed the situation at a Legislative Council panel meeting where CLP Power senior management detailed the outcome of an investigation into five electricity supply disruptions in the first four months of this year, including three voltage dip incidents that left more than 200 residents trapped in lifts.

The meeting also discussed whether a penalty mechanism should be added to the regulatory regime of CLP Power, which serves Kowloon, the New Territories and most outlying islands, when voltage dips occurred.

Last month, a lightning-induced high-voltage equipment failure at Black Point Power Station in Tuen Mun caused two consecutive voltage dips, leaving 152 people stranded in lifts and triggering 16 fire alarms. A week earlier, a hill fire in Yuen Long affected overhead cables resulting in 52 lift entrapments.

Panel chairman Edward Lau Kwok-fan and legislator Benson Luk Hon-man expressed concerns over whether authorities would help to speed up installations and the power giant would help financially to prevent lift entrapments during voltage dips.

CLP Power managing director Joseph Law Ka-chun said the firm had been providing free consultations to more than 100 housing estates and customers about mitigation devices, with more than half having adopted its suggestions in the past three years.

"We are actively engaged with the lift and property management industries, and relevant government departments to develop a feasible solution. If this solution can be implemented for older lifts, it will address the root cause effectively."

An existing penalty mechanism only covers full-scale power outages, with electricity providers paying fines based on duration and number of people affected.

Undersecretary for Environment and Ecology Diane Wong Shuk-han said officials had already met CLP Power and proposed incorporating a punitive framework for major voltage dip incidents into the regulatory agreement, which the firm was still considering.

## TRANSPORT

### Cabbies 'frustrated' at Uber inaction, union leader says

Appeal to stop 'undercover operations' that target ride-hailing drivers has not quelled anger

Wynna Wong  
wynna.wong@scmp.com

Many taxi drivers believe the government has not done enough to quell their years of frustration over the "illegal activities" of Uber, and that they should not be blamed for taking matters into their own hands in "undercover missions" against the ride-hailing firm, a union leader says.

Chong Wing-tak, principal vice-chairman of the Motor Transport Workers General Union, which represents 7,000 cabbies, said yesterday that the taxi drivers' actions reflected their anger at Uber.

It is against the law for private vehicles to accept customers without a hire-car permit issued by the Transport Department, which most Uber drivers do not have. Previous attempts for them to apply for one were rejected by the commissioner for transport.

The operations sparked calls for retaliatory action on social media sites such as Facebook and the Reddit-like LHKG, while Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu last week urged taxi drivers to stop their sting operations as they lacked the required training and legal knowledge.

But Chong said the recent actions by his peers were a reflection of their anger towards Uber's "illegal activities" over the years, and disappointment at transport authorities, "who have allowed them to run rampant for so long".

He said the government met the union in 2015 and 2017, and promised to work with the Department of Justice to ban illegal car-hailing platforms.

However, the Transport Department and law enforcement ended up taking a "passive approach" and conducted one or two operations "for show", while the court only doled out fines to those who were arrested, Chong said. "Our livelihoods have been greatly affected... justice delayed is justice denied."

Chong added that while the union also did not encourage taxi drivers to conduct their own sting operations, he understood their anger in wanting police to make some "real arrests" that were not "predetermined".

A government proposal to introduce stiffer penalties on unlicensed drivers is expected to be brought to the Legislative Council in July.

Taxi trade representatives said online users had been "sending hate" to the industry recently due to the impending bill, sparking renewed frustration among drivers at a time when they were still struggling to recover from the pandemic and compete with "illegal services".

Our livelihoods have been greatly affected... justice delayed is justice denied

CHONG WING-TAK, MOTOR TRANSPORT WORKERS GENERAL UNION

"Even though authorities urged us to stop conducting our own undercover missions because we did not go through proper training, this public appeal does not seem to have quelled anger among taxi drivers," Chong said. "We continue to receive many complaints."

Some taxi drivers launched a series of "undercover missions" earlier this month, filming themselves posing as Uber passengers and getting their drivers to stop at spots where they had called police. It was the latest move in protracted bickering between the taxi trade and Uber since the ride-hailing giant arrived in Hong Kong in 2014.

Uber's legal status has long been in question as the city lacks legislation solely for the regulation of ride-hailing apps.



Chong Wing-tak (front row, second from left) with other union leaders and taxi drivers at a press conference yesterday. Photo: Elson Li

## The write stuff



A visitor views portraits and personal documents of writer Eileen Chang Ai-ling (1910-95) at the Museum of Hong Kong Literature, which opened its doors yesterday in a historic grade two pre-WWI building on Mallory Street in Wan Chai. The attraction, part of a broader effort to transform the city into

an East-meets-West centre for cultural exchange, displays manuscripts or their copies by Chang and other notable authors who lived and wrote in Hong Kong, including Xiao Hong and Louis Cha, known by his pen name "Jin Yong". Educational activities and literary salons are also planned. Photo: May Tse

## LABOUR

### Migrant workers' group slams curbs on job-hopping

Edith Lin  
edith.lin@scmp.com

A union has slammed enhanced measures against foreign domestic helper job-hopping as "serious discrimination", saying it was unfair to deem the workers' right to terminate their contracts as "abuse".

The Hong Kong Federation of Asian Domestic Workers Unions released the statement yesterday after the government told lawmakers about the revised code of practice for employment agencies to "combat abuse" by helpers who prematurely terminate their contracts.

"We are deeply disturbed that the Labour Department views migrant domestic workers who assert their rights to terminate a contract as an abuse. It is misleading to the public to think migrant

domestic workers don't have the right to terminate contracts," the union said.

"It will bring serious repercussions to the society to think that migrant domestic workers are slaves and can be easily replaced." Under the new code of practice implemented on May 9, the government requires employment agencies to brief foreign domestic workers on immigration regulations and arrangements for changing employers.

Agencies also should not induce helpers to prematurely terminate their contracts through monetary or other incentives, according to the updated code.

Under the current arrangement, foreign domestic helpers who wish to change their employers must return to their place of origin and submit a new visa application to the Immigration Department.

They will only be exempted under certain circumstances, such as having evidence of being abused or exploited, or if employers were unable to continue the contract because of migration, death or financial reasons. If helpers are suspected of abusing the arrangement, their employment visa application may be refused.

The union said it was "serious discrimination" and a "threat" to migrant workers' human rights when employers changing helpers was not considered an abuse.

As of May, two workers had asked for help this year as their contracts were terminated after only working for 10 to 15 days, the group said. It said the government should look into the reasons for termination and strive to protect migrant workers from being abused or exploited. They also called for mandatory briefings to educate helpers about their rights.

## CRIME

### 14 domestic helpers held over bank account scams

Clifford Lo  
clifford.log@scmp.com

Police have arrested 20 people in a crackdown on a triad-controlled syndicate that lured domestic helpers with as little as HK\$1,000 each to set up bank accounts for laundering criminal proceeds.

The force yesterday said six of the suspects were Hong Kong men and the other 14 were female domestic helpers from overseas allegedly paid between HK\$1,000 and HK\$2,500 each to open accounts to process HK\$10 million in illegal funds.

"The amount is high when compared with the salaries of domestic helpers," Chief Inspector So Chi-ming of the

Kowloon East regional crime unit said.

"That was the main incentive tempting them to sell their bank accounts."

So added that the syndicate exploited the helpers' desire for quick money and their lack of knowledge of the city's laws and deceived them into selling their bank accounts "while using them as shields or scapegoats".

The minimum monthly salary for domestic helpers increased from HK\$4,730 to HK\$4,870 last September.

Senior Inspector Ng Ming-fung, of the same police unit, said investigations revealed the syndicate used an overseas domestic worker to recruit other helpers. Ng said meetings with helpers

were arranged in locations such as parks, fast-food outlets and hotels.

"The gang used mobile applications to assist domestic workers in opening bank accounts... and retained control over the passwords of these stooge accounts," he said.

Stooge account holders lend or sell their bank accounts to syndicates to collect illicit money and launder crime proceeds in exchange for cash payments.

Ng said the syndicate used 17 stooge accounts to launder HK\$10 million over the past six months. He said the accounts were linked to 39 cases of deception involving financial losses of HK\$5.4 million. The cases included online romance scams and e-shopping frauds.

Police last Saturday launched an operation, code-named "Hoversmoke", and made the arrests in raids across the city.

Ng said the investigation revealed a triad-controlled money-laundering syndicate was behind the scam, with some of its core members having affiliations with gangs.

The suspects, aged between 29 and 63, were detained on suspicion of conspiracy to launder money—an offence punishable by up to 14 years in prison and a HK\$5 million fine.

They were still being detained and questioned by police yesterday.

Police said investigations continued and further arrests were possible. Officers were

looking for the final destination of the illicit cash.

So said the helpers involved had lived in the city for varying periods of time.

"Some have been in Hong Kong for several years, while others arrived in the city recently," he added.

He said the operation was mounted after the force identified an increase in deception and money-laundering cases involving domestic helpers from abroad in the first quarter this year.

He reminded the public, including domestic helpers, that "allowing your personal bank accounts to be used by the criminals for the receipt and transfer of proceeds of crime constitutes the offence of money laundering".

# UNVEILING THE NEW AIA BUILDING

For over 90 years, AIA has been leading our industry in Hong Kong. Today, the Grand Opening of the AIA Building and our Group headquarters at 1 Stubbs Road stands as a testament to our confidence in and commitment to our home city.



As Hong Kong's first Urban Campus, our new building redefines what is possible for workplaces with dedicated spaces for collaboration, community and wellbeing, with sustainability at its core. This is our new home where our talented people will come together to find new ways to help millions of people across Asia live Healthier, Longer, Better Lives.



HEALTHIER, LONGER,  
BETTER LIVES

# CHINA

**We realised our economy was excessively dependent on the external for many, many important supplies. We realised we needed to become more autonomous**

ITALY'S FORMER PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE TO THE E.U. FERDINANDO NELLI FEROCI ON WHY THE BLOC HAS ADOPTED A DE-RISKING ECONOMIC STRATEGY TOWARDS CHINA > CHINA A9

## Employers warned of bias in using AI for hiring

Algorithms could worsen gender and age discrimination, state media caution

Vanessa Cai  
vanessa.cai@scmp.com

State media have warned that job interviews conducted by artificial intelligence (AI) could worsen gender and age discrimination and violate labour laws as the country seeks to leverage the technology for its economic recovery.

The official Economic Daily yesterday called on employers to be aware of potential risks while using the technology, highlighting that AI could have "algorithmic bias and discrimination" when evaluating candidates.

The article said that while AI could make preliminary screening of job candidates more efficient, current algorithms and standards for AI interviews could "hardly fully reflect the complexity and diversity of human behaviour".

Personal information, such as gender, age and place of birth, might affect the assessment and worsen workplace discrimination, it said.

Government agencies should also take measures to prevent risks and investigate any violations of labour laws with the use of algorithms, it said, noting that a sound regulatory mechanism should be established to prevent the misuse of the technology.

Beijing has eyed AI to help its economy recover and counter long-term economic challenges, including a shrinking workforce.

China has also sought strict regulatory control over the use of the technology, citing cybersecurity concerns.

AI is a frontier in the US-China rivalry in science and technology. In March, Premier Li Qiang introduced an AI+ initiative to integrate technology across traditional sectors to drive economic growth and technology upgrades.

Since late 2022, when US firm OpenAI launched ChatGPT, Chinese tech firms and start-ups have been developing their own models and competing to draw users to their generative AI services. These include Baidu's AI chatbot Ernie Bot, which was released in March 2023 as China's first answer to ChatGPT.

China's labour laws state that company employment policies should not discriminate based on gender, but some employers still only recruit or show preference for men.

Earlier this year, Chinese researchers found a significantly increased workplace gender gap during the pandemic.

In recent years, Chinese media reports and public debate have drawn attention to the "age 35 phenomenon", referring to job discrimination that typically starts around that age.

Experts have also warned that age discrimination could have potentially serious economic consequences as the country's population and workforce shrink.

> EDITORIAL A12  
> BANKING AND A.I. B2

## SECURITY

# 'NORMALISE ANTI-TERROR MEASURES'

Top official, on tour of Xinjiang, says priority must be given to preventing violent crimes by extremists

Yuan Yue Dang  
yuan.yue.dang@scmp.com

Top security official Chen Wenqing has called for the "normalisation" of counterterrorism efforts in Xinjiang, where a crackdown on extremism among Uygurs and other Muslim minorities has been under way for years.

During a visit to the far western region from Wednesday to Sunday, Chen said authorities must "insist on cracking down on

terrorist crimes in accordance with the law and make efforts to promote the normalisation of counterterrorism", Xinhua reported.

Chen is a member of the Politburo, and secretary of the Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission, which oversees the country's law enforcement agencies.

In Xinjiang, Chen visited the region's capital, Urumqi, as well as Kashgar and the Kazakh prefecture of Ili. He urged local officials to "always give top priority to

maintaining social stability" and to "accurately prevent and crack down on violent terrorist crimes", according to Xinhua.

The report said Chen visited Khorgos, a town in Ili on the border with Kazakhstan, and the Tashkurgan Tajik autonomous county in the region's southwest, which borders Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan. He told law enforcement officials to "strongly defend border security".

The Ministry of Public Security yesterday said China had not seen

a terrorist attack in more than seven years.

Decades of ethnic tensions and unrest in Xinjiang prompted Beijing to impose measures in 2016 that it said were aimed at cracking down on terrorist attacks. But the measures have led to allegations of widespread human rights abuses, including that at least 1 million Uygurs and other Muslim minorities were held in mass internment camps. Beijing denies the claims and has said the centres were for "vocational training".

Xinjiang authorities have claimed an "overwhelming victory" over terrorist attacks, but security remains a concern.

In its annual work report in January, the Xinjiang government stressed that the region would maintain a "tough stance" to safeguard social stability, meaning combating terrorism.

A white paper released by the State Council Information Office in the same month praised Xinjiang's anti-terrorism measures as improvements in the legal system over the past decade. It highlighted Xinjiang's de-radicalisation regulations, introduced in 2017 and revised in

2018, which list behaviours considered extremist, including growing an "abnormal" beard and wearing a veil.

In August, President Xi Jinping said "social stability" was a top priority for the region's authorities when he visited Xinjiang, and he called for more efforts to combat terrorism and religious extremism, as well as stressing the need for economic development.

In recent years, the Xinjiang government has tried to improve its image by touting economic development and inviting foreign media on carefully choreographed tours to promote the region.

## Golden harvest



Farmers using a reaper gather wheat in the fields of Henan's Beidingzhuang village. The province is gearing up for a massive harvest - according to its agricultural department, an estimated

5.67 million hectares of the crop was expected to be collected by yesterday. Henan had planned an extensive deployment of machinery to ensure a smooth harvest. Photo: Xinhua

## ECONOMY

# Xi warns lopsided energy investment counterproductive

President also assures foreign firms country is committed to creating level playing field for all

Amanda Lee  
amanda.lee@scmp.com

President Xi Jinping warned against a lopsided rush of investment into the new-energy sector and promised China would be a place for fair competition in a meeting with business executives and economists.

The warning comes as a row with the US and Europe over purported industrial overcapacity is all but certain to escalate.

Xi, who previously warned against economic bubbles stemming from pouring an excess of resources into certain fields, said support for the "new three" commodities - electric vehicles, lithium-ion batteries and solar panels - must be "adapted" to local conditions.

The new-energy sector should not be the sole focus, he said at the meeting last Thursday, as the transformation of traditional industries could also develop "new productive forces" - a term coined last year to describe up-and-coming sectors, mostly tech-related, which could take the place of traditional standbys like real estate as drivers of economic growth.

"If a company collapses within a few years of its establishment, then our development of modern industries and cultivation of new productive forces will not be sustainable. The enterprise itself must develop internal strength," Xi was quoted as saying by state news outlet Xinhua on Saturday.

The president made the comments in response to Zhang Bin, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, who discussed fierce domestic competition and declining prices.

The meeting in Jinan, Shandong province, was attended by executives from state and private sectors, including personnel from tech start-ups, Hong Kong firms and foreign investment houses. It came ahead of the third plenum of the Communist Party's Central Committee - a gathering which typically unveils major economic policy.

Enthusiasm for the "new three" - the products that show promise as essential goods underpinning the global green transition - has led local governments to spend heavily to support their own champions, with companies mostly focusing on the lower end

of value chains rather than pushing technological frontiers.

External forces are also a factor. Washington has announced plans to raise tariffs on roughly US\$18 billion of Chinese goods in strategic sectors like electric vehicles, batteries, steel and critical minerals, and the issue of overcapacity was mentioned in a communique from finance chiefs of the Group of Seven countries over the weekend.

The European Union has started several investigations to determine the nature of Chinese subsidies for producers of green tech.

At issue are whether the introduction of these goods into EU markets constitutes dumping, and whether government support to Chinese companies operating inside the EU is sufficient to be classified as an unfair benefit.

**I observed these companies - they were focused ... and they strengthened their ... business**

PRESIDENT XI JINPING

Chinese authorities have raised their own concerns about excess capacity, but they have also refuted claims by the US and Europe that China is flooding global markets with cheap goods to crowd out competitors, especially in new energy.

To drive his point home, Xi reminisced at the meeting on his tenure as governor of Fujian province and party secretary of Zhejiang province, the Xinhua report said. He saw the transformation of many private garment firms from simple warehouses to brands in their own right.

"I observed these companies - they were focused, consistent, and they strengthened their core business," he said.

Xi also assured foreign executives Chinawas committed to creating a "level playing field" and would not squeeze foreign-funded firms out of the market "just because they are foreign companies".

> E.U. NOT ANTI-CHINA A9

## DIPLOMACY

# Gaza war set to be on agenda during Arab leaders' visits

Laura Zhou  
laura.zhou@scmp.com

The Israel-Gaza war and the Palestine issue, as well as a free-trade deal between China and Gulf states, will be high on the agenda when President Xi Jinping hosts a number of Arab leaders in Beijing, observers say.

The visits mark the launch of China's latest diplomatic charm offensive with the Arab world amid its rivalry with America.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa, Tunisian President Kais Saied and United Arab Emirates President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan will "pay state visits" to China from today, according to foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying.

The leaders would also attend the opening ceremony of the 10th Ministerial Conference of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum, Hua said yesterday.

At a briefing in Beijing yesterday morning, Foreign Vice-Minister Deng Li said Xi would hold separate meetings with the four state leaders and "exchange views regarding bilateral ties and regional and international issues of common concern".

Xi would also attend the opening ceremony of the conference and deliver a keynote speech on Thursday, Deng said, adding the attendance of the four state leaders reflected "unity between China and the Arab world".

Established two decades ago, the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum is a mechanism between Beijing and the 22 members of the League of Arab

States, which also includes Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Palestine, Kuwait and Qatar. Under the mechanism, foreign ministers of the 23 countries meet every two years to discuss cooperation "in the fields of politics, economy and security".

Yesterday, Deng said the foreign ministers of China and the Arab countries would "continue to have in-depth discussion of the Palestinian issue ... so as to issue a common voice between China and Arab countries".

"The goal is to end the Gaza conflict as soon as possible and realise peace, and at the same time promote the international community's determination to implement the 'two-state solution' with greater determination and more concrete actions to ultimately achieve long-term peace and stability in the Middle East region," Deng said.

Fan Hongda, a professor at the Middle East Studies Institute of the Shanghai International Studies University, said the ongoing Gaza crisis and the Palestinian issue would "definitely be high on the agenda".

He said China might also be looking to seal a long-sought free-trade deal with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) when the top diplomats meet in Beijing.

In January Chen Weiqing, then China's top envoy to Saudi Arabia, said about 90 per cent of the terms of the free-trade negotiations between China and the GCC nations had been completed.

But two months later, Reuters cited sources as saying talks had stalled over Saudi concerns that cheap Chinese products could compromise Riyadh's ambitions to transform the kingdom into an industrial powerhouse.

## HEALTH

# Patient 'cured' of type 2 diabetes using cell therapy

Dannie Peng  
dannie.peng@scmp.com

For patients battling diabetes, Chinese scientists and clinicians may offer a glimmer of hope. For the first time in the world, a patient's diabetes has reportedly been cured using cell therapy.

The patient, a 59-year-old man, who had type 2 diabetes for 25 years, was at risk of complications from the disease. He had a kidney transplant in 2017, but had lost most of his pancreatic islet function, which controls blood glucose levels, and relied on insulin injections daily.

"He was at great risk of serious diabetes complications," Yin Hao, a leading researcher at Shanghai Changzheng Hospital, told Shanghai-based news outlet The Paper earlier this month.

The patient received the innovative cell transplant in July

2021. Eleven weeks after the transplant, he no longer needed external insulin, and the dose of oral medication to control blood sugar levels was gradually reduced and then stopped one year later.

"Follow-up examinations showed the patient's pancreatic islet function was effectively restored," Yin said. The patient has now been completely weaned off insulin for 33 months.

The medical breakthrough, achieved by a team of doctors and researchers from institutions including Shanghai Changzheng Hospital, the Centre for Excellence in Molecular Cell Science under the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and Renji Hospital, all based in Shanghai, was published in the journal Cell Discovery on April 30.

"This study represents an important advance in the field of cell therapy for diabetes," said Timothy Kieffer, professor in the department of cellular and

physiological sciences at the University of British Columbia in Canada.

Diabetes is a chronic condition that affects the way our bodies convert food into energy. What we consume is broken down into glucose - a simple sugar - and released into the bloodstream. Insulin, produced by the islets of the pancreas, is essential for regulating blood sugar levels. In diabetes, this system is hijacked: either the body does not produce enough insulin, or it cannot use the insulin it produces effectively.

There are several types of diabetes. Type 2 is the most common, affecting almost 90 per cent of sufferers. It is largely diet-related and develops over time.

Regardless of the type of diabetes, failure to maintain normal blood glucose levels over time can lead to serious side effects, including heart disease, vision loss and kidney disease.

According to the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, "there isn't a cure yet for diabetes".

Along with losing weight, eating well and taking medication, insulin is the mainstay of treatment for some, but this requires injections and monitoring.

Scientists around the world are researching islet transplant as an alternative, mainly by creating islet-like cells from human stem cell cultures. Now, after over a decade of work, Chinese scientists have come a step closer.

The team used and programmed the patient's own peripheral blood mononuclear cells, Yin said, which were then transformed into "seed cells" and reconstituted pancreatic islet tissue in an artificial environment.

While preclinical data from Kieffer's team support the use of stem cell-derived islets for the treatment of type 2 diabetes, the

report by Yin and colleagues is, to Kieffer's knowledge, "the first evidence in humans".

Yin said the breakthrough was another step forward in the relatively new field of regenerative medicine - where the body's own regenerative capabilities are harnessed to treat illness.

"Our technology has matured and it has pushed boundaries in the field of regenerative medicine for the treatment of diabetes."

If this approach for cell therapy ultimately worked, Kieffer said "it can free patients from the burden of chronic medications, improve health and quality of life, and reduce healthcare expenditures".

Globally, China has the highest number of diabetes sufferers. According to the International Diabetes Federation, there are 140 million people with diabetes in the country. Of those, about 40 million depend on lifelong insulin injections.



Xi Jinping meets representatives from businesses and academia at a symposium in Jinan, Shandong province. Photo: Xinhua

# CHINA

## China 'can share the burden' of going green

Industrial overcapacity seen as way to expedite transition in a mainland version of Marshall Plan

Siqi Ji  
siqi.ji@scmp.com

To help developing countries expedite their green transition while also digesting China's industrial overcapacity and enhancing internationalisation of its financial sector, Beijing should take a page from the US' old foreign aid initiative known as the Marshall Plan, according to a central bank adviser.

Huang Yiping, a member of the Monetary Policy Committee of the People's Bank of China, yesterday said Beijing could lend to emerging economies that were in need of a transition to clean energy but lacked money and technology.

"Since every country needs to make the green transition, and developing countries find it particularly difficult, if we share the burden, we cannot only help them achieve the goal, but also elevate China's global leadership and influence in green development," Huang said at the Global Finance Forum organised by Tsinghua University in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province.

While China's overcapacity issue - caused by excessive investment coupled with insufficient demand - is unlikely to abate in the short term, exporting the abundant fruits of its green energy sector is the only way out, said Huang, who is also dean of the National School of Development at Peking University.

"There has been obvious resistance in the European and US markets, but at the same time we actually have huge potential in developing countries," Huang said.

In recent months, a number of Western countries have escalated their responses to a surfeit of Chinese imports in the new-energy sector, claiming their own markets have become distorted and manufacturing disrupted.

Two weeks ago, the United States revealed tariff rises on an array of Chinese imports, including electric vehicles, lithium-ion batteries and solar panels.

Developing countries need renewable energy investments of about US\$1.7 trillion annually - a far cry from the US\$544 billion worth of foreign direct investment in clean energy they attracted in 2022, according to a report last year from Unctad.

It is possible that Beijing could provide them with policy financial tools through sovereign credit, or even direct funding, Huang said.

"We have the technology and the products ... You can think of it as a Chinese version of the Marshall Plan in the green economy era," he said.

Washington's Economic Recovery Act of 1948, proposed by then US secretary of state George Marshall, was an initiative that provided billions of dollars worth of capital and materials to restore the economic infrastructure of post-war Europe.

"If [China's version] works, we would be able to encourage them to buy more clean energy products from China and assist Chinese companies' quest to go overseas, which in some degree could alleviate the overcapacity problem," Huang said.

## Search for survivors



Rescuers search for signs of life at the site of a partially collapsed residential building in the Datong township of Tongling city,

in the eastern province of Anhui yesterday afternoon. Five people remain missing, authorities said. Photo: Xinhua

## TRADE

# E.U. DE-RISKING BID NOT ANTI-CHINA, EX-DIPLOMAT SAYS

Bloc is right to reduce dependencies and increase competitiveness as relations sour amid Ukraine war, experts tell forum - but Beijing disagrees

Dewey Sim  
dewey.sim@scmp.com

China should not see a de-risking economic strategy by the European Union as anti-China even as the bloc mulls further tariffs on Chinese exports, a former senior Italian diplomat said at a forum in Beijing.

The sentiment is not shared by Beijing, though, with one Chinese expert calling the measures "concrete anti-China policy".

Ferdinando Nelli Feroci, Italy's former permanent representative to the EU, said ties with China had grown "even more complex and complicated" compared to 2019, when the group first defined China as a partner, competitor and systemic rival.

Feroci cited the severe economic impacts of Covid-19 and the war in Ukraine as reasons for souring ties, and that the events had made Europe aware of the "risks related to excessive dependencies" and the need to improve its competitiveness.

"We realised that our economy was excessively dependent on the external for many, many important supplies. We realised that we needed to become more autonomous," he said at a round-table discussion on Saturday as part of a forum organised by the Centre for China and Globalisation think tank.

"This brought us to adopt a number of measures ... meant to reduce our dependencies and also

to improve and increase our economic security."

Feroci, who was European Commissioner for Industry and Entrepreneurship in 2014, said decoupling from China was not feasible, but a de-risking approach was "much more, in a sense, reasonable".

Last year, the EU proposed to de-risk its trade relationship with China in response to the bloc's economic dependence on China, and what it called an "increasingly assertive" Beijing on the world stage.

The bloc in September launched an investigation into subsidies in China's electric vehicle (EV) industry, the results of which are imminent and expected to hit Chinese-made EVs with extra import duties.

The US, which this month announced substantially higher tariffs on Chinese goods, including EVs and solar panels, has urged the EU to join Washington in curbing cheap Chinese exports.

Still, Feroci told the forum that the EU's strategy was "not meant to be interpreted as anti-Chinese", but instead it was an approach that had "a general value and global application".

"If it has a direct impact on you, China, it is only ... because China's economy is too important and too big. And the two economies of China and Europe are so interdependent that unavoidably China risks becoming a target of these measures," he said.

"There's nothing particularly

aggressive on our side against China. We, in Europe, want to continue to have dialogue with China."

Fabian Zuleeg, chief executive of the Brussels-based think tank European Policy Centre (EPC), added that the bloc's de-risking strategy was an attempt to reduce future vulnerabilities and risks which had become obvious since Russia invaded Ukraine.

He said it was "right" that the EU questioned whether there was a level playing field in a number of different areas.

Georg Riekes, head of the European political economy programme at EPC, agreed, citing wind turbines as an example.

He said European producers of the turbines faced "the greatest difficulties" in getting access to the China market, raising the question of whether Chinese producers should have such unfettered access to the EU.

China, however, did not see Europe's actions in the same way, according to Liu Zuokui, director of the Institute of World History at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

He said Europe's de-risking strategy had brought "big uncertainties" to the world and stifled cooperation, and while the bloc had said its actions were not aimed at China, "we see more and more very concrete anti-China policy".

Liu said cooperation between the EU and China over the past decades had been a "good choice", but uncertainties from multiple factors, including Brexit, the pandemic and the Ukraine war had divided the two sides, and made being able to understand each other "very important".

## CROSS-STRAIT TENSIONS

# US lawmaker warns against 'unprovoked' Taiwan invasion

McCaul vows to speed up weapons delivery to Taipei to step up deterrence and prevent conflict

Lawrence Chung  
lawrence.chung@scmp.com

The US House Foreign Affairs Committee has the authority to declare war if Beijing makes an unprovoked attack on Taiwan, the head of the congressional body said in Taipei yesterday.

But committee chairman Michael McCaul said deterrence was the most effective strategy to prevent such an outcome.

"If the island in an unprovoked manner was invaded, then it would be to the American people and the United States Congress, and my committee that has the power to declare war, how to deal with that," McCaul said on the second day of a five-day trip to the island.

"But my job right now is to make sure we do everything we can to make sure we never end up in that situation. And to make sure that deterrence is here to stop that from ever happening."

He added that both the US Congress and the government were fully committed to ensuring that Taiwan had the necessary weapons for deterrence.

McCaul is part of a bipartisan group of six lawmakers visiting Taiwan despite warnings from Beijing.

The delegation is the first from the US Congress to make the trip since the May 20 inauguration of Taiwanese leader William Lai Ching-te. Its visit comes just days after Beijing conducted its largest military exercise in a year around

the island - a response to what the mainland perceived as a "strong pro-independence statement" by Lai in his inaugural address.

Beijing sees Taiwan as part of China to be reunited by force if necessary. Most countries, including the US, do not recognise Taiwan as an independent state, but Washington is opposed to any attempt to take the self-governed island by force and is committed to arm Taiwan.

McCaul noted that under the Taiwan Relations Act, the United States was obliged to provide defence equipment and training to Taiwan, saying this could be a significant deterrent against potential conflict with Beijing.

He said that to step up this deterrence, the US was working to expedite the delivery of long-delayed weapons. Some of those arms have been on order for four years.

"We are moving forward on

those weapons systems. I'd like to see it faster, but they are forthcoming," he said.

McCaul said President Xi Jinping had "bold and aggressive ambitions", and it was crucial to take every possible step to ensure that "the risks outweigh the rewards" for him.

"The key is to make sure that Taiwan has the weapons necessary for deterrence so when Xi's looking at that calculation, it doesn't look good for him," he said.

He said the military drills by the People's Liberation Army last week "actually gave us some warning indications about what that would look like in terms of a response" by Taiwan and possibly, the US.

"I would say the focus would be maritime assets," he said.

Earlier yesterday, McCaul and his delegation met Lai, who conveyed his commitment to "enhancing national defence capabilities and demonstrating the determination of the Taiwanese people to defend their homeland".



Taiwanese leader William Lai wears a cowboy hat given to him by Texan Congressman Michael McCaul in Taipei yesterday. Photo: Reuters

## In loving memory of Jackson Hoi Fung Chow

beloved son of Jose and Johnny Chow, and cherished brother to Joanne and Jocelyn Chow, peacefully passed away on 11th May 2024, at Prince of Wales Hospital, Hong Kong, after a courageous battle with stomach cancer.

Born on 31st August 1985, at Hong Kong Baptist Hospital, Jackson was deeply loved by his family and friends. A graduate of Boston University, he applied his passion for innovation and entrepreneurship to his family businesses, touching the lives of many with his dedication and zeal.

In 2018, Jackson married Elaine Yan Ling Ng in Bangkok. Their union was blessed with the joyous arrival of their son, Ashton Chow, in 2022, adding immense joy to their lives.

As the visionary third-generation leader of Aussco, Jackson's passion for every project transformed the traditional knitwear business into a pioneering smart factory. His forward-thinking strategies not only expanded the company's reach but also profoundly influenced the industry and inspired colleagues.

Jackson and his family were recognized in 2023 as one of the most beautiful families in China, a testament to their love and unity. His ten-year tenure as CEO of Aussco was marked by innovative and strategic leadership that propelled the company to new heights.

In 2023, Jackson received the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao-Greater Bay Area Outstanding Young Entrepreneur Awards for his significant contributions. Committed to lifelong learning, he studied AI with MIT that year, further demonstrating his dedication to innovation. He also made substantial contributions to community initiatives, serving as Chairman of Knitwear Innovation and Design Society (KIDS) and actively promoting the knitwear industry.

Jackson's love for friendships, food, drinks, and travel forged countless cherished memories and lasting friendships worldwide. His passion for his projects and the positive impact he had on many lives will be remembered fondly.

His profound legacy and cherished memories will forever remain in the hearts of his family—mother Jose, father Johnny, sisters Joanne and Jocelyn, wife Elaine, and son Ashton—will miss him deeply.

The family wishes to extend their gratitude to everyone for their support in his final days.



A private memorial will be held with family and friends at the Union Church.  
Funeral Service live streaming link below  
14:00-15:00  
8th June 2024  
<https://youtube.com/live/8cq3VS4FB08?feature=share>

## SCIENCE

# AI helps find unreported carcinogenic 'forever chemicals'

Victoria Bela  
victoria.bela@scmp.com

Potentially carcinogenic chemicals are prevalent worldwide and going unreported, according to Chinese scientists who identified unknown "forever chemicals" in the environment with the help of machine learning.

The team's new identification platform will make it possible to find and examine the impact of the synthetic chemicals in the environment, creating opportunities for better risk management.

Many synthetic perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) - widely used owing to their resistance to oil, water and heat - have been restricted or banned around the world because of their links to organ damage, developmental issues and cancer.

"Banning legacy PFAS,

however, has led to the increased use of PFAS substitutes that have not been adequately tested for safety, or publicly disclosed due to trade secret protection," the researchers wrote in a paper published in peer-reviewed journal Science Advances.

"New PFAS are kind of like cousins to the old ones - they share similar properties and similar structural features, but [are] not completely consistent," said Wei Si, the paper's author and a professor at Nanjing University.

"Because they're different, they're not as familiar to scientists and regulators, which makes it more difficult to keep track of them and evaluate their potential risks," Wei said, according to a release by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) which publishes the journal.

Existing methods cannot identify many of the unknown PFAS chemicals, and there are no

platforms capable of identifying unknown PFAS in environmental samples, according to the paper.

The team outlined how their innovation could help track them.

"Here, we report a PFAS identification platform that can discover and accurately identify unknown [PFAS] in environmental samples," the team wrote.

The non-biodegradable "forever chemicals" - named for their persistence in the environment - became widely used in

**Banning legacy PFAS has led to the use of substitutes that have not been adequately tested**

RESEARCH PAPER

many products - including non-stick pans, food packaging, and waterproof and fireproof clothing.

To screen for unknown PFAS, the team used a molecular network that analyses similarities in mass spectra, or plots of molecules and chemicals that reveal their signature and structure, enhanced using machine learning.

"By applying molecular networking, we can map out the relationships between known and unknown PFAS," to identify similar structures, Wei told AAAS.

Their platform - APP-ID - was used to examine samples of waste water from an industrial estate in Jiangsu province, and discovered 733 PFAS belonging to 31 different classes, according to the paper.

The team also used APP-ID to screen a global repository of environmental samples from 20 countries discovering 126 PFAS, including 81 unreported ones.

## ASIA

As the next generation, I will continue to fight so that the truth about cases of past human rights violations is revealed

MAGDALENA MARTINA WULANDARI VOWS TO SEEK JUSTICE FOR HER BROTHER, ONE OF HUNDREDS OF CHINESE-INDONESIANS WHO DIED IN THE BLOODY RIOTS IN MAY 1998

## JAPAN

## Caught behaving badly? Just say 'sorry, I was drunk'

Julian Ryall in Tokyo

When questioned after being escorted off a flight from Thailand to Japan, Naoki Tada gave a reply that Japanese police have heard countless times: "I don't remember because I was drunk."

Tada, 55, was arrested by police last Thursday on suspicion of attempting to forcibly hug and kiss a woman flight attendant after yelling at other passengers and attempting to hit at least one other person, according to local media Fuji News Network.

His behaviour was sufficient to attract the attention of the media, but his excuse – that he was too intoxicated to remember his actions – has raised no eyebrows. Being drunk and apologising are, it seems, steps on the path to absolution in the eyes of many Japanese.

Izumi Tsuji, a professor of the sociology of culture at Tokyo's Chuo University, puts it down to the two key elements of the Japanese national character.

"We Japanese have two states, *honne* [true feelings or desires] and *tatemae* [facade]," he said. "Ordinarily, everything we do at work and in public is *tatemae*. We are polite and respectful to those around us, we follow the rules of society, and we keep ourselves under control."

"When we want to act freely, we enter our *honne* world," he said. "This is when we travel and relax, when we have our leisure time and yes, when we drink. This is when we show our true feelings and say what we are really thinking."

"The things we say and do when we are at drinking parties stay in that *honne* world, and what happens there can be used as an excuse."

That attitude is reflected in the Japanese saying that suggests the person who is polite in their public life can be shameless in private, Tsuji said, with the nation's legions of "salarymen" who in the past saw their limited amount of free time as a "treasure" to be enjoyed as they saw fit.

While times have changed, the attitudes of many men do not appear to have kept pace.



Academics say there are changes in the habits of younger Japanese who are less keen on the traditional drinking culture. Photo: AFP

In May 2022, a senior official in the finance ministry was arrested after assaulting a fellow passenger on a train in Tokyo. Heihachiro Ono, the deputy vice-minister for policy planning and coordination, told police he was drunk and had no recollection of the incident.

Sumo champion Asashoryu in 2010 similarly had no recollection of a drunken scuffle in which he allegedly broke another man's nose.

Last month, restaurant worker Hidenori Naka claimed he had no memory of damaging a taxi and refusing to pay a taxi fare after an altercation with the driver in September. A local bureaucrat in Sendai, in Miyagi prefecture in northern Japan, also could not explain why he had poured a container of his urine into a machine in a game centre.

The issue of public drunkenness and using it as an excuse for bad behaviour really caught the spotlight in December 2022, when a member of the Nagasaki Prefectural Assembly for the conservative Liberal Democratic Party was filmed performing drunken pull-ups on a train.

In a press conference to address his behaviour, Takatoshi Kitamura explained that he had been drinking at a school reunion, adding, "I don't remember why I did the chin-ups." Kitamura told the media that he planned to give up drinking.

"Being drunk and misbehaving is tolerated in this society; it's accepted as a cultural norm," said a member of the Tokyo branch of Alcoholics Anonymous.

"Someone who later says that they do not remember what they did, while they may be telling the truth, that does not mean they did not do it," said the member, who asked not to be identified by name.

Tsuji, of Chuo University, says he enjoys a few beers after a long week at work, but says there are clear changes in the drinking habits of younger Japanese.

"This sort of thing seemed to be far more common 20 years ago," he said. "Young people do not want to attend drinking parties like they used to in the past, so misbehaviour is less frequent now."

## Testing the waters



Vehicles move through waterlogged streets yesterday in Kolkata, India as rain continues after Tropical Cyclone Remal made landfall near the Bangladesh-India border. The storm flooded coastal villages, blew away thatched roofs and left hundreds

of thousands of people without power in southern Bangladesh and eastern India. At least seven deaths were reported and nearly 800,000 people had been evacuated from the most vulnerable areas of Bangladesh on Sunday. Photo: AP

## PAPUA NEW GUINEA

## OVER 2,000 BURIED ALIVE IN MASSIVE LANDSLIDE

National Disaster Centre says few survivors are likely to be found due to the treacherous terrain after Friday's early-morning disaster in remote area

Reuters in Sydney

More than 2,000 people were buried alive by a massive landslide in Papua New Guinea (PNG) last week, the National Disaster Centre said yesterday, as treacherous terrain and the difficulty of getting aid to the site raises the risk few survivors will be found.

The centre raised the number suspected buried to 2,000 in a letter to the UN released yesterday but dated Sunday. A separate UN agency put the possible death toll much lower, at more than 670 people.

The variance reflects the remote site and the difficulty getting an accurate population estimate. PNG's last credible census was in 2000 and many people live in isolated mountainous villages.

The landslide crashed through Yambali village in the country's north at around 3am on Friday while most of the community slept. More than 150 houses were buried beneath debris almost two storeys high. Rescuers told local media they heard screams from beneath the earth.

"I have 18 of my family members being buried under the



Villagers gather at the site of the landslide in Papua New Guinea.

debris and soil that I am standing on, and a lot more family members in the village I cannot count," Evit Kambu said. "But I cannot retrieve the bodies, so I am standing here helplessly."

More than 72 hours after the landslide, residents are still using spades, sticks and their bare hands to try and shift the debris and reach any survivors.

Heavy equipment and aid has been slow to arrive due to the remote location while tribal warfare nearby has forced aid workers to travel in convoys escorted by soldiers and return to the provincial capital, roughly 60km away, at night.

Eight people were killed, and 30 houses burnt down on Saturday during tribal clashes, a UN agency official said. Aid convoys yesterday passed the still smoking remains of houses.

The first excavator only reached the site late on Sunday, according to a UN official. Six bodies have been retrieved so far.

Many people are not even sure where their loved ones were when the landslide hit because it is common for residents to stay at the homes of friends and relatives, according to Matthew Hewitt Tapus, a pastor based in Port Moresby.

"It's not like everyone is in the same house at the same time, so you have fathers who don't know where their children are, mothers who don't know where husbands are, it's chaotic," he said.

PNG media yesterday reported that residents had rescued a couple trapped under rubble after hearing their cries for help.

Johnson and Jacklyn Yandam told local NBC News that they were very grateful and described their rescue as a miracle.

"We thank God for saving our lives at that moment. We were certain that we were going to die, but the big rocks didn't crush us," Jacklyn said. "It's really hard to explain as we got trapped for nearly eight hours, then got rescued. We believe we were saved for a purpose."

Prime Minister James Marape's office said the disaster was being handled by PNG emergency authorities and Marape was in the capital, Port Moresby, preparing for the return of parliament today, where he faces a no-confidence motion.

President Xi Jinping yesterday said he was "saddened" to learn of a landslide disaster in Papua New Guinea and offered help to the Pacific island nation.

"I am convinced that Papua New Guinea will definitely overcome the difficulty," he said. "The Chinese side stands ready to provide assistance."

Even when rescue teams can get to the site, rain, unstable ground and flowing water is making it extremely dangerous for residents and rescue teams to clear debris, according to Serhan Aktoprak, the chief of the UN migration agency's mission in PNG.

There was still a risk the soil and debris could shift again and more than 250 homes had been abandoned, he said. Additional reporting by Agence France-Press

## Pakistan arrests 11 for deaths of five Chinese

Members of Taliban group held over the March suicide bombing that killed engineers

Reuters in Islamabad

Pakistani authorities have arrested 11 Islamist militants who were involved in the suicide bombing that killed five Chinese engineers in March in the north of the country, officials said.

The announcement was made at a news conference held by Pakistan's counterterrorism chief Rai Tahir along with Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi.

The arrested men belong to local Taliban, also known as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), an umbrella group of Sunni Islamists and sectarian militant groups that aims to overthrow the government and replace it with Islamic law.

Tahir said a mobile phone the suicide bomber had been using to communicate with his local handlers led to the arrests.

The investigation and evidence show the militants had been taking instructions from TTP leaders in Afghanistan, he said.

Pakistani military had already said the attack was planned in Afghanistan and that the suicide bomber was also an Afghan national, a charge Kabul denies.

We want Afghanistan to act against these terrorists. Either try them there or hand them over

INTERIOR MINISTER MOHSIN NAQVI

The TTP denies involvement and a spokesman said it had already explained its position on the attack.

"We have forensic evidence to prove that the TTP militants who were operating from Afghanistan are involved in it," Naqvi said.

The killer drove a vehicle into a convoy of Chinese engineers working on a dam in northwest Pakistan in March, killing five of the engineers and a local diver.

Relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have soured in recent months. Islamabad says Kabul is not doing enough to tackle militant groups targeting Pakistan.

Naqvi said legal help would be sought from Kabul to arrest another three TTP members who were directing the attacker and his facilitator from Afghanistan.

"We want Afghanistan to act against these terrorists. Either try them there or hand them over to us," he said.

## INDONESIA

## Victims of anti-Chinese riots seek justice as painful memories fester

But activists fear their struggle will only get harder under president-elect Prabowo

Amy Sood amy.sood@scmp.com

Magdalena Martina Wulandari was aged five when she lost her brother Stevanus to Indonesia's bloody riots in May 1998.

Stevanus was 16 at the time, and like many Indonesian youngsters, loved playing football and listening to music with his friends. He was also a curious teenager, so when he heard that there was some trouble at a nearby shopping centre in East Jakarta, he rushed to take a look.

But Stevanus did not return. He was killed in a fire that broke out at the City Plaza Klender mall, an incident that would claim the lives of hundreds of people.

Now 31, Magdalena has followed in her mother Maria Sanu's footsteps trying to "learn the truth behind the cases of the tragic events and the human rights violations" that changed the course of their lives.

"We have struggled for the past 26 years with the families of other victims to learn the truth ... and to get justice," Magdalena told the Post.

Pent-up anger towards military dictator Suharto's 32-year rule and an economic downturn triggered by the Asian financial crisis saw Indonesians take to the streets in violent protests against food shortages, mass unemployment and corruption.

The country's minority Chinese community – seen as disproportionately wealthy and blamed for stealing jobs – became prime targets of the rioters, who attacked homes and businesses owned by ethnic Chinese.

Another major flashpoint for the rampage and Suharto's resignation was the killing of four students by security forces at a protest in Jakarta's Trisakti University. An investigation into the incident was opened, but nobody was charged with the shootings.

Victims, their families and activists commemorated the 26th anniversary of the riots and the Trisakti tragedy earlier this month as they continued to press for accountability from the government.

But there are fears their calls for justice will be sidelined under Indonesian president-elect Prabowo Subianto, who was a military general in

Suharto's regime and married to his daughter.

While Prabowo has denied accusations that he helped instigate the riots, he earlier admitted his role in the kidnapping of student democracy activists in 1998, which led to his dismissal from the army.

Indonesian author and leading feminist Julia Suryakusuma described the incoming leader, who takes office in October, as a "blatant symbol and representation of the lack of recognition of human rights issues in Indonesia". "So far he has not taken any responsibility, so there's no reason to think he will do anything different," she said.

Jane Rosalina Rumpia, head of the Impunity Monitoring Division at the Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence (Kontras), said at least 1,190 people were killed in the riots that incumbent President Joko Widodo has called "gross human rights violations".

He apologised last year for the violence and offered non-judicial settlements to the victims' families.

Jane said concrete legal and state accountability measures must follow

Widodo's "acknowledgement and regret" so that the perpetrators of the killings were finally brought to light.

"The victims and their families have had to endure mental and physical torment due to the lack of accountability of the state to provide effective recovery by upholding the rule of law," she said.

Data from Indonesia's National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan) showed that 85 women, mostly Chinese, were reportedly raped. But the real number was believed to be far higher because



Julia Suryakusuma says Prabowo has not taken any responsibility so far.

many victims did not come forward, Kontras' Jane said.

Suryakusuma said women bore the brunt of the atrocities due to widespread public discontent with the Chinese tycoons and large business groups that thrived under Suharto's administration.

"The mostly wealthy Chinese and their conglomerates were seen as the cronies of the Suharto regime, but the anger of the people could not be targeted at the conglomerates, so they went after the most vulnerable members of the Chinese community, the women," she said.

The bloodshed prompted Indonesia to establish Komnas Perempuan, which organises campaigns every year to keep the public memory of the riots alive and "ensure that the events of 1998 do not happen again".

Veryanto Sitohang, a commissioner for the agency, acknowledged that the outreach efforts might fall on deaf ears at government level.

"We suspect that this has not been done because the actors involved in the May 1998 riots are currently in power circles," he said.

But activists had not lost hope, Suryakusuma said. Every Thursday afternoon since 2007, a group of

volunteers dressed in black stand in front of Jakarta's State Palace in silent protest to demand justice for their lost loved ones.

"This is a very visible sign that there is a demand that these past human rights issues be recognised, even though it has not been addressed for so long," she said.

Faiz Nabawi, the president of the student executive body at Trisakti University, said that students commemorated the campus shootings through community events and educational discussions aimed at ensuring the next generation understood this pivotal chapter in their school's history.

"The spirit of the students remains undimmed in pushing for change for the better," he said, urging students to uphold the ideals of Indonesia's Reformasi movement that led to major democratic changes in the country.

Meanwhile, Magdalena vowed to carry on with her 78-year-old mother's long-standing efforts to secure justice for the death of Stevanus and all the other families who lost loved ones during the riots.

"As the next generation, I will continue to fight so that the truth about cases of past human rights violations is revealed," she said.

**I feared this ending but I wanted so much for it to end differently**  
 AVIVIT YABLONKA, THE SISTER OF AN ISRAELI HOSTAGE WHOSE BODY WAS RECOVERED FROM THE GAZA STRIP LAST WEEK

# WORLD

**NIGERIA**

## Dozens arrested in fight against illegal mining of lithium

As country emerges as source of critical mineral, role of Chinese nationals in illicit trade in focus

Associated Press in Abuja

Nigeria's government is cracking down on illegal mining, making dozens of arrests of unlicensed miners since April for allegedly stealing the country's lithium, a critical mineral used in batteries for electric vehicles (EVs), smartphones and power systems.

The arrests come as Nigeria seeks to regulate its mining operations of critical minerals, curb illegal activity and better benefit from its mineral resources.

The clean energy transition, a shift away from coal, oil and gas and towards renewable energy and batteries, has spiked global demand for lithium, tin and other minerals.

Illegal mines are rife in the country's fledgling industry as corruption among regulatory officials is common and the mineral deposits are located in remote areas with minimal government presence.

Officials say profits from illicit mining practices has helped arm militia groups in the north of the country. In the most recent arrests in mid-May, a joint team of soldiers and police conducted a raid on a remote market in Kishi, in the country's southwestern Oyo state.

Locals said the market, once known for selling farm produce, had become a centre for illicit trade in lithium mined in remote areas. The three-day operation saw the arrest of 32 individuals, including two Chinese nationals, local workers and mineral traders, according to the state government. Loads of lithium were also seized.

Jimoh Bioku, a Kishi community leader, said there had been "clandestine searches" for the mineral at sites tucked away in the bush in the past years by Chinese nationals before "they engaged people to dig for them and turned the market into a transit point".

The community was "particularly worried about the insecurity that usually follows illegal mining and that was why we reported to the state government", he said.

China is the dominant player in the global EV supply chain, including in Nigeria where China-owned companies employ mostly vulnerable people leaving Nigeria's far north - ravaged by conflicts and rapid desertification - to work in mining operations throughout the country.

China's nationals and companies are frequently in the spotlight for environmentally damaging practices, exploitative labour and illicit mining. There have been at least three cases of illegal mining arrests involving Chinese nationals in two months.

President Bola Tinubu has blamed illegal mining for the worsening conflicts in the nation's north and asked the global community for help to stop the problem, which provides armed groups with the proceeds needed to sustain and arm themselves.

The Chinese embassy in Abuja did not respond to an Associated Press request for comment.

But in a statement last year following a report by The Times of London alleging Chinese miners were bribing militants for access, the embassy said it "always encouraged and urged the Chinese companies and nationals in Nigeria to abide by the laws and regulations of Nigeria".

Nigeria is emerging as a new source of lithium as the world's largest producers, like Australia and Chile, are unable to fulfil the growing demand worldwide. But illegal activities thrived in Nigeria's extractive sector, denying the government due revenues, said Emeka Okoro, whose Lagos-based SBM Intelligence firm had researched illicit mining and terrorism financing.

The arrests of "both Chinese nationals and young Hausa boys from conflict-affected regions underscore a troubling pattern," Okoro said.

"The socioeconomic strain stemming from conflict and the repercussions of climate change has given rise to a vulnerable demographic desperate for survival."

**ISRAEL-GAZA WAR**



Fire rages after Israeli strikes set shelters ablaze in an area of western Rafah that has been designated as a safe zone where thousands of Palestinians are sheltering. Photo: Reuters

## WORLD LEADERS DECRY ISRAELI ATTACK ON RAFAH AFTER 45 DIE

Many of the fatalities are women and children with death toll set to rise as France, EU and Arab countries call on Israel to halt military offensive

Reuters

An Israeli air strike killed at least 45 people in a tent camp in the Gaza city of Rafah, doctors said, drawing condemnation yesterday from European leaders, who urged implementation of a World Court ruling to halt Israel's offensive.

French President Emmanuel Macron voiced his outrage over the Israeli strikes and demanded an "immediate ceasefire". "These operations must stop. There are no safe areas in Rafah for Palestinian civilians," Macron said on X, formerly Twitter. "I call for full respect for international law and an immediate ceasefire."

Israel has kept up attacks on Rafah despite a ruling by the top UN court on Friday ordering it to stop, arguing the verdict grants it some scope for military action.

Germany's foreign minister Annalena Baerbock and the EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said the ruling must be respected. "International humanitarian law applies for all, also for Israel's conduct of the war," she said.

Palestinian families rushed to hospitals to prepare their dead for burial after the strike late on Sunday night set tents and rickety shelters ablaze.

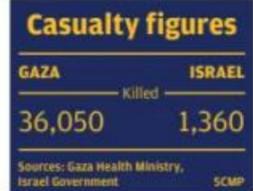
"The whole world is witnessing Rafah getting burnt up by Israel and no one is doing anything to stop it," Bassam, a Rafah resident, said on a chat app, of the strike in an area of western Rafah that was designated a safe zone.

Despite a global outcry at the toll on civilians, Israeli tanks continued to bombard the eastern and central areas of the city yesterday, killing eight, local health officials said.

Israel's military said Sunday's air attack, based on "precise intelligence", had eliminated militant group Hamas' chief of staff for the second and larger Palestinian territory, the West Bank, plus another official behind the attacks on Israelis.

Earlier on Sunday, it said eight rockets were intercepted after being fired from the Rafah area. A minister said that showed the need for continued operations against Hamas.

According to an initial Israeli investigation, an air strike against Hamas commanders set off a fire which killed Palestinian civilians, a government spokesman said.



"The IDF [Israel Defence Forces] regrets any harm to non-combatants during the war," Major-General Yifat Tomer Yerushalmi said.

The attack took place in the Tel al-Sultan neighbourhood, where thousands were sheltering after Israeli forces began a ground offensive in the east of Rafah more than two weeks ago.

Many of the dead were women and children, the health officials said, adding the death toll was likely to rise as some were in critical condition with severe burns.

"On top of the hunger, on top of the starvation, the refusal to

allow aid in sufficient volumes, what we witnessed last night is barbaric," Ireland's Foreign Minister Micheal Martin said.

Egypt condemned the Israeli military's "deliberate bombing of the tents of displaced people", state media reported, describing it as a blatant violation of international law.

Saudi Arabia also condemned the Israeli attack, and Qatar said the Rafah strike could hinder efforts to mediate a ceasefire and hostage exchange.

By daylight, the camp was a smoking wreckage of tents, twisted metal and charred belongings.

Sitting beside the bodies of his relatives, Abed Mohammed Al-Attar said Israel lied when it told residents they would be safe in Rafah's western areas. His brother, sister-in-law and several other relatives were killed in the blaze.

"The army is a liar. There is no security in Gaza. There is no security, not for a child, an elderly man, or a woman. Here [my brother] is with his wife, they were martyred," he said. "What have they done to deserve this? Their children have been orphaned."

Hospitals in Rafah, including the International Committee of the Red Cross field hospital, were unable to handle all the wounded, so some were moved to hospitals in Khan Younis further north in Gaza for treatment, doctors said.

The UN agency for Palestinian refugees said the situation was horrifying. "Gaza is hell on Earth. Images from last night are yet another testament to that," UNRWA wrote on X.

Israel launched the operation after Hamas attacked Israeli communities on October 7, killing some 1,200 people and seizing more than 250 hostages, according to Israeli tallies. Additional reporting by Agence France-Presse

### FAMILIES MOURN THEIR DEAD AS BODIES OF RECOVERED HOSTAGES ARE BURIED

The sister of an Israeli hostage whose body was recovered from Gaza last week struck a solemn tone as she laid him to rest after thousands attended his funeral.

"I feared this ending but I wanted so much for it to end differently," Avivit Yablonka said at the funeral of her brother Chanan on Sunday.

Chanan, 42, was murdered on October 7 in Hamas' unprecedented attack, while trying to escape from the Nova music festival where at least 364 people were killed.

His body was taken to Gaza by militants but was retrieved on Friday by Israeli troops after spending 230 days in captivity.

In the space of a week, the Israeli army has announced the deaths of eight hostages who had been presumed to be alive - five Israelis, two Thais and a French-Mexican dual national.

The army also retrieved seven bodies - including Chanan's - that had been held in Gaza since October 7.

Hopes have since faded among the families of other hostages whose whereabouts are unknown. Militants took 252 hostages during the attack, 121 of whom remain in Gaza, including 37 the Israeli army says are dead.

Dozens of hostage relatives gathered outside the home of Chanan's parents for a silent procession to Tel Aviv's Kiryat Shaul cemetery, accompanied by thousands waving Israeli flags.

The Yablonka family had urged people to join the march in solidarity with the hostages.

"We have to bring everyone back - this march is for him and for the release of all the hostages," Avivit said.

The war in Gaza broke out after Hamas' attack on southern Israel, which resulted in the deaths of more than 1,170 people, mostly civilians, according to a tally based on Israeli official figures.

Before she learned of her brother's death, Avivit, 48, attended the funeral of Ron Benjamin, who was found in the same tunnel complex in northern Gaza as her brother, according to the army.

"I'm scared. I go from funeral to funeral. I'm so scared, but I have hope, I'm not giving up," she said at the time.

A father of two, Chanan's family had not heard from him since October 7, and was told he was in Gaza 90 days after his disappearance.

"We thought they were coming back alive, but they're coming back in coffins," Avivit said before laying her brother to rest.

Avivit said she wanted "to believe that the government really wants to bring them all back and that there are difficulties in negotiating with such murderers".

Agence France-Presse



Reuven Yablonka is the father of hostage Chanan Yablonka.

**UNITED STATES**

## At least 18 dead after storms sweep across parts of south



A resident of Valley View returns to a scene of devastation. More than 200 buildings were destroyed in the northern Texas town. Photo: AP

Reuters

Search teams picked through wreckage left by the tornado-spawning thunderstorms that swept the US Southern Plains and Ozarks, killing at least 18 people and wrecking hundreds of buildings as forecasters warned of more severe weather over the holiday weekend.

At least seven people died and nearly 100 were injured on Saturday night when a powerful tornado struck communities in north Texas near the Oklahoma border, Governor Greg Abbott said at a news conference.

He said two children, aged two and five from a single family, were among the dead in and around the tiny Cooke county town of Valley View, which bore the brunt of the twister.

More than 200 homes and other structures were listed as destroyed, with another 120 buildings damaged in a zone that stretched over 80km, Abbott said.

Dozens of motorists abandoned their vehicles on a highway and fled to a petrol station as the

twister struck. According to Abbott, about 125 people took cover inside as the tornado shredded the building. Everyone survived, but it took rescue teams about an hour to free scores trapped in the wreckage.

"I was just waiting for it to pick us up or slam something on top of us," Elizabeth Hernandez, who had huddled inside a restroom in the building, said in an interview with Dallas television station WFAA. "I don't know how that didn't kill us."

A National Weather Service official said the Valley View tornado had winds of 217km/h. Multiple twisters hit the region, but the precise number had yet to be determined, she said.

As the scale of the disaster came into fuller view on Sunday, officials were wrapping up initial search-and-rescue operations, the governor said. He said authorities would make one final sweep of damaged buildings for possible additional victims but that nobody else had been reported missing by day's end.

Additional reporting by Associated Press

**LITHUANIA**

## President re-elected amid concerns over Russia

Agence France-Presse in Vilnius

Lithuanian President Gitanas Nauseda has won re-election by a landslide in a vote marked by defence concerns over neighbouring Russia, according to official results.

The count published by the electoral commission showed Nauseda won 74.6 per cent of votes with 90 per cent of ballots counted after polls closed in the second-round vote.

"[Voters] have handed me a great mandate of trust and I am well aware that I will have to cherish this," Nauseda, 60, told journalists in Vilnius. "Now that I have five years of experience, I believe that I will certainly be able to use this jewel properly, first of all to achieve the goals of welfare for all the people of Lithuania."

His opponent, Prime Minister Ingrida Simonyte, secured 23.8 per cent of the vote and



**Lithuania's independence and freedom is like a fragile vessel that we must cherish**

PRESIDENT GITANAS NAUSEDA

congratulated Nauseda in comments to reporters.

The Lithuanian president steers defence and foreign policy, attending European Union and Nato summits, but must consult the government and parliament on appointing the most senior officials.

While the candidates agree on defence, they share diverging views on Lithuania's ties with Beijing, which have been strained for years over Taiwan.

Both candidates agree the Nato and EU member of 2.8 million people should boost defence spending to counter the perceived threat from Russia, and to that end the government recently proposed a tax increase.

"Lithuania's independence and freedom is like a fragile vessel that we must cherish, protect and prevent from cracking," Nauseda said late on Sunday.

"With the re-election of Gitanas Nauseda, we will see

continuity in foreign and security policy, areas where the president will try to remain active," said Rima Urbonaite, a political analyst at Mykolas Romeris university.

Vilnius fears it could be next in the cross hairs if Moscow were to win its war against Ukraine.

Lithuania is a significant donor to Ukraine, which has been battling Russia since the 2022 invasion.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky was one of the first leaders to congratulate Nauseda. "You have been by our side every day and night throughout these most difficult years," he wrote on social media platform X, formerly Twitter. "I am confident that working together, we will ensure freedom, peace, and security in Ukraine, the Baltic states, and throughout our Europe."

Pensioner Ausra Vysniauskiene said she had voted for Nauseda. "He's an intelligent man, he speaks many languages,

he's educated, he's a banker," the 67-year-old.

Simonyte, the 49-year-old candidate of the ruling conservatives, was running for president again after losing to Nauseda in the last presidential ballot.

The uneasy relationship between Nauseda and Simonyte's conservatives has triggered foreign policy debates, most notably on Lithuania's ties with China.

Bilateral ties turned tense in 2021 when Vilnius allowed Taiwan to open a de facto embassy under the island's name - a departure from the common diplomatic practice of using the name of the capital Taipei to avoid angering Beijing. China, which considers self-ruled Taiwan a part of its territory, downgraded diplomatic relations with Vilnius and blocked its exports.

Nauseda sees the need to change the name of the representative office, while Simonyte pushed back against it.

# OPINION

## EDITORIAL

### Revise rather than throw out the city's waste-charging plan

By nearly every measure, the trial run of the city's waste-charging scheme was a disappointment. Confusion reigned among residents and businesses over how to properly follow it. The compliance rate for the voluntary two-month trial plumbed depths as low as 20 per cent. Its citywide launch was delayed twice, from December to April and then to August 1. The warning signs were everywhere.

As painful as it was, the government's decision to shelve the scheme first proposed in 2004 should be considered sensible and pragmatic. The scheme required residents to dispose of their rubbish in an array of designated plastic bags – nine sizes ranging in cost from 30 HK cents to HK\$11. There were complaints about a lack of collection bins, and mobile bins with poor operating hours. The cost of implementation would have put a strain on low-income residents, restaurateurs and care home operators.

Few question the motive of the "pay-as-you-throw" scheme. Protecting the environment and encouraging proper waste reduction and disposal in a place with diminishing landfill space must be the way forward. The city needs to implement an effective plan to cope with the rising environmental toll of its waste.

The key word is effective, and this plan, sadly, was not. It is sensible that the government recognised an ineffective policy measure when it had one and decided to hit the brakes on an inadequate plan that was going to affect everyone in the city. There also is the timing for citywide implementation, which was due in August. Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu enters his third year in office in July and has a full policy agenda, with important work ahead on reviving the economy, improving livelihoods and building the city back up as Asia's financial hub. There was little point in rushing to launch an ill-conceived and poorly received plan that would have consumed time and resources.

The city was not ready. Taking a moment to reflect on and learn lessons from the policy's shortcomings is warranted. But an indefinite shelving cannot be the answer. Hong Kong expects existing landfills to be full to the brim by 2026. Waste from businesses and households must be reduced. Environmental groups are right to keep pressure on the government, but launching a plan that is ineffective and clearly not ready is not the answer.

The city should consider going back to the drawing board, study best practice from other communities that have got it right – Seoul, Taipei and Germany are places to start – and come back with a plan that has a greater probability of working. With proper planning and education, a workable scheme must be devised to cope with the city's looming mountain of waste.

### Sino-US talks on AI off to positive start

Agreement has not yet been reached, but the world should take heart that the United States and China recently met to discuss artificial intelligence (AI) – an issue with profound global implications. The Geneva talks were the first intergovernmental exchange since leaders of the world's two largest economies agreed to cooperate on reducing risks and improving governance of the technology.

The high-level delegations exchanged views "constructively" at the May 14 meeting, according to readouts from both sides. China's foreign ministry said both delegations reaffirmed a commitment to implementing the consensus President Xi Jinping and his US counterpart Joe Biden reached in November in San Francisco.

A US National Security Council spokeswoman said Washington's representatives stressed the importance of harnessing the benefits of AI for sustainable development and the need to build global consensus to ensure AI systems are "safe, secure and trustworthy".

US delegates raised concerns over the misuse of AI, including by China, as it affirmed the need to maintain open lines of communication on AI risk and safety as part of "responsibly managing competition". China's delegates said Beijing had stuck to a principle that AI technology should be people-centred and used for good and laid out a "solemn position" regarding US restrictions on AI.

Chinese delegation leader Yang Tao said Beijing was willing to step up communication with Washington. He said China supported strengthening global governance of AI and "for the United Nations to play the role of main channel". A global framework for AI governance, with standards and norms formed by wide consensus, is a sensible goal. It is right to focus on an issue that stands in the way of mending bilateral ties and deepening engagement.

Earlier in the month, freshly appointed climate envoys from the US and China also held inaugural face-to-face discussions. Both sides have said that environmental issues should be free of the divisive rancour on other fronts. It is time for progress to be made.

Market suppression and security concerns threaten to make AI talks relatively thorny. However, the benefits of AI, and the threat we all face if the technology is left unchecked should drive both sides to cooperate.

## CONTACT US

Tammy Tam Editor-in-Chief

Chow Chung-yan Executive Editor Zuraiddah Ibrahim Executive Managing Editor  
Yonden Lhatoo Managing Editor, Content Eugene Tang Managing Editor, Business & Projects

Editorial office: 11/F, Tower One, Times Square, 1 Matheson Street, Causeway Bay, Hong Kong  
Editorial feedback, general inquiries: 2565 2222, news@scmp.com  
Advertising Enquiry: 2563 2435, advertising@scmp.com  
Reprint permission and back copies: 2680 8180, reprint@scmp.com  
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Online / digital inquiries: 2680 8622, digital@scmp.com  
Charity giving: 2680 8159, scmp@ncm.com  
Events and conferences: 2680 8160, conferences@scmp.com

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# High-stakes market

Nicholas Spiro says Beijing's measures to stem the property sector crisis have contributed significantly to improvement in sentiment around Chinese stocks

It has been a long time since China's stock market outperformed benchmark global indices in a four-month period. This makes the 26 per cent gain in the MSCI China Index, which tracks Chinese shares listed at home and abroad, since January 22 all the more remarkable.

While the gauge is still down almost 50 per cent from its peak in February 2021, the bull run in Chinese equities has been the big surprise in global markets in 2024. Although several factors are at play – including stronger-than-expected growth in the first quarter, cheap valuations and Chinese stocks' weak correlation with bond markets in the United States – Beijing's more forceful measures to stem the crisis in the housing market have contributed significantly to the improvement in sentiment.

Since mid-April, when the rally in Chinese equities gathered momentum, real estate shares have driven the recovery along with internet stocks, a Bank of America report on May 22 noted. The dramatic gains stem from the government's decision to tackle the property crisis with greater urgency and in a more comprehensive manner than investors expected.

The persistent deterioration in the housing sector has "breached policymakers' pain threshold, pushing them to step up housing easing and shift the strategic focus towards digesting existing inventory", Goldman Sachs noted in a report on May 18. Prices for new homes in 70 cities last month fell at their sharpest pace in both monthly and annualised terms in at least a decade.

The package of measures announced on May 17 includes a cut in the minimum down payment ratio for first-time buyers to a record low 15 per cent and a removal of the nationwide floor for mortgage rates. It also provides a framework for reducing housing inventory.

China's central bank will offer 300 billion yuan

(HK\$323.5 billion) in cheap funding to state banks for them to extend financing to local state-owned enterprises (SOEs) chosen by local governments to support the purchase of unsold homes at reasonable prices.

Nomura, one of the most bearish voices on China, said Beijing is "headed in the right direction with regard to ending the epic housing crisis" and "will be the builder of last resort".

While there are serious concerns about the implementation and effectiveness of measures to destock the market, the signalling effect of the bolder policy response sends a message that stabilising the property market is a political priority.

Policy support is now a compelling part of the market narrative around China. The findings of Bank of America's latest Asia fund manager survey on May 14 show that more investors are buying Chinese stocks on incremental signs of policy easing as opposed to taking a wait-and-see approach.

Yet there are strong reasons to doubt whether further easing measures are sufficient to sustain the rally in property stocks, especially given the dramatic gains over the past month. In a podcast on China on May 22, JPMorgan noted that investors still treat the country's equity market as "guilty until proven innocent" given the succession of shocks during the past several years.

This is questionable given the extent to which sentiment has improved. What is clear, however, is that the more forceful response to the crisis in the property market has raised expectations and put the data on housing activity under sharper scrutiny.

Analysts and investors reacted with disappointment to the small size of the re-lending programme to help reduce housing inventory. The destocking plan only applies to unsold properties that are already completed, doing little to help distressed developers whose projects are mostly unfinished or delayed.

Nomura estimates that the funding gap to secure the delivery of pre-sold but uncompleted homes is about 3 trillion yuan.

Another major concern is the scheme's implementation given that risks are being transferred to local governments and SOEs which are already financially stretched. The unsold homes that will be bought can only be sold or leased as public housing.

Since average rental yields in tier one cities stood at just 1.4 per cent last year, it is unclear whether the rental income from public housing units will cover local governments' debt servicing and operating costs. Moody's Ratings warned in a report on May 21.

Still, the demand-side measures announced by Beijing are significant and should help stabilise sales in the coming months, like when the government reduced down payments and cut rates for existing mortgages in August 2023. Bank of America notes that property viewings in major cities increased markedly after the new measures came in earlier this month.

Lawrence Lu, managing director and analytical manager, Greater China property and conglomerates at S&P Global Ratings, said it was important to put the easing measures in perspective. "It's a significant shift in the government's stance, from restrictions to outright stimulus," Lu said.

The recovery in equities remains vulnerable. Property stocks are one of the biggest drags on corporate earnings growth. In the absence of a meaningful improvement in confidence in the housing market – especially among homebuyers – and credible solutions to the inevitable snags in reducing inventory, real estate shares are bound to resume their decline.

The stakes are high. A stabilisation in the housing market would encourage retail investors, who dominate trading in onshore shares and have so far stayed on the sidelines, to buy stocks and provide a more solid underpinning to the broader rally. This is why Beijing's more forceful policy response, although just one of several factors influencing sentiment, offers hope for Chinese stocks.

Nicholas Spiro is a partner at Lauressa Advisory



Dinosaurs hold no fear for a boy at the Hong Kong Observation Wheel in Central. Photo: Robert Ng

## Sino-Russian ties have put Republicans on the spot

Robert Delaney says party has been tough on Beijing but appears to be finding it harder to reconcile China's closeness to Moscow amid the war in Ukraine

The hug that President Xi Jinping gave his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin earlier this month, along with the many other expressions of mutual support, made clear which side Beijing is taking on Russia's war against Ukraine, and underscored the foreign policy problem that the US Republican Party has.

How does one proceed in portraying China as the most pressing threat facing the US, which has been a political imperative for both American political parties in recent years, when Russia continues to integrate its economy with China's while trying to bombard its neighbour into submission?

As Putin makes dark references to Russia's nuclear capabilities, it's becoming impossible to avoid mentioning Moscow as equally dangerous, and if we look closely enough we can see a growing effort by the Republican Party to lay the blame for the Sino-Russian partnership entirely at US President Joe Biden's feet and use it as an election issue.

To get into this, let's be clear about the Republican Party's new ideological foundation: the liberal international order that the party's earlier incarnation forged over decades – where free markets and civil society initiatives have broadened political power bases throughout the West – is now seen by the party of today as more dangerous than anything that Moscow and Beijing might have done to undermine it.

In other words, better to strangle independent media and a judiciary that might question efforts to

subvert elections as well as regularly employ Nazi rhetoric than to allow transgender people to use bathrooms that align with their gender identity.

In the Republican Party, the respect for autocrats used to be mostly limited to Trump himself and the most fervent among his base. Just last week, for example, he proclaimed that Putin, Xi and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, are "at the top of their game" while denigrating the US. Trump has managed to get away with these comments because they're often just one small part of his usual meandering vortex of rhetorical extremes that echo white supremacist and Christian nationalist backwash.

But now others in Trump's orbit, many with better foreign policy bona fides, are joining in to seed the ground for the new positioning that the entire party will need to adopt as part of the effort to unwind what it did globally in the second half of the 20th century.

Cue Michael Pillsbury, a respected China analyst, now with the Heritage Foundation, who has long been out in front when it comes to the argument for the hardest line possible against Beijing.

He doesn't deny that Beijing and Moscow are much closer now. However, Pillsbury is asserting that not only is Biden responsible for the hell that Putin has unleashed on Ukraine, but that he's also culpable for not supporting negotiations between Moscow and Kyiv.

Putin has no intention of giving up an inch of Ukrainian land that his forces occupy, and will use any

means at his disposal to keep it. So what good are negotiations unless the parties involved are prepared to accept this condition?

And aside from the allegation that Biden is the real villain, Pillsbury came out with a line straight from Moscow's propaganda machine: "We need some kind of negotiations over the Ukraine."

Anyone at his level knows that using the article "the" before Ukraine was the way that the Soviet Union referred to the area. The article was dropped when Ukraine gained its independence.

This is not an insignificant verbal slip. It is part of a reframing of the situation that prepares the ground for the ultimate shift that Republicans need to make to achieve their new geopolitical aims.

Over time, the new Republican Party will not side with a democratic Taiwan against the Beijing-Moscow partnership which has become a military industrial behemoth pushing nationalist-populist agendas. When it comes to international power projection, it will be much easier for the Republican Party to deal with like-minded players like Putin and Xi than it will be to cater to the agendas of the world's democracies.

Pillsbury isn't the only traditional Republican who is embracing the Trumpist extremes. Nikki Haley, Trump's most formidable opponent in the Republican Party primary, who put up some valiant fights against the Russians when she was the former president's UN ambassador, now says she's prepared to vote for him.

The question isn't whether the Republican Party will side with the world's autocrats. It already is. It's whether their twisting of the truth will persuade enough American voters to go along with them.

Robert Delaney is the Post's North America bureau chief

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# OPINION



## Sea change essential

Richard Heydarian says Beijing and Manila can avoid conflict with mutually beneficial deals

Raising tensions in the South China Sea is "the last thing we would like," said Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr recently, when pressed on whether Manila would adopt more aggressive tactics, such as the water cannons used by the Chinese. "And that [using water cannons] will certainly do that," he said, dismissing the idea.

In recent months, Chinese maritime forces have repeatedly aimed water cannons at Philippine resupply and patrol missions in the disputed South China Sea, damaging vessels and injuring servicemen. Manila is facing growing pressure to adopt stronger countermeasures.

To bolster its position, the Philippines has joined an emerging alliance, nicknamed the "Squad", with the United States, Australia and Japan to counter a powerful China. It has also expanded the scope of its annual military drills with Western allies - this year's Balikatan conducted, for the first time, drills beyond its 12 nautical-mile territorial sea as well as close to Taiwan.

But this tilt towards the US could jeopardise Manila's strategic autonomy and further alienate China - as well as concern fellow Asean members fretting over the risk of a new cold war. For China, its actions in the South China Sea risk its reputation as a responsible stakeholder in the Indo-Pacific, accelerating the US' expanding military footprint in the Philippines and causing Beijing to sleepwalk towards an armed confrontation with a key US treaty ally.

The upshot is a brinkmanship that could tip over into mutual losses, especially if each side presses its advantage at the expense of a sustainable and peaceful management of an inherently intractable

conflict. It's high time the Philippines and China work to avoid conflict by pursuing mutually beneficial agreements, rather than rely on military might and diplomatic intransigence. It's hard to sugarcoat the troubling state of Philippine-China relations. Against the backdrop of festering maritime spats, diplomatic channels are on the verge of total disintegration.

Frustrated by Manila's assertion of claims in the disputed areas and its publicising of dangerous encounters with Chinese maritime forces, Beijing has responded with a diplomatic offensive.

Over the past year, China has repeatedly referred to confidential deals with the previous and current Philippine administrations. Under a "gentleman's agreement", the Duterte administration reportedly agreed not to fortify the Philippines' grounded navy vessel in the Second Thomas Shoal, its de facto military base there. Various Philippine officials have categorically denied such a deal.

Diplomatic tensions, however, reached new heights when China, incensed by the Philippines' plans to fortify disputed land features, leaked details of an alleged "new model" agreement with the current leadership. In response, top Philippine security officials called for the Chinese diplomats involved to be expelled.

Amid the diplomatic deadlock, China hawks within the Marcos administration are pushing for tighter security cooperation with traditional allies. Last month, Marcos attended a trilateral summit with his Japanese and US counterparts in the White House. This month, Philippine Defence Secretary Gilberto Teodoro met defence chiefs from other Squad nations - Australia, Japan and the US - in Hawaii. Over the

coming months, the four allies are set to enhance naval interoperability and conduct joint patrols in the South China Sea.

The Philippine defence establishment is also pressing for expanded security cooperation, including visiting forces agreement-style deals with Japan and France, and, I understand, more bases under the Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) with the US. Although defensive in nature, this approach may end up undermining the Philippines' strategic autonomy by fostering an undue reliance on the West.

**China can ill afford to be seen as a bully and, worse, risk an armed confrontation with the Philippines**

To begin with, the trajectory of US foreign policy is extremely volatile, given its competing strategic priorities from Ukraine to Israel and Taiwan, as well as the possibility of a more stridently "isolationist" foreign policy under a second Trump administration.

While Japan has a "global partnership" with the US, it also faces demographic and economic stagnation, and is unlikely to be able to drastically assist the Philippines. As for Australia, which has relatively modest resources and economic heft, it is already bogged down by the massive costs of and controversies surrounding its nuclear-powered submarine project with

Washington and London. Moreover, a full-throated tilt into the Western camp could further isolate the Philippines within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, which has broadly maintained warm and economically fruitful ties with China. The Philippines can't afford to be seen as the US' deputy sheriff in Southeast Asia lest it erodes its ability to exercise leadership among and secure tangible cooperation with key Asean members such as Indonesia, Singapore and Vietnam.

The status quo, however, is also deleterious to China's interests. After all, the encirclement of much smaller Philippine vessels and injuring of Filipino servicemen at the hands of Chinese maritime forces will reinforce international concerns over China's rise as a major power. And China's newly imposed regulations against "trespassing" foreigners across its claimed territories in the South China Sea only raise the risk of accidental clashes and casualties.

As an aspiring leader in Asia, China can ill afford to be seen as a bully and, worse, risk an armed confrontation with the Philippines and potentially the US, which has reiterated its commitment to help in an event of a contingency in the South China Sea. It is therefore incumbent on China, as the more powerful party, to re-examine its approach to the Philippines in favour of de-escalation and genuinely mutually beneficial agreements.

On its part, the Marcos administration should ensure it maintains robust communication channels with China, avoids getting dragged into a US-led "Asian Nato" and engages with the rest of Asean to seek an inclusive and stable regional order.

Richard Heydarian is a Manila-based academic and author of *Asia's New Battlefield: US, China and the Struggle for Western Pacific*, and the forthcoming *Duterte's Rise*

## Airlines face growing challenges from climate change

Kavitha Yarlagadda says the possibility of more frequent turbulence is one of the dangers

Last week, a Singapore Airlines flight encountered severe turbulence that left one passenger dead and dozens injured. While the episode has been described as a freak incident, it is making people wonder what could have caused such a serious disruption to the flight and whether climate change will worsen the frequency and intensity of turbulence during air travel.

Already, turbulence is the leading cause of non-fatal injuries in on-board accidents.

Hours after take-off from London on May 20, the flight headed for Singapore hit a pocket of turbulence and experienced a precipitous drop of about 1,800 metres, which sent objects and people hurtling towards the cabin ceiling and necessitated an emergency landing in Bangkok.

Most flights encounter some turbulence at some point. Strong winds near the airport cause turbulence when flights take off or land. Mainly, however, the turbulence that affects aviation can come from three sources.

The first is shear turbulence and mainly found around the jet streams that are so important to air travel. In these fast rivers of air that encircle the planet, wind shear, or an abrupt change in the direction or speed of airflow, causes turbulence.

The second is convective turbulence, caused by storms or other weather.

The third is mountain waves. In the face of mountains, not all air passes smoothly over them. Some air masses crowd against the mountains and are forced upwards,

forming mountain waves that might then break up into currents of turbulence.

Any turbulence that occurs outside storm clouds is called clear-air turbulence. According to a study published last year, significant increases in clear-air turbulence were found between 1979 and 2020. For example, severe clear-air turbulence, which is more powerful than the Earth's gravity, became 55 per cent more frequent over the North Atlantic. Worldwide, there were comparable increases in turbulence.

Climate change is most likely to blame here because it is strengthening the jet streams that cause turbulence. Specifically, warmer air from increasing carbon emissions is changing wind speeds.

While turbulence associated with storms can be detected by radar systems and avoided, clear-air turbulence is difficult to identify. It does not show up on cockpit instruments and the only warnings are from planes that have already flown through it. The unpredictable nature of such turbulence presents operational difficulties for airlines.

**Airlines will have to make a greater effort to lessen the impact of climate change on passengers and flights**

To maintain passenger comfort and safety, pilots have to navigate unforeseen rough patches, possibly changing altitudes or deviating from intended paths. This might lead to higher fuel usage and thus higher running expenses. Severe turbulence can also result in aircraft damage, and flight diversions and delays, all of which could have costly impacts.

Flight planning would be completely transformed if turbulence could be predicted accurately. The existing techniques rely on weather forecasts and pilot reports, which are useful sources of information but fall short in terms of timeliness and precision when it comes to managing turbulence effectively.

Currently, the two World Area Forecast Centres use only one turbulence index, the Ellrod and Knapp (1992) Turbulence Index 1, while other turbulence indices are included in the Graphical Turbulence Guidance forecast. Next-generation satellites, such as the GOES-16, have the potential to enhance turbulence nowcasting since they have higher temporal and spatial resolutions, which could help aircraft avoid turbulence on short timescales.

Meteorologists can foresee broad areas of turbulence, but they are unable to predict localised clear-air turbulence, which poses a problem to pilots.

One strategy for avoiding encounters with clear-air turbulence could be steering clear of the four main jet stream systems encircling the planet. However, commercial airlines and pilots have been, and may continue, taking advantage of

the jet stream systems to reduce flight durations and save on fuel.

The aviation sector faces other climate change challenges, and turbulence is not the only danger. Hotter temperatures might make it more difficult for planes to take off, for example, and more passengers might have to be left on the ground.

Given that air travel is not only recovering but growing, new and better working processes could and should be devised to ensure that both the impact aviation has on the environment and the impact climate change could have on aviation are minimised.

Around the world, the demand for air travel rose last year. In India, a record 152 million passengers flew domestically in 2023.

Last year, total traffic increased by 36.9 per cent compared with 2022. Global traffic was at 94.1 per cent of pre-pandemic levels in 2019. Traffic in December last year increased by 25.3 per cent year on year, reaching 97.5 per cent of the level recorded in December 2019. The robust recovery towards the end of the year was reflected in fourth-quarter traffic, which was at 98.2 per cent of 2019.

Rising temperatures and accompanying changes in atmospheric conditions could result in more frequent instances of severe turbulence. As we move into more turbulent times, airlines will have to make a greater effort to lessen the impact of climate change on passengers and flights. In the meantime, a regular traveller's best bet is to buckle up and stay calm.

Kavitha Yarlagadda is an independent writer based in Hyderabad, India

## LETTERS

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### University English language education of vital importance

Demographic and technological transformations highlight the growing necessity of university English language education in Hong Kong.

The number of mainland students in Hong Kong public universities has surpassed 10,000. The proportion of non-local self-financed students is expected to keep growing as the government allows universities to accept more overseas applicants, especially those from the belt and road countries.

With greater numbers of students of non-English-speaking origins, expect more of them to struggle with having English as the medium of instruction. Their hurdles may range from pronunciation to writing complete sentences to reading journal articles written in academic English.

Despite this increase in demand, university language centres are facing shortages of lecturers and funding.

Meanwhile, recent incidents of students being accepted into university with forged documents have also put their qualifications under scrutiny.

Much like other universities which teach in English and require preparatory English courses for students less capable in the language, Hong Kong universities and the government must address this resource mismatch.

Having English as a medium of instruction is one of our advantages in attracting students from the mainland and abroad to supplement the shrinking numbers of local students.

Hong Kong aims to internationalise its institutions. If our graduates do not receive proper English training and cannot master this global lingua franca, we could end up marginalising ourselves.

Some might question the need to learn English when artificial intelligence (AI) can correct students' grammar, but expectations for university graduates are higher than that as they should have more advanced English proficiency and not just be able to produce grammatically accurate text. Relying too heavily on AI while downplaying English language education will produce cohorts of young people vulnerable to being replaced by robots.

The split between the actual growing demand for English language education and its apparent diminished importance is alarming. The decline in students' English abilities could be exacerbated as the bar for teaching English in school could be lowered by replacing the Language Proficiency Assessment with the International English Language Testing System.

Rather than focusing on making short-term numbers look better, educators should help address long-term problems before it is too late.

**Ailion Ng, assistant lecturer, Centre for Applied English Studies, University of Hong Kong**

### Working together to solve a problem can pay dividends

In a society that prizes market freedoms as Hong Kong does, can private-sector parties work together for the public interest?

I refer to a situation in the old block of flats where I live, a private development of some 300 units housing a substantial number of elderly residents.

While the block of flats has a lift to the car park level, the only pedestrian access to street level is via some linked staircases consisting of over 60 steps. This causes problems for the elderly residents and it is depressing to see them struggling to navigate such a major barrier to access street level.

A proposal to install another lift to solve this problem still leaves some 30 steps for residents to climb, while being exorbitantly expensive.

However, a closer examination of the block's surroundings reveals a possible solution.

The block of flats' car park is on the same level as the car park in the commercial building next to it, separated by a wall. An entrance could easily be provided to give pedestrian access from the residential car park to the commercial car park. This then provides access to a cargo/disabled lift in the commercial car park which travels to street level.

There are, of course, safety and insurance issues which need to be resolved. However, I believe this is an opportunity for us to demonstrate how cooperation by different interests in Hong Kong can solve difficult problems.

**John Dockerill, Wan Chai**

### Scientists' life-saving research an inspiring example for all

It was inspiring to read about the achievements of scientists Thein Swee Lay and Stuart Orkin, this year's winners of the Shaw Prize for Life Sciences and Medicine. The two were awarded for their research that contributed to a cure for a blood disorder, bringing hope to 20 million people worldwide affected by it.

The practical application of their research is impressive. The US Food and Drug Administration has approved two sickle stem cell therapies based on their work. This achievement really highlights the potential of basic scientific research to pave the way for transformative therapies that can save lives, and will inspire future generations of scientists.

As a secondary school student with a passion for science, I am inspired by them to pursue a career in research and make a positive impact on society.

**Ariel Ching, Kwai Chung**



# A walk in the dark



Bundles of electrical wiring, exposed water pipes and interconnected alleyways shrouded in darkness resurrect Hong Kong's infamous Kowloon Walled City for director Soi Cheang's latest hit film *Twilight of the Warriors: Walled In*.

The action feature follows a troubled youth as he stumbles into the sprawling neighbourhood and fights a series of battles to defend his new home from a crime lord. Handout photographs from the film set offer a sneak peek into life in the labyrinthine urban enclave known for its poor living conditions and rampant criminal activity that was demolished in 1994.





## BECKHAM ON BOARD

AliExpress taps former English football star as its global brand ambassador > **E-COMMERCE B2**



## 'NOT EASY TO LOOK AT'

Bruce Nauman retrospective traces six decades of the artist's unsettling work > **ARTS & CULTURE B7**

### PROPERTY

# SHANGHAI EASES CURBS FOR BUYERS

New loosening measures include lower down-payment ratios, reduced mortgage rates and subsidies

Salina Li and Daniel Ren

Shanghai will relax home purchase restrictions and grant subsidies to people buying new flats in a move designed to bolster the city's property sector.

The measures, which take effect today, come less than two weeks after the central government rolled out a rescue package to avoid a property bust in the world's second-largest economy.

Down-payment ratios for first-time buyers had been cut to 20 per cent from 30 per cent, and to 35

per cent from 50 per cent for people buying second homes, the Shanghai government said in a statement yesterday.

The minimum five-year mortgage rate has been reduced to 3.5 per cent from 4.1 per cent for first homes, and 3.9 per cent from 4.5 per cent for second homes.

Households with two or more children are now eligible to buy an additional unit, to meet the housing needs of families with more than one child.

Shanghai had since 2011 barred households from owning a third flat to curb the red-hot property market.

Families in difficult housing situations with plans to upgrade by dumping their existing flat and buying a better one in the primary market will receive a subsidy of as much as to 30,000 yuan (HK\$32,375).

The authorities will also allow more non-local residents to own a house in the financial hub.

People from other parts of the mainland who have paid taxes to their local authorities for three consecutive years will now be allowed to buy a flat in Shanghai. Previously, they were required to have done so for five years to qualify.

"Over the past month, we have received a lot of inquiries from non-local residents who are interested in owning a flat in Shanghai," said Yan Zhancai, a consultant at an outlet of Lianjia, the mainland's largest property brokerage, on Nanquan Road in Shanghai.

The city has an inventory of new homes of about 8 million square metres, which could take more than a year to digest, based on the current pace of sales, according to data from China Real Estate Information Corporation.

"Chinese authorities recently unveiled a housing market

support plan that shifts the focus of efforts to reducing inventories rather than solely focusing on stabilising demand," asset manager T. Rowe Price said in an email.

"This new effort represents a significant change in policy focus, moving in the right direction."

The government has rolled out a swathe of policies to clear excess housing inventory and ensure the timely delivery of new homes, as the country embarks on its most ambitious effort yet to rescue the moribund property market and shore up the broader economy.

A raft of measures, including 300 billion yuan of funds for affordable housing, encouraging

local authorities to buy unsold homes and ensuring developers have access to financing, were announced on May 17.

The move coincided with the People's Bank of China's (PBOC) announcement that it would remove the national lower limit on mortgage rates for first and second homes.

The central bank also cut down-payment ratios for first-time and second-time buyers to 15 and 25 per cent, respectively, compared with 20 and 30 per cent previously.

In another move to stimulate demand, the PBOC lowered interest rates on loans tied to individuals' housing provident funds by 0.25 percentage point.

## Mideast and Indonesia 'next family office targets'

Opportunities abound but city must do more to boost its global hub status, InvestHK says

Meredith Chen  
meredith.chen@scmp.com

The Middle East and Indonesia are the next targets for Hong Kong to attract family offices, but more needs to be done to bolster the city's status as a global family office hub, according to an executive at InvestHK, the agency in charge of attracting foreign investment.

The mainland was undoubtedly Hong Kong's biggest family office market, but the city had to adopt an international outlook, said Jason Fong, global head of family office at InvestHK.

There were many opportunities in Indonesia, he said, citing his recent trip to the Southeast Asian country.

"For these big Indonesian family businesses, as well as family offices, they're familiar with Hong Kong. But surprisingly, they're not too aware of how much knowledge and wisdom we have in the family office [space]," Fong said.

High-level visits to the Middle East last year by Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu, Financial Secretary Paul Chan Mo-po and Hong Kong Monetary Authority CEO Eddie Yue Wai-man were paying dividends, as more wealthy individuals were looking to set up family offices in the city, he said.

Hong Kong had more than 2,700 single-family offices at the end of last year, according to a study published by Deloitte in March.

The city was renowned for its "simple, direct and transparent" tax regime, Fong said.

The government introduced a host of tax incentives for family offices in May last year.

Singapore, Hong Kong's main rival as an Asian financial hub, had stricter rules for family offices to qualify for tax incentives, said Paul Ho, a financial services tax partner at EY.

These included a 10 per cent threshold of assets under management invested locally, whereas there was no such requirement in Hong Kong, he said.

Unlike the city state where single-family offices seeking tax concessions must seek approval from the Monetary Authority of Singapore first, Hong Kong has a self-assessment tax regime where the tax concessions automatically apply provided the family offices meet the minimum criteria.

Ho suggested the government do more, such as setting up a hotline, for family offices to get in touch with the tax department to answer questions related to tax policies, saying this would "further facilitate the process and provide more certainty".

InvestHK's Fong said the agency was exploring setting up an art storage facility at the airport to serve as a catalyst to speed up and encourage art transactions in the city.

### COMPANIES

# AIA keen to own premium office buildings in China

Enoch Yiu  
enoch.yiu@scmp.com

AIA Group, Asia's biggest publicly traded insurer, is looking to take ownership of more properties on the mainland to consolidate its operations, picking an opportune time when a two-year slump has rendered asset prices "affordable" to long-term investors.

The insurer aims to own premium office buildings in key growth cities such as Beijing, Guangzhou and Shenzhen, after an economic slowdown that started in 2022 led to a surge in vacancy rates in commercial properties last year. The plan will add to its recent acquisitions in Shanghai.



**We have strong cash flow, which enables us to invest in office buildings for our own use**

EDMUND TSE, CHAIRMAN, AIA GROUP

"Property prices are affordable, and we have strong cash flow, which enables us to invest in office buildings for our own use," chairman Edmund Tse Sze-wing said. "China is one of our major markets. We are not short-term investors."

AIA took five years to re-develop its headquarters in Hong Kong, turning the 50-year-old building on 1 Stubbs Road in Wan Chai into a modern structure to prevent wastage and keep up with new environmental and energy demands.

The insurance giant paid 2.4 billion yuan (HK\$2.58 billion) in January to acquire a 95 per cent stake in the Capital Square Beijing building in Chaoyang district. This came after the purchase of a 90 per cent interest in a commercial complex in Shanghai's North Bund, now renamed as AIA Financial Centre, for 5 billion yuan in December 2022.

Savills forecast vacancy rates in grade A offices would increase in 10 major mainland cities, including Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Hangzhou, with most of these urban centres experiencing excess supply.

China's office market cycle, which typically lasts for four to six years, remained shaky since prices fell from 2022, the property consultancy had said in a report in January.

Tse, 86, led AIA's return to the mainland in 1992 by becoming the first foreign insurer with a licence to operate onshore. The company was established in Shanghai in 1919 and left the mainland market after 1949.

Having its own building in Hong Kong to house some 1,800 staff under one roof would help AIA better control costs, Tse said. The building would incorporate the latest technology and allow the firm to "train and nurture a new generation of insurance leaders", he added.

AIA reported a 31 per cent jump in its value of new business to US\$1.33 billion in the first three months of this year, marking the best quarter in the firm's operating history. The yardstick is an indicator of its growth trajectory.

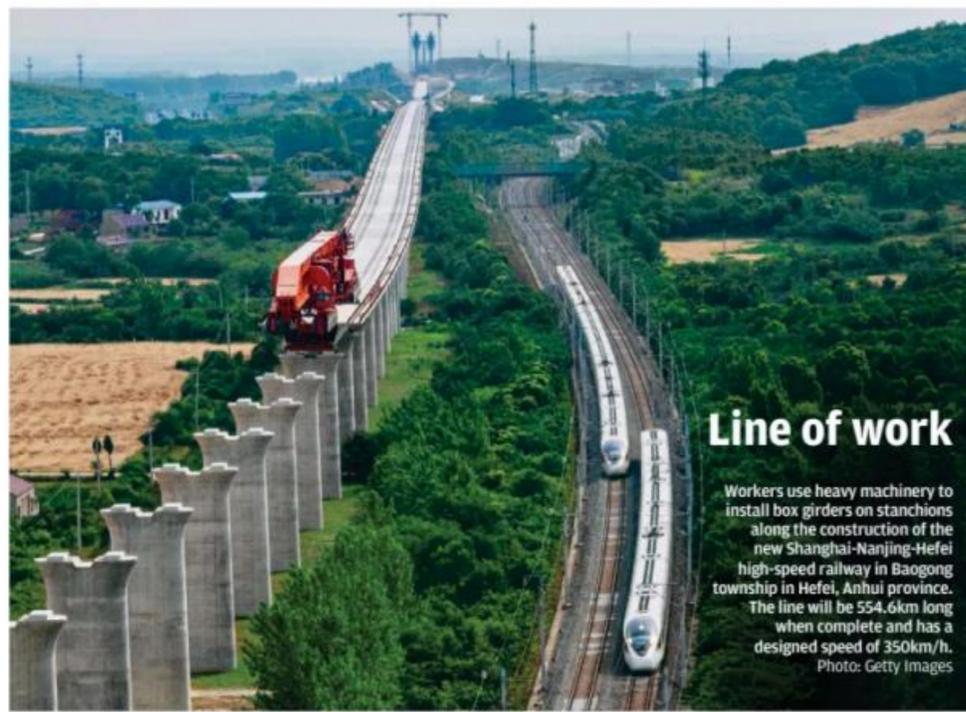
Hong Kong and the mainland now account for more than 50 per cent of AIA's new business value in 18 markets. Tse believed these two markets would continue to be a growth engine for the group.

"There have been a lot of ups and downs in the insurance market in Hong Kong over the past 50 years, but Hong Kong remains resilient," he said.

"With policy support from the central government, the insurance industry in Hong Kong will continue to prosper."

CEO Lee Yuan Siang said the reopening yesterday of its headquarters was a milestone in AIA's 90 years of business in the city.

"The new building will use all the environmentally friendly design features to cut waste and use of energy," said Mark Konyn, AIA's chief investment officer.



## Line of work

Workers use heavy machinery to install box girders on stanchions along the construction of the new Shanghai-Nanjing-Hefei high-speed railway in Baogong township in Hefei, Anhui province. The line will be 554.6km long when complete and has a designed speed of 350km/h. Photo: Getty Images

### INVESTMENT

# Hotel owners told to lure Reit investors with 4% returns

Daniel Ren  
ren.daniel@scmp.com

China's hotel property owners should aim to double their returns to win over investors before packaging their assets into listed real estate investment trusts (Reits), as the industry enjoys a revival in tourism.

Hotels in prime locations in major cities such as Beijing and Shanghai with an annual return of 4 per cent would be welcomed by market regulators and investors looking for steady income, said Zhou Tao, head of hotels and hospitality at JLL in China.

Reits backed by hotels could give the asset class a boost, he added.

The current estimated return of about 2 per cent was not enough to draw interest in Reits

backed by hotel assets, JLL said, adding some properties in Shanghai had reported annual returns of about 3 per cent.

"The asset value of old or idled hotel properties can be enlarged with the right [market] positioning and sound management," Zhou said at a conference in Shanghai yesterday. "Hotels can generate good returns and will be deemed as lucrative assets to invest in and own."

More than 40 Reits have been listed on the Shanghai and Shenzhen stock exchanges since June 2021 as part of China's financial market revamp to allow retail investors to diversify their investments from stocks and bonds.

The government first allowed infrastructure Reits backed by toll expressways, and later widened the eligible assets to include rental homes and shopping malls.

Pent-up demand by tourists, improved operating capability by hospitality groups and a growing appetite for a diverse asset portfolio among institutional funds are creating a good foundation for the launch of China's first hotel-backed Reits, according to JLL.

Reits allow asset owners to raise cash from valuable but illiquid assets without losing control of them.

The investment vehicle also gives investors the opportunity to collect regular dividends with income generated by the underlying properties.

"Reits backed by hotels can be issued once hotels can bring investors stable and strong returns," Zhou said, adding better space utilisation and management efficiency could add value to the package.

"Renovation with meticulous

planning can effectively maximise returns for existing hotels."

The world's second-largest economy has enjoyed a surge in tourism during the recent Labour Day holiday from May 1 to 5.

However, many big hotel chains failed to capitalise on the boom as budget-conscious travellers filled lesser-known resorts.

Stiff competition has also prevented hoteliers from raising room rates, according to analysts at Caitong Securities.

Some 13 billion yuan (HK\$14 billion) of hotel assets in Beijing and Shanghai changed hands last year, according to JLL statistics.

They had become a target of big investors seeking to pick up bargains amid a three-year property crisis. The value worked out to about 8 per cent of total commercial property transactions, JLL said.

### INVESTMENT

# China steps up chip push with 334b yuan fund

New investment vehicle marks Beijing's latest bid to achieve self-sufficiency

Che Pan  
che.pan@scmp.com

China has stepped up efforts to achieve self-sufficiency in its semiconductor industry by creating its largest-ever chip investment fund, disregarding mounting pressure from US tech sanctions and a track record of corruption in these state-led programmes.

The third phase of the China Integrated Circuit Industry Investment Fund, also known as the "Big Fund", was kicked off on Friday with a registered capital of

344 billion yuan (HK\$371 billion), according to information made available yesterday by corporate database service Qichacha.

The Big Fund III has 19 equity investors, led by the Ministry of Finance with a 17 per cent stake, followed by the state-owned China Development Bank Capital with 10 per cent and state-asset manager Shanghai Guosheng Group with 8 per cent.

China Construction Bank yesterday said it would contribute 21.5 billion yuan over a 10-year period for a 6.25 per cent stake. Bank of China and Agricultural Bank of China also said they

would invest 21.5 billion yuan each.

Bank of Communications will invest 20 billion yuan for a 5.81 per cent stake, while Postal Savings Bank of China will offer 8 billion yuan for a 2.33 per cent interest.

Other enterprises that took part include Industrial and Commercial Bank of China and China National Tobacco Corp.

The size of the Big Fund III – roughly on a par with the US\$53 billion in incentives under the Chips and Science Act, which was enacted by US President Joe Biden in 2022 – shows the Chinese government's "whole nation"

approach to build a self-sufficient semiconductor industry and overcome Washington's export curbs.

Shares in Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corporation (SMIC), the mainland's biggest contract chip maker, closed 7.43 per cent higher at HK\$16.48 yesterday. The country's second-largest chip foundry, Hua Hong Semiconductor, ended 11.47 per cent ahead at HK\$19.82.

Launched in 2014, the Big Fund has been Beijing's main investment vehicle to support the domestic semiconductor industry, particularly in the areas of chip design, manufacturing and packaging, equipment and materials.

It is a major investor in SMIC

and memory chip giant Yangtze Memory Technologies, which are both on the US trade blacklist.

The fund had raised 204.1 billion yuan in 2019, up from its initial financing of 138.7 billion yuan in 2014.

But the programme has been rocked by corruption scandals.

China's semiconductor industry, meanwhile, continues to show its strength in producing older-generation legacy chips widely used in cars, home appliances and various consumer electronics.

The country's global share of mature semiconductor-making capacity is expected to reach 39 per cent by 2027, up from 31 per cent in 2023, according to market research firm TrendForce.



Edmund Tse, who led AIA's return to the mainland in 1992, says China is a major market for the insurance giant. Photo: Xiaomei Chen

# BUSINESS

## E-COMMERCE

### AliExpress taps Beckham as global brand ambassador

Platform strives to boost international business amid intensifying competition with rival Temu

Ben Jiang  
ben.jiang@scmp.com

Alibaba Group Holding's global shopping platform AliExpress has signed up English football star David Beckham as its global brand ambassador, as the Chinese e-commerce giant strengthened efforts to boost its international business amid intensifying competition with PDD Holdings' Temu.

Under the one-year partnership announced by AliExpress yesterday, Beckham will be featured in a series of promotional campaigns on television, the internet, social media and traditional media, starting with TV commercials during the European Football Championship, or Euro 2024, which kicks off on June 14.



Football icon David Beckham is featured in AliExpress' latest ad.

AliExpress is a sponsor of this year's event. Alibaba is the owner of the Post.

The move comes after Alibaba's rival Temu, a budget shopping platform, splashed millions of dollars on commercials during the past two Super Bowl games, the annual championship of the US National Football League, which is one of the most expensive nights to place ads.

Temu entered the European market last year, starting with France, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom, touting a wide selection of budget items.

AliExpress' Euro 2024 campaign would involve a giveaway of millions of euros worth of coupons, as well as free tickets to matches, the platform said.

Its partnership with Beckham "makes a lot of sense" as he "is a global sports and lifestyle icon" and "will help AliExpress users get closer to the action throughout the tournament", said Gary Topp, European commercial director at AliExpress.

Europe is one of Alibaba's key targets for the e-commerce segment. The company currently offers five-day online shopping delivery in Germany, France and Portugal, in addition to the United States, Mexico and Saudi Arabia, supported by Alibaba's Cainiao smart logistics network.

The European Championship, which takes place every four years, is the world's most watched football tournament after the World Cup. Euro 2020 accumulated 5.2 billion global views during live matches, according to the Union of European Football Associations, the organiser.

AliExpress has emerged as a key driver of Alibaba's e-commerce business.

The site's revenue in the March quarter surged by 45 per cent to 27.4 billion yuan (HK\$29.5 billion), driven largely by its premium service Choice, according to the company's latest financial statement.

Combined orders on Alibaba's international marketplaces in the quarter rose by 20 per cent year on year, the report showed.

As part of its global marketing push, AliExpress has also tapped Chinese actress Tang Wei as its regional brand endorser in South Korea.

The platform has also recently rolled out new subsidies to entice more Chinese brands and merchants to sell overseas via AliExpress, as well as Alibaba's other online shopping channels including Lazada in Southeast Asia, Daraz in South Asia, Miravia in Spain, and Trendyol in Turkey.

### Cutting edge



Wind turbine blades await shipment at a port in Lianyungang, in Jiangsu province. The area is also home to LZ Blades, the largest wind turbine blade solutions provider in the world, which

specialises in research, design, manufacturing and services. The firm is a unit of China National Building Material Group, a diversified building materials company. Photo: AFP

## TECHNOLOGY

# CAUTION URGED ON USE OF A.I. AMID RISING RISKS

While the new technology creates uncertainty, Hong Kong can cope by leveraging its hub status and mainland gateway role, HSBC banker says

Enoch Yiu  
enoch.yiu@scmp.com

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) is adding uncertainty to an already uncertain world, but Hong Kong can cope with the challenges by leveraging its hub status and acting as a gateway to the mainland, according to veteran HSBC banker Peter Wong Tung-shun.

"The younger generation today has access to a lot more information than we had in my day," Wong said in City Business Magazine, a twice-yearly publication of City University, of which he is chairman of the international advisory board.

"The world is very uncertain. With generative AI, quantum computing, everything is going to go faster and faster."

The main challenge for students was to make sure the

information was genuine and use it judiciously, he added.

Unlike traditional AI, which is typically used for analysing data, generative AI can be trained to produce different types of content, including text, imagery and audio. Many business leaders, including Elon Musk, have advocated caution because of the technology's potential dangers.

With generative AI, quantum computing, everything is going to go faster and faster

HSBC BANKER PETER WONG

Wong, the 72-year-old non-executive Asia-Pacific chairman of HSBC, believes the city can cope with the challenges of a fast-changing world, "as the people of Hong Kong know how to navigate".

"I have been in banking for 42 years now. In those years, I have gone through 12 crises," he said. "May it be pandemic, may it be caused by politics, or may it be economics, but every time, Hong Kong bounced back very strongly."

The key to the city's future success would depend on whether it could provide the international network for China, Wong said.

"Hong Kong is an international centre. [It] flourishes because of the fact that we have international communities. We have French, British, Canadians, Indians, and so forth," he said.

The Hong Kong government's promotional efforts in the Middle

East were paying off, he said, pointing to growing ties with countries like Saudi Arabia.

Earlier this month, Saudi Tadawul Group, the Gulf nation's bourse operator, organised its first international Capital Markets Forum in the city.

Hong Kong and Saudi Arabia were also working on an exchange-traded fund (ETF) that would track the benchmark Hang Seng Index, Deputy Financial Secretary Michael Wong Wai-lun said at the conference.

Once ready, the ETF will be listed on the Tadawul exchange in Riyadh, allowing Saudi investors to trade Hong Kong stocks.

This comes after the listing of the CSOP Saudi Arabia ETF in Hong Kong in November, which tracks 56 Gulf stocks, including the world's biggest company, Saudi Aramco.

"Hong Kong can only be of value to China if it is in the international space, bringing all the best products and practices. And then China can use Hong Kong as a pilot or a gateway to understand the world," Peter Wong said.

## THE INFORMER

### EVENTS

**Today:** Asia Society Hong Kong evening seminar: "Waste: What is Hong Kong doing?" Asia Society Hong Kong Centre.

**Thursday, May 30:** Canadian Chamber of Commerce evening seminar: "Female leaders in innovation and technology". Tower 2, Times Square.

**Friday, May 31:** Asia Society Hong Kong evening seminar: "Strategy for sustainability". Asia Society Hong Kong Centre. Asia Society Hong Kong Centre.

**Monday, June 3:** Asia Society Hong Kong lunch seminar: "Is Hong Kong really over? A dialogue". Asia Society Hong Kong Centre.

**Tuesday, June 4:** Asia Society Hong Kong evening seminar: "The good, bad, and beautiful of artificial intelligence". Asia Society Hong Kong Centre.

**Wednesday, June 5:** Australian Chamber of Commerce afternoon seminar: "Banking and finance for start-ups and SMEs in Hong Kong". Hollywood Centre.

## RESULTS

**Today 1st Quarter:** Baozun Inc. **Final:** Media Chinese International, One Media Group

**AGM:** 7Road Holdings, A Metaverse, Auto Italia Holdings, Biocytogen Pharmaceuticals (Beijing), C-Mer Eye Care Holdings, Changmao Biochemical Engineering, Chengdu Expressway, China BlueChemical, China Huirong Financial Holdings, China Pipe Group

**Tomorrow 1st Quarter:** Noah Holdings Private Wealth and Asset Management

**Interim:** Infinity Development Holdings, Water Oasis Group **Final:** Alibaba Pictures Group **AGM:** A-Living Smart City Services, CGN Power, Chu Kong Shipping Enterprises (Group), CN Logistics International Holdings, COSCO SHIPPING Holdings, Cosmos Machinery Enterprises

## CONTACT US

**Business News Desk**  
Telephone 2565 2653  
Fax 2565 1624  
Email bizpost@scmp.com  
If you have information on events that should be included here, email business.diary@scmp.com

# DIRECTORY

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\*Ipsos Affluent Survey Asia Pacific Q2 2022

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## Legal & General Notices

### NOTICE

IN THE GENERAL DIVISION OF THE HIGH COURT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE

HC/OC 1/2024

Between  
Resorts World At Sentosa Pte Ltd  
(Singapore UEN No.200502573D) ...Claimant(s)

And

Gao Gunter  
(Hong Kong SAR Passport No.KJ0589XXXX) ... Defendant(s)

To: Gao Gunter, The Defendant

TAKE NOTICE that an action has been commenced against you as the Defendant in the General Division of the High Court of the Republic of Singapore, under Originating Claim No. 1 of 2024 by the Claimant Resorts World At Sentosa Pte Ltd of 8 Sentosa Gateway, Resorts World Sentosa Singapore 098269, whereby the Claimant claims against you as the Defendant for:-

- the sum of S\$9,722,550.00;
- interest at the rate of 12% per annum;
- costs on an indemnity basis; and
- such further or other relief as the Honourable Court deems fit or just in the circumstances.

AND THAT it has been ordered, *inter alia*, that:

- the service of the Originating Claim, the Statement of Claim, the Order of the Court for Service out of Jurisdiction, and the Order of Court for Substituted Service (collectively the "Cause Papers") be effected on you by way of (a) publication of advertisements in (i) the English language newspaper "South China Morning Post" and (ii) Chinese language newspaper "Sing Tao Daily"; and (b) sending the Cause Papers by ordinary post to the last known addresses of the Defendant at (i) Flat D, 23/F Block 11 Chi Fu Fu Yuen, Chi Fu Road, Pok Fu Lam, Hong Kong SAR; (ii) 5 Gough Hill Path, The Peak, Hong Kong SAR; and (iii) 37/F, Cosco Tower, Grand Millennium Plaza, 183 Queen's Road Central, Hong Kong SAR (collectively the "Addresses"); and (c) sending of the Cause Papers by registered post to the Addresses.
- such service shall be deemed good and sufficient service on you upon completion of such posting and advertisement as aforesaid.

And further take notice that you must within 21 days from the publication of this advertisement inclusive of the day of such publication, acknowledge service of the Originating Claim by completing a prescribed form of Notice of Intention to Contest or Not Contest, otherwise judgment may be entered against you.

Dated the 28th day of May 2024.

Wilkinson & Grist  
Process agent of K&L Gates Straits Law LLC,  
Solicitors for the Claimant  
6th Floor, Prince's Building, 10 Chater Road,  
Central, Hong Kong  
Ref: IC:CST:TED:ecl:R947-L2  
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PROPERTY

# SLOWDOWN IN RENT RISE OF LUXURY HOUSING

Declines in Singapore, Hong Kong and Toronto have kept rate below long-term trend average in first quarter, according to Knight Frank report

Yuke Xie  
yuke.xie@scmp.com

Rents on luxury properties in 15 major world cities rose last quarter by the slowest pace in more than three years, with prices weakening in Singapore, Toronto and Hong Kong, according to Knight Frank.

Rents increased at an annual rate of 3.7 per cent in the first quarter, according to the consultancy's Prime Global Rental Index, which tracks prices in 15 cities. That was the smallest gain since the second quarter of 2021 and well below the 12.4 per cent in the first three months of 2022.



"After a period of substantial rental growth, it's not surprising to see policymakers exploring solutions to high rents, as evidenced by the discussions around rent caps in London," said Liam Bailey, Knight Frank's global head of research based in London.

"The rebalancing between supply and demand will be crucial in shaping the rental landscape."

Last quarter's gain meant rents on luxury homes had fallen below the index's long-term trend average growth of 3.8 per cent, Knight Frank said in the report, following a rapid post-pandemic rebound as curbs on cross-border travel were scrapped. Even so, demand was expected to strengthen later this year, it added.

The latest report showed 12 of

the 15 cities registering rent increase, led by Sydney, which grew by 17.3 per cent. Auckland and London made up the top three markets, both advancing by 5.6 per cent. Rents in Berlin, Miami, Monaco, Los Angeles and Tokyo all gained by 4.5 per cent or more.

Singapore logged the worst outcome as rents fell by 2.9 per cent, while rents in Hong Kong and Toronto retreated by less than 1 per cent.

"Demand has been matched in some price brackets by a higher supply of accommodation," Bailey said. Despite the recent slowdown, "we expect rental growth to resume its upward trajectory later in the year, driven by sustained demand in key global cities".

In Hong Kong, there has been stronger leasing demand for luxury homes amid an influx of high-earning overseas talent, according to Martin Wong, head of research and consultancy at Knight Frank Greater China. Demand would be aided by the city's measures in February to ease decades-old financing limits, he added.

The number of luxury home deals on the Peak and the Southern district jumped by 1.4 times in the first quarter from a year earlier, according to data published by Midland Realty. Turnover increased by 13 times to HK\$3.4 billion.

Hong Kong's Top Talent Pass Scheme, introduced in December 2022, has so far attracted almost 2,000 professionals with at least HK\$10 million in annual income.

"Renting becomes a preferred choice upon their arrival, and this trend persists even in the face of a high-interest-rate environment," Wong said, adding Hong Kong's prime rental rates could increase by a further 3 to 5 per cent for the rest of the year.

COMPANIES



An Evergrande NEV car on show in Shanghai in 2021. Trading in its shares has resumed after last week's suspension. Photo: Bloomberg

## Evergrande car unit rallies on hopes of stake disposal

Zhang Shidong  
shidong.zhang@scmp.com

Shares in the electric-vehicle (EV) manufacturing unit of insolvent property developer China Evergrande Group surged in Hong Kong yesterday after the liquidators of its parent found a buyer for a stake in the listed arm.

China Evergrande New Energy Vehicle Group (Evergrande NEV) jumped by 87 per cent to 71 HK cents as trading resumed after last week's suspension. The stock extended a 53 per cent jump on May 17 when the shares were last traded.

The liquidators reached an initial agreement on May 16 to sell a 29 per cent in Evergrande NEV to an unidentified buyer, who will provide funding to help the carmaker resume production, according to a statement to the Hong Kong stock exchange on Sunday night. The buyers had an option to acquire the remaining 29.5 per cent stake held by the liquidators, the company said.

The deal, if completed, will offer a silver lining to resurrect the EV maker, which has been mired in a funding crunch after the collapse of its parent.

China Evergrande chairman and founder Hui Ka-yan has been put under police custody

for suspected financial crimes. China's securities regulator fined him 47 million yuan (HK\$50.7 million) and the developer 4.2 billion yuan in March for falsifying revenue in the years leading up to its collapse.

The proposed stake sale might trigger a general offer for Evergrande NEV's shares under listing rules, the statement said.

A funding shortage has hit the EV maker, with production at its Tianjin factory suspended since the beginning of the year, according to the statement.

China Evergrande's move into EVs was an ambitious foray by former billionaire Hui, with sales of the vehicles surging on rising demand at home and abroad.

EVs will make up 50 per cent of China's total car sales by 2030, according to Moody's Ratings.

Trading in the shares of China Evergrande has been suspended since January 29 when they closed at 16.3 HK cents after having lost 99 per cent of their value over the past four years.

The firm had combined liabilities of US\$332 billion as of June last year, making it potentially the world's most indebted developer. The High Court in January ordered it to be liquidated, leaving creditors with pennies on US\$20 billion of defaulted offshore bonds.



## Ready for the road

Workers check alloy wheels at a vehicle wheel company in Binzhou city, Shandong province. The nation's eight big players, including Citic Dicastal, Lizhong Wheel, Zhejiang Jinfei Kaida Wheel, and Zhejiang Wanfeng Auto Wheel, hold a combined 60.2 per cent share of the aluminium wheel industry. Photo: Getty Images

TECHNOLOGY

# HK's CiDi looks to Middle East as growth market

Driverless vehicle start-up seeking 'long-term presence' in Saudi Arabia

Yuke Xie  
yuke.xie@scmp.com

Hong Kong-based driverless commercial vehicle start-up CiDi is looking to expand in the Middle East as countries including Saudi Arabia embark on ambitious construction projects geared towards diversifying their economies.

The company, which has research centres in Changsha, Chongqing and Chengdu, was in talks to "set up a long-term presence" in Neom, Saudi Arabia, co-founder and CEO Ma Wei said. Neom is the kingdom's futuristic urban project that is expected to accommodate 9 million residents by 2030.

"We want to improve commercial and industrial work safety and efficiency in the kingdom," Ma said. "We want to improve people's job opportunities, and do so in a way that is sustainable and environmentally friendly."

Albert Hu, general manager at CiDi, said the company's expansion plan in the Middle East was driven by the region's strong economic growth momentum and "mutually beneficial positioning with mainland China and Hong Kong".

"It's a very welcoming business environment for a company like us," he said. "We're very focused on technology and product ... and on commercialising autonomous driving, because the technology is already here."

The gulf states' burgeoning construction and logistics industries, along with harsh weather, called for constant innovation around autonomous driving, creating added opportunities for CiDi, he said.

Saudi Arabia leads in the Middle East and North Africa region in terms of construction spending, which is estimated to reach US\$70 billion annually this year and US\$91 billion in 2029, according to a report published last month by the United States International Trade Commission.

Driving the growth was Saudi Vision 2030, a government programme that involves heavy investment in infrastructure development aimed at reducing

the kingdom's dependence on fossil fuels, the report said.

Founded in 2017, CiDi offers solutions such as assisted driving and autonomous haulage, which includes driverless vehicles in settings like mining, quarrying, tunnelling and construction excavation, according to the company.

The start-up is backed by leading venture capital firms including Sequoia Capital and Baidu Ventures. It was valued at more than US\$1 billion in its latest funding round early this year.

Last month, CiDi hosted 12 Neom executives in Shenzhen during their weeklong trip to the mainland and Hong Kong. The Neom delegation was led by CEO Nadhmi al Nasr and Andreas Cangelaris, president of Neom University, according to an internal document viewed by the Post.

During the Shenzhen trip, CiDi's founding team briefed Neom executives on the start-up's latest progress and solutions, and showed one of the vehicles it was hoping to deliver within the next year, Hu said. The vehicle is a 30-tonne-capacity electric truck specifically designed for self-driving operations in rough terrain.

"Our partners in the Middle East want to build long-term, strong, and mutually beneficial relationships, and product is just a starting point for cooperation," Hu said.

"China has a lot to offer, whether it's the maturity of our supply chain or the strength of our construction industry."

CiDi was also exploring business opportunities with authorities in the United Arab Emirates to offer products for quarrying and smart transport, the officials said.

## ByteDance, Kuaishou see exodus of AI experts

Ann Cao  
ann.cao@scmp.com

Chinese social media giants ByteDance and Kuaishou Technology, which operate the country's two largest short-video platforms, have seen an exodus of top artificial intelligence (AI) experts amid increased investor interest in start-ups that could become the next OpenAI, creator of ChatGPT.

Yang Hongxia, who was involved in research and development of large language models (LLMs) at ByteDance, recently left the Beijing-based company to start preparing for her own AI projects, according to a report by Chinese media 36Kr. LLMs are the technology behind generative AI services like ChatGPT.

Separately, Fu Ruiji, a tech leader at Kuaishou's Knowledge Graph and LLM projects, left the firm to "prepare for an AI start-up project", Chinese media outlet LingTai reported.

Details of the new endeavours of Yang and Fu are unclear. They could not be reached for comment.

Both ByteDance and Kuaishou did not immediately reply to requests for comment yesterday.

The departure of these experts reflects China's new unicorn boom that has so far yielded four "AI tigers", each of which has raised billions of dollars from deep-pocketed investors. These new unicorns - start-ups valued at more than US\$1 billion - include Baichuan, Zhipu AI, Moonshot AI and MiniMax.

Yang reportedly joined ByteDance to lead the firm's AI Lab and build its LLM after her exit in late 2022 from Alibaba Group Holding, where she headed the team overseeing the Hangzhou-based company's M6 AI model. Alibaba owns the Post.

Before joining Kuaishou in 2021, Fu served as vice-director at the AI research arm of iFlytek, one of China's AI champions.

He was in charge of the development of Kuaipedia, dubbed the world's first "large-scale multimodal short-video encyclopedia", and KwaiAgents, an information-seeking agent system with LLMs.



## Charting Hong Kong's Future as Asia's World City

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Table of Official List with columns for Name, NAV, and Price. Lists various mutual funds and their details.

Share consolidation
China Evergrande New Energy Vehicle Group (708): Trading in its shares resumed yesterday.

Companies in bold declared dividends in the current week



# LIFE

Whenever I perform in mainland China, I feel an obligation to spread classical music. I believe young people ... should go for classical music, not necessarily as a career but as a great hobby

HONG KONG VIOLIN VIRTUOSO PALOMA SO, ON HER MUSICAL JOURNEY • ARTS & CULTURE 87

## SOCIETY



Jeng Chi restaurant co-founders Yuan Hai "Papa" Teng and his wife Mei "Mama" Teng still help out in the kitchen, despite being retired. Photos: TNS

# Family finds a way to thrive in Texas

In Richardson's Chinatown in the north of the US state, Jeng Chi has been operating since 1990 and it shows no signs of slowing down

Tribune News Service

On most mornings, while Richardson's Chinatown – in the US state of Texas – lays dormant, Jeng Chi's kitchen rings with the clangs of metal pans and the squeaks from the gears of an old dough roller.

The wheels of the cart Yuan Hai "Papa" Teng uses to move ingredients rattle against the kitchen floor tiles as the 85-year-old moves from station to station, prepping different items.

Francisco Teng says his father comes to the restaurant several times a week – sometimes as early as 1am – to prepare the kitchen. The work is not easy, but Papa Teng says he feels more alive when he is working at the restaurant.

"When I'm at home, I feel tired and sleepy. When I'm here working, I feel like I can carry a 50-pound bag of flour," he says in Chinese.

Francisco is the second Teng in the family to own Jeng Chi, one of the oldest Chinese restaurants in Richardson's Chinatown – itself among the longest-running Asian-American enclaves in North Texas.

He and his wife, Janelle, own and manage the restaurant. Papa and Francisco's mother, Mei "Mama" Teng, are technically retired, but still love working at the business.

In total, nine members of Francisco's family, including his wife, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law and nephew, work at the restaurant.

Much has changed since the restaurant opened in May 1990.

"This thing, all the good, the bad, the ugly; it's a lot of work, there's screaming and arguing," Francisco says. "But there's also this human connection. It becomes this groove that makes the place come alive."

### Plastic bags of bao

Francisco says he, his mother and one of his brothers moved to Richardson in 1985. His father, oldest brother and younger sister were in Brazil, where his family owned and operated a confectionery factory – also named Jeng Chi.

The family moved to a block of flats and his mother got a job about 1.5km away at a Chinese grocery store.

To make extra cash, his mother convinced the owner of the store to allow her to sell pork and vegetable bao on the weekends, Francisco says. He recalls how he used to help his mother make the steamed buns on Fridays after coming home from school. They would package the bao in plastic bags.

"I mean, back in the day, I thought it was just natural. It was exciting in a way. We all worked hard to come up with something because we were very poor at that moment," Francisco says.

His father and the rest of his siblings came to the US in 1989, Francisco says.

The history of Chinese-owned restaurants in North Texas dates back to before the 1960s, but in the late 80s, Richardson was becoming a popular destination for a wave of immigrants from Taiwan.

In 1990, Mama Teng opened the family's first restaurant location, which seated four tables in a 1,000 sq ft space. Francisco describes it as a time when Richardson's Chinatown was just starting to take shape.

Nearly all of Jeng Chi's initial patrons were Chinese-speaking, Francisco says. It was popular



Francisco Teng (left) with his family; and chicken with garlic sauce from Jeng Chi restaurant.



It was humble beginnings ... There was a need for an Asian-owned, family-run restaurant

FRANCISCO TENG, CO-OWNER AND MANAGER OF JENG CHI

for its dough-based menu items and Taiwanese-style dishes.

"It was very simple, humble beginnings, nothing extravagant," he says. "There was a need for a small, Asian-owned, family-run restaurant."

### Young blood, new energy

Taking over the family restaurant was a "conscious" decision, Francisco says, but it was not always part of the plan. In the early 2000s, he studied graphic design at the University of North Texas, where he met mentors who helped him land a job at a well-known fashion company.

"It was very quiet, there wasn't this connection between people. I missed the closeness, I missed the churning that happens," he says.

In 2003, he quit his job in graphic design. After about a year of working part-time, Francisco says he made the decision to return to the family business.

By then, the modest restaurant had added to its menu to serve a growing customer base. It had expanded to 3,000 sq ft and 25 tables.

"Even when they grew, they didn't really change their ways ... we had maybe a 20 per cent American clientele," he says.

"It had all of the pros of a mom-and-pop and all the cons of a mom-and-pop."

The food was good, Francisco says. The environment, however, was not welcoming to business meetings or larger family gatherings. At the turn of the century, Richardson's Chinatown was growing, and with it, the number of restaurants in the city serving Chinese cuisine. Jeng Chi was still just a "hole in the wall", Francisco says.

He started working as a pastry chef at the restaurant and went to Taiwan to hone his craft. In addition to helming Jeng Chi's pastry business, he started sprucing up its interior.

"You need the young blood to come in sometimes – you need to bring new energy," Francisco says.

In 2013, the business moved to its current 8,300 sq ft space. He implemented a point-of-sale system, added a bar and tried to make the restaurant more welcoming for a family-dining experience. The world around Jeng Chi also started to change.

Richardson's Chinatown was becoming "more of a central" attraction and not just a gathering place for people of Asian descent, Francisco says. As more of the Chinese-speaking immigrant community moved away, the restaurant took on a more diverse consumer base.

### Marrying the family

As someone who married into the family, Janelle Teng has had an up-close look at Francisco's relationship with Jeng Chi.

"My in-laws, they trust me ... and it's a huge compliment to have these two individuals trust me to guide the business to its success," Janelle says.

The restaurant has filled a hole in Janelle's life. Her relatives live in northwestern Iowa and she does not see them often. As a Teng working at Jeng Chi, she seldom feels that void.

"I'm really lucky in that when I married into the family, I really married the family," Janelle says.

The restaurant has helped the older members of the Jeng Chi family, too.

Mama Teng, 76, says the restaurant is where she can have the feeling of community. For her husband, the restaurant is a place that can keep his mind busy, Mama Teng says.

It was difficult for the couple to make friends in their younger years – they were consumed with keeping the restaurant afloat. Now that they are retired, some of Mama Teng's best friends are long-time customers. Rather than watching Korean dramas all day from her couch, Mama Teng says she prefers coming out to greet familiar faces.

"We are old, so spending every day in the house is no good at all for us. We don't play mahjong, we don't know how to dance, we don't do anything," Mama Teng says. "I have a lot of American and Chinese customers. They always look for me, and if I'm here, they always come inside and talk to me."

Francisco says he is thankful for the chance to spend time with his ageing parents. He is reminded of the days he would watch Mama and Papa work at the confectionery factory in Brazil.

"For a long time, [I] have been able to work with my parents and have been able to solve problems with them. I get to see my parents go through things many people never will have a chance to see, and that's precious," Francisco says.

"Most people don't understand that but I do; that's the part I enjoy."

The family has survived health scares, sibling feuds, the pandemic economy and made tremendous sacrifices. Through it all, the Tengs have been able to keep Jeng Chi together.

Or perhaps it is the other way around.

## HEALTH

# Habitual smoking linked to a higher risk of dementia

Studies show the habit causes brain to shrink over the years – which can lead to memory loss

Anthea Rowan  
life@scmp.com

If you've ever smoked – or lived with a smoker – you may be familiar with the breathlessness and early morning cough that come with the habit.

The impact on the lungs is obvious – a smoker directly inhales a poison, after all. But smoking's damaging effect on the brain may be less apparent.

A new study throws this into the spotlight: habitual smoking causes the brain to shrink, it suggests.

Dr Laura Bierut, a psychiatry professor at Washington University School of Medicine in the US state of Missouri, led the study.

She admits scientists once paid less attention to the effects of smoking on the brain, "in part because we were focused on all the terrible effects of smoking on the lungs and the heart".

As we have grown more concerned about brain health, and started looking at the brain more closely, it has become apparent that smoking is also really bad for your brain, she says.

"People who smoke are more likely to have deterioration in grey and white matter," Bierut adds, noting that this may help explain why some researchers estimate 14 per cent of global Alzheimer's disease cases are linked to smoking.

A Swedish study on smoking and the brain examined the brains and smoking habits of women over more than 30 years. It found cigarette smoking was associated with shrinkage in the frontal lobe.

The frontal lobe is responsible for managing many elements of thinking and behaviour, including emotions, personality, judgment, and self-control. It also supports memory storage. And memory loss is an early marker of the disease.

The vascular risks that come with smoking – including stroke, which is a significant risk factor for dementia – are exacerbated by the toxins in cigarette smoke, which cause inflammation and stress in cells, both of which have been linked to Alzheimer's disease.

Dr Joshua Gray, associate professor in the departments of medical and clinical psychology, and of neuroscience at the Uniformed Services University in Washington, led a large 2020 study on the effects of smoking on the brain.

The results, he says, suggest that smoking is one of the top risk factors for dementia, associated with a 1.6 times greater likelihood of developing the disease.

"It exerts numerous damaging effects through oxidative stress," he says. Inflammation, and atherosclerotic processes such as hardening of the arteries, can translate into brain atrophy, which was shown in the studies referenced and in many more.

Atherosclerosis is the thickening or hardening of arteries caused by a build-up in vessel linings.

"We found in our study that smoking was linked to reduced grey matter and increased white-matter hyperintensities" – meaning lesions, Gray says.

The lesions are closely linked to a higher risk of dementia and

stroke. (White matter describes the nerve fibres that connect different areas of the brain to each other and to the spinal cord.)

The brain consumes 20 per cent of the oxygen the body uses to function. It is especially vulnerable to oxidative stress – an imbalance between harmful free radicals and the body's natural defence mechanisms – that damages structures inside brain cells and can cause cell death.

Oxidative stress also disrupts the balance of essential proteins, like amyloid-beta peptides. Studies suggest this contributes to the build-up of amyloid plaque in the brain that is a marker for Alzheimer's disease.

Inflammation is cited as a cause for many diseases, including dementia; experts talk of brain "inflammaging" – ageing accelerated through inflammation.

Atherosclerosis impairs blood flow, which can have serious consequences for brain health as it deprives the brain of oxygen and important nutrients, so is a risk for vascular dementia.

The chemicals inhaled through smoking (and from second-hand smoke) damage blood vessels, which raises the risk of developing atherosclerosis.

It exerts numerous damaging effects through oxidative stress

DR JOSHUA GRAY, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR

According to the US Food and Drug Administration, there are more than 7,000 chemicals in cigarettes and cigarette smoke. Nicotine and tar are the most talked about. Others include acetone, found in nail polish remover; arsenic, used in rat poison; and lead, found in batteries.

A pregnant woman who smokes may be harming not only her brain but her unborn child's, too. A 2023 study by researchers at University of California, Irvine, found that gestational nicotine disrupts receptors that sustain and regulate central nervous system activity.

Tobacco smoke exposure during pregnancy has been linked with a smaller head circumference at birth, reflecting the smaller size of a newborn baby's brain – which may affect brain development in the long term.

Quitting smoking brings broad benefits to smokers and those close to them, Gray stresses – the earlier, the better for the brain, and other organ systems.

"Quitting at an early age [40 years] can reduce excess mortality by 90 per cent," he says.

"In other words, risks are reduced to levels only slightly higher than never-smokers. Even stopping smoking after 60 years old has been shown to substantially reduce the risk for dementia."

This is the 37th instalment in a series on dementia, including the research into its causes and treatment, advice for carers and stories of hope.



Smoking tobacco is proven to harm brain health. Photo: Shutterstock

EXHIBITION



**Animal Pyramid (1989)** consists of taxidermy moulds with upside down foxes on top of rows of deer and caribou in a pale brown polyurethane. Photo: Tai Kwun Contemporary

# PROVOCATIVE AND UNSETTLING WORKS FROM AN ARTISTS' ARTIST

Tai Kwun Contemporary is hosting a major retrospective of 35 of Bruce Nauman's multimedia pieces

**Iaria Maria Sala**  
life@scmp.com

The latest exhibition at Tai Kwun Contemporary is an ambitious retrospective of six decades of works by American multimedia artist Bruce Nauman.

Nauman has been challenging the art world with diverse conceptual works since he started out, and this exhibition shows that his early art has not lost its power to unsettle and provoke viewers.

Often referred to as an "artists' artist", Nauman does not strive to produce art that is easy to look at. One of his most cited quotes underlines this: "Sunsets, flowers, landscapes – these kind of things don't move me to do anything. I just want to leave them alone. My work comes out of being frustrated about the human condition, and how people refuse to understand each other, and how people can be cruel to each other."

Nauman, who was born in the United States in 1941, is still producing groundbreaking video art and sculpture that show a strong use of the body (whether his own, other people's or those of animals), and work under one of his main themes: words as art.

At the Tai Kwun Contemporary exhibition in Central, called simply "Bruce Nauman", a towering sculpture titled *Animal Pyramid* (1989) features polymer taxidermy moulds of foxes arranged upside down on top of rows of deer and caribou.

It is a macabre work that



**Nauman's Contrapposto series; and neon art with the words "The true artist helps the world by revealing mystic truths" (1967).**



**It is not an easy show, but Hong Kong artists and the public are ready to see this kind of art**

PI LI, EXHIBITION CURATOR

invites reflection on the violence humans inflict on other living creatures.

Pi Li, the exhibition's curator, who recently became head of art at Tai Kwun after many years curating the M+ Sigg Collection at M+ museum of visual culture in West Kowloon, says: "Now that Hong Kong's artistic landscape has been transformed, with many new venues and the growth of contemporary art, it is time to bring to a wider public knowledge of the work of influential contemporary artists from across the world."

"More and more, Hong Kong will become a destination for Asian tourists to fly here just to see art shows."

The Tai Kwun show comprises 35 works spanning media from video and sound art to neon, sculpture and drawings.

The diversity of the pieces on show required a lot of heavy lifting by the curatorial team, which, as well as Li, includes Caroline Bougeois, chief curator of the Pinault Collection, and Carlos Basualdo, chief curator at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

The works have been assembled from a wide range of collections and museums including the Pinault Collection, New York's Museum of Modern Art, the Tate, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Dia Art Foundation and the Sonnabend Collection Foundation.

The exhibition is in part a re-elaboration of a 2021 show that was held at Palazzo Grassi in Venice.

Some of the pieces on show, such as Nauman's neon works, resonate with the urban landscape of Hong Kong.

The first work encountered on entering the show is a winding spiral with the words: "The true artist helps the world by revealing mystic truths" in pale blue and red.

Further in, a Vietnam war-era neon work titled *WAR/RAW* (1971) feels all too contemporary given the armed conflicts taking place around the world today.

One of Nauman's most interesting series is "Contrapposto", which, true to form, features works related to the body. The title is a classical Italian term used to describe statues in which much of the figure's weight falls on one leg, creating two non-parallel lines between the hips and shoulders (think Michelangelo's *David*).

As part of the series, a video piece from 1968 called *Walk with Contrapposto* shows a young Nauman walking down a narrow corridor while holding a contrapposto pose, in a simple reflection on classical art that also highlights the suppleness of youth.

Newer explorations in this lifelong series appear in *Contrapposto Studies*, and include videos from 2017 of an older Nauman spliced at the waist with a less athletic body. The images are best viewed wearing 3D glasses, and provide a reflection on age and our relationship with classical art and its glorification of eternal youth.

Words are another obsession

for Nauman. From strategically positioned speakers, words and phrases, such as "thank you", play over and over, making them lose meaning and feel almost threatening or disquietingly absurd.

Pi says that Nauman has been a highly influential artist in the contemporary Chinese art scene.

He recalls how Chinese artist Zhang Peili "did some of his works without knowing Bruce Nauman, in China, in the 1980s and 90s – like when he washed a chicken for one full hour, a video that is now at the Chicago Institute of Art, or in another instance when he broke a piece of glass, and glued it together, then broke it again and glued it and so on."

"But when he saw Bruce Nauman's work his feelings got very complicated; he felt what he was trying to do had already been made. He got really interested in Bruce Nauman after that."

According to Pi, the impact Nauman had in China was significant, even before he became known by his Chinese contemporaries.

Hong Kong artists Ellen Pau and Samson Young say Pi has also been inspired by Nauman's body of work – especially in his experiments in sound and video.

As Pi himself says: "That's why I thought now is the time to present Bruce Nauman in Hong Kong. It is not an easy show, but Hong Kong artists and the Hong Kong public are ready to see this kind of art."

"Bruce Nauman", JC Contemporary, Tai Kwun, 10 Hollywood Rd, Central, Tuesday to Sunday, closed Monday except public holidays, 11am-7pm. Until August 18

EXHIBITION

# Migrants' lives and stories reflected in multimedia show

Wong Chuk Hang gallery features works by 17 individuals, as well as art collectives of diasporas

**Kylie Knott**  
kylie.knott@scmp.com

Spread out on the gallery floor is an eclectic mix of items: packets of chocolate and pasta, face masks, a sewing machine and lots of colourful children's toys.

Added to the mix are two cardboard boxes, one bursting open with clothes and both stamped "S.D Xpress". But this is no courier service.

S and D are the initials of the first names of artists Sharu Binnong Sikdar and Dhafney Dela Cruz Pineda, who have unpacked childhood memories for their installation, which pays homage to their Filipino roots.

"When we were young we watched our parents pack boxes with essentials like items you see here and they would send them to friends and family back home in the Philippines," Pineda says.

They are called *balikbayan* boxes, she says, the word a portmanteau of the Tagalog words *balik* (to return) and *bayan* (homeland).

*Balikbayan* boxes are typically packed with material goods but filled with sentiment, says Sikdar, who is Indian Filipino, and the recipients overjoyed at being remembered by loved ones far away.

The installation is part of "marginalia (notes from the peripheries)", a group exhibition at contemporary art non-profit group Current Plans which is being staged until June 30 in its temporary art space in Wong Chuk Hang.

Showcasing the work of 18 artists, and migrant groups, the exhibition explores the diasporic experience in Hong Kong through music, film and video, print and painting.

Curator Nicole Nepomuceno thought marginalia – personal notes written in the margins of a text – was the perfect metaphor to capture the perspectives of migrants.

Abhishek Desai and Krupa Joshi, the creative duo behind integrative design studio Pop & Zebra, collected discarded styrofoam boxes from a wet market in Sheung Wan and transformed 24 of them into giant mahjong tiles.

Using tape in the distinctive red, green and blue colours of mahjong tiles, they created portraits of artists taking part in the exhibition.

"At times, we've wondered if there is any difference between [members of] ethnic minorities

and the Thermocool boxes commonly strewn across Hong Kong, discarded when they are no longer needed," Desai says.

In "little pockets", Hong Kong-based Filipino interdisciplinary artist Katrina Leigh Mendoza Raimann dug deep into the psychology of *anting-anting*, the Filipino phrase for amulet or charm, by showing a collection of found objects.

Carrying objects for good luck and guidance intrigues her.

"I have been carrying this around for six years," says Raimann, holding up one of the pieces, a wooden block she carved into the shape of a pebble that has become smooth over time and darkened from the natural oils in the skin of her hands.

Holding it tight, she says, helps relieve stress, the piece acting like a calming security blanket – which is apt considering Raimann specialises in textile art. Next to the collection is a four-metre blanket she knitted, designed to provide extra warmth and protection.

In *Jaad from Home*, Chandramaya Sunwar provides a taste of her home with *jaad*, a Nepali wine she makes with rice leftover from meals. Artist Arnel Agawin's work recalls the wave of Filipino musicians active in Hong Kong in the 1980s and 90s.

Filipino artist Xyza Cruz Bacani, the daughter of a migrant domestic helper in Hong Kong who herself was a migrant domestic helper in the city, taps into her personal story with a touching installation exploring the experiences of children left behind by overseas workers.

The installation features a blanket with images of migrant mothers' hands and objects that remind them of home.

Also featured are paintings by members of the Indonesian Migrant Workers Union and the United Indonesians Against Overcharging, and works by Guhit Kulay, a Filipino migrant artist collective.

There is a lot to take in, which is ironic given that, historically, ethnic minority artists living in the city have long struggled to find support, something Nepomuceno was eager to address.

Workshops on topics from cooking to live drawing have been woven into the programme.

"marginalia (notes from the peripheries)", Current Plans, 3/F Remex Centre, 42 Wong Chuk Hang Rd, Thursday to Saturday, and certain Sundays, 2pm to 8pm. Ends June 30



**Altered States of Music & Exiles, by Arnel S. Agawin.** Photo: Faith Monsod

PROFILE

# Violin virtuoso Paloma So wants to spread classical music to the young

**Erika Na**  
erika.na@scmp.com

In 2014, violinist Paloma So made her debut with the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, performing as the soloist in Mozart's *Violin Concerto No 5*.

It would be a proud achievement for any young musician to have such an opportunity to shine, but it was all the more impressive since So was only eight years old – and had played the violin for only three years.

Now 18 and studying economics and music at Harvard University and on a full scholarship at the New England Conservatory, the Hong Kong-born virtuoso has played with the London Philharmonic, Berlin Symphony Orchestra, China Philharmonic and Shanghai Symphony Orchestra, and recently toured the mainland with the HK Phil.

The Post talked to her during the few days she was back home in Hong Kong after performing the *Butterfly Lovers Violin Concerto* in Wuxi and Shanghai.

Playing on the mainland always feels different, So says. Compared to the mature classical music scene in Europe and the US, the one in China is at an incipient stage and full of young, enthusiastic audiences.

"Whenever I perform in mainland China, I feel an obligation to really spread classical music. I really believe young people can and should go for classical music, not necessarily as a career but as a great hobby," she says.

For some, it will become more than a hobby. So does not come from a musical family and no one expected her to be a musician. Her parents enrolled her and her siblings in piano and violin lessons as extracurricular activities.

But So realised early on that she wanted to devote herself to

music and to have professional training. It took a fair amount of time to persuade her parents, but they gave in when she was 10.

"They knew how narrow the field was going to be, so there was some resistance at first. But eventually they realised how much I was into it and how passionate I was about music. I think they saw

that although it would be a hard path, I had the fortitude to pave my way through it. Now they are my biggest supporters," she says.

As an eight-year-old performing on stage, So did not consider herself any different from her peers and never self-identified as a child prodigy, although she was often referred to as such.

"I think it was very positive in a way that it pushes you to perform your best in concerts when everybody calls you that," So says.

To this day, she maintains a rigorous practising routine, playing four to five hours a day and adding more hours just before performances.

She credits her teacher Zakhar

Bron, a Russian violinist who has a school in Zurich, Switzerland, for gifted children, as her biggest musical influence. She began to visit him for lessons during school holidays and he was part of the reason she went to study in Britain when she was 11.

She used to travel from her boarding school, Wycombe Abbey, in Buckinghamshire, to Switzerland every month for lessons with him.

Other mentors have helped enrich her career. After the UK, she moved to the United States and finished the Juilliard Pre-College programme (which primes gifted students for a career in music) while boarding at Choate Rosemary Hall in Connecticut, one of the most exclusive schools in the US.

Why is she studying economics, then? "The logical and analytical approach to studying economics provides a nice contrast to the intuitive, creative

and artistic aspects of playing the violin," she says.

So says she is going to take some time thinking about her long-term plans. After all, she has only just finished her first year at university and has another four years before she can graduate with a bachelor's degree in economics and a master's in music.

One wonders how she can fit it all in. She puts it down to discipline and the strong support from those around her.

"It's ingrained in me to do everything really efficiently, to spare all the time I have, to practise, do schoolwork or to sleep."

After university she wants to pursue a career in music but has not decided where to base herself. She might return to Hong Kong, but nothing is set in stone.

What she was most excited about when we spoke was the concert she was heading over to London for. It was not a classical music concert, but jazz.



**Paloma So plays with the HK Phil in Wuxi; and So in Causeway Bay this month.** Photo: HK Phil, Antony Dickson



# DIVERSIONS

## The Best of Calvin and Hobbes

by Bill Watterson



## Non-Sequitur

by Wiley Miller



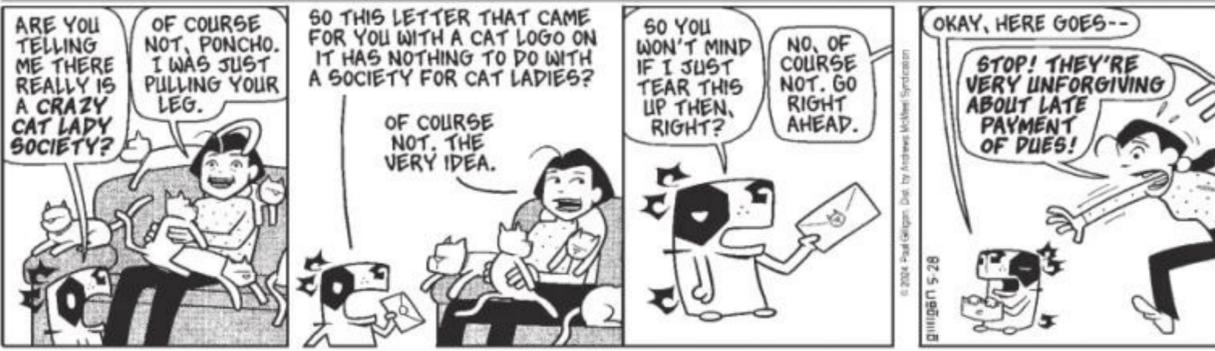
## Doonesbury Flashback

by Garry Trudeau



## Pooch Cafe

by Paul Gilligan



## Bridge

**North dealer. East-West vulnerable.**

**NORTH**  
 ♠963  
 ♥853  
 ♦AK9643  
 ♣7

**WEST**  
 ♠Q10852  
 ♥K97  
 ♦J7  
 ♣J106

**EAST**  
 ♠J7  
 ♥10642  
 ♦Q105  
 ♣Q932

**SOUTH**  
 ♠AK4  
 ♥AQJ  
 ♦82  
 ♣AK854

**The bidding:**  
 North East South West  
 2♠ Pass 3NT

**Opening lead: five of spades.**  
 On many deals, declarer has to choose between two different lines of play, knowing that if he chooses the wrong one, he will have no chance to try the other. In deciding what to do in these cases, declarer's best bet is to rely on basic probabilities.

For example, consider this deal where South is in three notrump. When dummy appears, he can count seven top tricks - two spades, a heart, two diamonds and two clubs - and so needs to develop two more winners.

There are two possibilities. He can cross to dummy with a diamond at trick two and take a heart finesse. If it succeeds, he can return to dummy with another diamond and repeat the finesse. Since East and West are equally likely to hold the heart king, the chance that this approach will succeed is an even 50 per cent.

South's other option is to attempt to establish dummy's diamonds. This can be accomplished - if the missing diamonds are divided 3-2 - by allowing the defenders to win the first lead of the suit and later using his remaining diamond as an entry to run the rest of the suit.

In trying to choose which method of play is more likely to succeed, it is obviously helpful for declarer to know that the chance of a 3-2 division is 68 per cent.

Consequently, the winning line of play in the long run would be to deliberately lose the first diamond trick, which would succeed about two-thirds of the time, as opposed to relying on a heart finesse, which would win only half the time.

In the actual deal, declarer makes four notrump if he concedes a diamond trick early in the play, but goes down one if he tries a heart finesse instead.

Steve Becker

### ONLINE

For details about local bridge events, go to the HK Contract Bridge Association website [hkcb.org](http://hkcb.org)

## Sudoku

		5	8		2			7
				7	1			5
1		7		3			8	6
						4	9	
	5							8
		8	3					
	6	1		4			7	9
3			7	9				
	7		1		8	6		

Complete the grid so that each row, column and 3x3 box contains every digit from 1 to 9, inclusive.

Difficulty: 3/5

### Yesterday's solution:

5	9	1	8	3	6	4	7	2
4	2	8	5	1	7	3	9	6
7	3	6	9	2	4	8	5	1
9	5	7	3	8	1	2	6	4
6	1	2	7	4	5	9	8	3
3	8	4	2	6	9	5	1	7
1	6	3	4	5	8	7	2	9
8	4	9	6	7	2	1	3	5
2	7	5	1	9	3	6	4	8

## Kokonotsu Supersudoku

7				2			6				1
				8			4				
				5			1				
8	2	6							3	7	5
4	1	7							9	2	6
				4			3				
				9			8				
2				6			7				8

Complete the grid so that each row, column and two centre diagonal lines contain every digit from 1 to 9, inclusive.

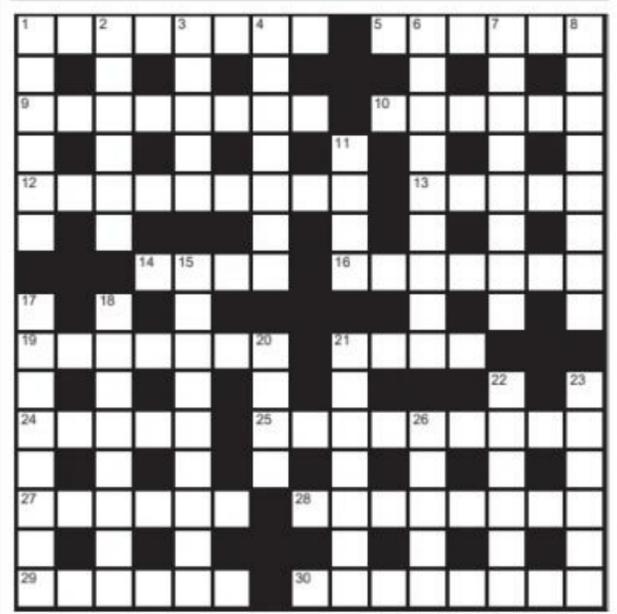
Difficulty: 1/5

### Yesterday's solution:

8	9	2	3	6	7	5	1	4
5	1	6	8	4	2	3	9	7
3	7	4	9	5	1	8	2	6
1	8	7	6	9	3	4	5	2
6	5	3	2	7	4	9	8	1
4	2	9	1	8	5	6	7	3
9	3	5	7	1	6	2	4	8
7	6	8	4	2	9	1	3	5
2	4	1	5	3	8	7	6	9

**Yesterday's solution:** deport, departs, deposit, depot, despot, dips, disport, DISPORTED, dope, doped, doper, dopier, dopiest, drip, drips, drop, drops, epos, esprit, estop, opted, period, pert, peso, pest, pied, pier, piste, pits, poet, poise, poised, pore, pored, port, ported, pose, posed, poser, posit, posited, post, posted, poster, presto, pride, prided, prides, pried, prides, priest, prise, prised, prod, prods, prose, ripe, ripest, riposte, riposted, rips, rope, roped, ropes, ropiest, sped, spider, spied, spire, spit, spite, spited, spore, sport, sported, spot, sprit, sprite, step, stop, strip, stripe, striped, strop, tepid, tips, tope, topped, toper, topside, torpid, trip, tripe, tripod, tripos, trope

## Daily Crossword



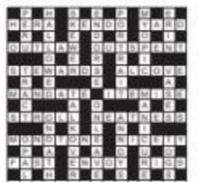
### Across

- No varieties in the numbers crawling (3,5)
- A fearful noise is very funny! (6)
- The crack of dawn? (8)
- To invest with ministerial responsibility (6)
- Eating utensil cuts Mark (9)
- Imitating a noise of a bullet (5)
- Lend support to a speculative venture (4)
- Grandmother enthusiastic to get fabric (7)
- Decorative dress from Algeria (7)
- They're pressed into service by musicians and typists (4)
- A grain or a fruit (5)
- A bit of a bite not taken all at once? (9)
- Free translation of tag, sir (6)
- E.g. David saw head included by hand-reader (8)
- A long time after Dorothy shows a second childhood (6)
- Observe fewer to be perfectly clean (8)

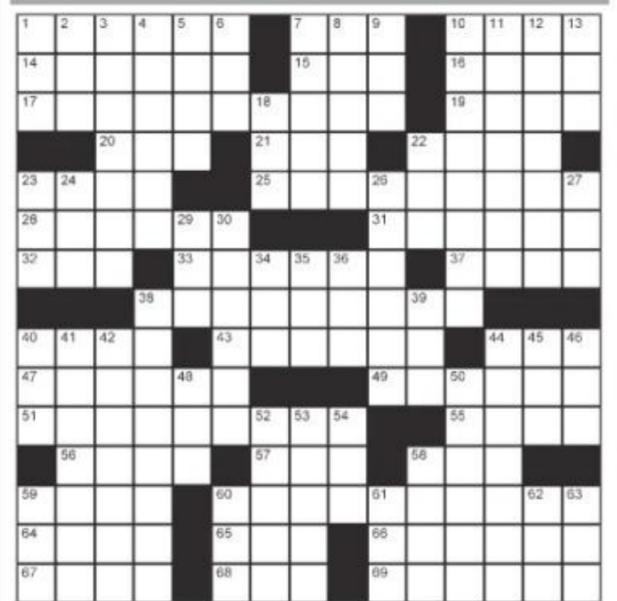
### Down

- Kidnap sailor by channel (6)
- Fell but kept quiet (3,3)
- Some of the retrogressive monsters (5)
- For the practical man art lies in ruins (7)
- No doubt I react badly, getting left in New York (9)
- Inspector returns chopper to collier (8)
- Although the fellow's looking older, he's still coping (8)
- Cover or uncover (4)
- Affinity with creature without desire (9)
- Are grand organised thus (8)
- No rating is lacking in knowledge (8)
- Pass out when snakes appear (4)
- Maintains one's position - and vies with the Joneses? (5,2)
- Feel in form, like a cat (6)
- Finds fault with old-fashioned school equipment (6)
- To consume about 150 produces a striking effect (5)

### Yesterday's solution:



## Universal Crossword



### Across

- Thick things to smoke
- Overacting actor
- Wear down
- Iron deficiency
- Chicken \_\_\_ king
- Short race, for short
- Renowned medical center
- Speechless entertainer
- Seek legal damages
- Nautical record
- Dog that visited Oz
- Congregant's reply
- Hit travelling close to the ground
- What a screwdriver might go on
- Sea of Galilee's country
- Fixed-term investments, for short
- Short-legged Australian creature
- Automaker whose name preceded "mobile"
- Cabaret performance
- Region
- Scheduled to appear
- "You look like you need a \_\_\_"
- Classic theatre name
- Modify, as a manuscript
- City just west of Dallas
- And more authors: Abbr.
- "Divergent" actor \_\_\_ James

### Down

- Part of a security system, for short
- Garten who hosts "Barefoot Contessa"
- Erupting springs
- Quantity
- Sushi base
- Mineo of "Rebel Without a Cause"
- Vietnam's capital
- Straighten
- Apple product
- Day after today
- Agree to briefly, on a contract
- Withdrawn
- Just make, with "out"
- In poor health
- Six-pt. NFL plays
- First letters
- Livid
- "Both will do"
- Windy City trains
- Cobbler's hand tool

### Yesterday's solution:



RACING

FIRST LOOK

McDONALD CHASES JAPANESE DOMINATION WITH WARRIOR

Superstar galloper bids for a fifth consecutive Group One win on Sunday in Yasuda Kinen at Tokyo

Jack Dawling jack.dawling@scmp.com

Kiwi ace James McDonald is confident Romantic Warrior can continue his Group One winning spree when the Danny Shum Chap-shing-trained galloper lines up in the Yasuda Kinen (1,600m) at Tokyo racecourse on Sunday.

McDonald will ride in Japan for the first time in a decade when he hops aboard Romantic Warrior, who bids for a fifth consecutive elite-level win on his first visit to the Land of the Rising Sun.

The 32-year-old rider has been an ever-present force during Romantic Warrior's sublime campaign and he believes his partner in crime is ready to shine

on the world stage as he steps back to a mile for the first time since January last year.

"It's going to be unreal to go over there with such a good horse and it's a great opportunity for Romantic Warrior to showcase how good he is over in Japan," said McDonald, who flew to Japan yesterday to reunite with Romantic Warrior in the lead-up to Sunday's race.

"This horse doesn't know how to run badly, he's unbelievable. It's something I've never come across before - the constitution he has, the willingness he has.

"He wears his heart on his sleeve and even if he's getting beaten it's only by the smallest of margins. His record speaks for itself, he's a winner."

McDonald's only experience

of riding in Japan came in November 2014, with the New Zealander failing to return to the winner's enclosure from five rides in the World Super Jockeys Series.

Both rider and horse are set to enter unknown territory as they take on a selection of Japan's finest milers in their own backyard, but McDonald is confident Romantic Warrior can acclimatise to his surroundings better than he did in Australia before last October's Group One Cox Plate (2,040m).

"I think he'll travel to Japan better than how he travelled to Australia because he looks unbelievable, he's in great form and his condition is holding well," McDonald said.

"He's just an absolute brute, nothing fazes him and he's the

ultimate professional. He's beaten up all the Japanese before on his home ground so hopefully he can go over there and beat them up again."

Romantic Warrior got the better of three Japanese gallopers in last month's Group One QE II Cup (2,000m) and faces a tough task against a host of rivals including Soul Rush and Serifos, who finished fourth and seventh, respectively, in last December's Group One Hong Kong Mile.

The son of Acclamation also faces Voyage Bubble and will aim to repeat his triumph over the Ricky Yiu Poon-fai-trained five-year-old in February's Group One Gold Cup (2,000m) at Sha Tin.

"We obviously have our question marks and the biggest

question mark is him going back to a mile, but hopefully a strong-run race will look after that and he'll be there when the whips are cracking," McDonald said.

"His best wins have been in fast-run races and generally when it's a fast-run race, the best horse wins. That just shows he's superior to the rest.

"I've been lucky enough to experience all types of wins with Romantic Warrior.

"A flamboyant win in his first Hong Kong Cup, tough and gritty for his second Hong Kong Cup, tenacious for the Cox Plate and just down and out fighting like a bulldog in the QE II. I was a little bit in disbelief how good that performance was and how he lifted off the canvas."

McDonald eyes an astonishing 97th Group One victory on Sunday as he looks to continue his excellent year in the saddle.

Good as gold



Golden Title gallops on the turf at Sha Tin yesterday morning in preparation for the Class Four Hin Yiu Handicap (1,200m) on the all-weather track tomorrow night. The Danny Shum Chap-shing-trained gelding will attempt to turn his form around in his

first run on the dirt. The former New Zealand galloper has had five starts in Hong Kong, with a fifth behind Happy Fat Cat at Happy Valley his best result. He jumps from barrier four tomorrow night for in-form apprentice Jerry Chau Chun-lok. Photo: Kenneth Chan

TALKING POINTS - SAM AGARS

Rebel shows raiders way to Champions & Chater loot

Godolphin star's comprehensive win should blaze a trail for more international participation

While the comprehensive Hong Kong victory for Rebel's Romance is unlikely to begin a parade of Group One Dubai Sheema Classic (2,400m) winners turning up at Sha Tin for the Group One Champions & Chater Cup (2,400m), one can only hope the nature of the Godolphin superstar's success will prompt increased overseas participation in the HK\$13 million feature.

Rebel's Romance did exactly what was expected of a galloper of his ilk on Sunday, brushing aside his rivals at \$1.45 in a race that would have been rather vanilla had he not made the trip.

Much of the talk after the race was about Rebel's Romance being the perfect horse for the task, with the six-year-old gelding a proven traveller with victories in six countries and no stud career to plan for.

The reality is, however, that in most years it likely would not require the "perfect" horse to swoop in and plunder

what is often the least inspiring Group One race of the Hong Kong season.

In a jurisdiction that's long featured a focus on sprint and mile races, the quality of the Hong Kong horse population decreases as you get out to the longer trips and the Champions & Chater Cup is a race that is ripe for the picking more often than not. The fact Hong Kong has only three 12-furlong contests a season - and nothing over further - tells you all you need to know about where staying races sit in the pecking order at the Jockey Club.

You only have to look at the Group One Hong Kong Vase (2,400m) honour roll to get an idea of the impact proper staying types can have over Sha Tin's longest trip, with locally trained horses successful only three times in the 30-year history of the race. That Rebel's Romance was only the third raider to tackle the Champions & Chater Cup - and the first boasting previous Group One success - represents a raft of missed opportunities.

At HK\$13 million, the Champions & Chater Cup boasts a purse more than three times larger than that on offer in the Group One Coronation Cup (2,400m) at Epsom this Friday and superior to most 12-furlong contests around the world.

In the past, that purse has proven a nice reward for Hong Kong connections willing to invest in talented stayers like Russian Emperor, Exultant and Viva Pataca.

Going forward, however, the ease with which Rebel's Romance trounced the HK\$7.28 million winner's prize might see that change.

For the sake of a bit more of the colour and excitement that genuine top-level participation brought to the dreary late stages of the Hong Kong season, we can only hope it does.

Class Two fields disappoint

Hong Kong's need for more upper-class depth has been well documented and that

deficiency is again on full display this week, with the Jockey Club dishing up two of the smallest Class Twos of the season.

Tomorrow night's opener, the Chun Shek Handicap (1,650m) on the all-weather track at Sha Tin, is the first five-runner Class Two contest since September, while officials considered cancelling Sunday's six-horse 1,400m Class Two on the Sha Tin turf.

On reopening entries for the race, which only had five runners as of yesterday morning, officials confirmed "this race may be cancelled if insufficient number of entries are received", however the addition of one more runner saw it survive the cut.

Perhaps the decision to run a 1,400m Class Two on the same day as the Group Three Sha Tin Vase (1,200m) and Group Three Lion Rock Trophy (1,600m) was a mistake?

After a trio of late scratchings hurt turnover at Sha Tin on the weekend and betting numbers were again down, it is hard to see punters getting too excited about this week's skinny Class Twos.

TOMORROW'S SHA TIN FIELDS

ALL-WEATHER TRACK

RACE 1 Rated 100-80 (Class 2) 1,650m 7:15pm CHUN SHEK HANDICAP (Total stakes: HK\$3,120,000)

RACE 2 Rated 40-0 (Class 5) 1,200m 7:45pm MEI LAM HANDICAP (Total stakes: HK\$875,000)

RACE 3 Rated 60-40 (Class 4) 1,200m 8:15pm HIN YIU HANDICAP - Sec 2 (Total stakes: HK\$1,170,000)

RACE 4 Rated 40-0 (Class 5) 1,650m 8:45pm SHUI CHUEN O HANDICAP (Total stakes: HK\$875,000)

RACE 5 Rated 60-40 (Class 4) 1,200m 9:15pm HIN YIU HANDICAP - Sec 1 (Total stakes: HK\$1,170,000)

RACE 6 Rated 60-40 (Class 4) 1,800m 9:45pm LEE ON HANDICAP (Total stakes: HK\$1,170,000)

RACE 7 Rated 85-60 (Class 3) 1,200m 10:15pm CHUNG ON HANDICAP (Total stakes: HK\$1,660,000)

RACE 8 Rated 80-60 (Class 3) 1,650m 10:50pm FUNG WO HANDICAP (Total stakes: HK\$2,050,000)

RACE 9 Rated 80-60 (Class 3) 1,650m 11:20pm FUNG WO HANDICAP (Total stakes: HK\$2,050,000)

RACE 10 Rated 80-60 (Class 3) 1,650m 11:50pm FUNG WO HANDICAP (Total stakes: HK\$2,050,000)

TRACK STARS

- Race 1: (1) Telecom Fighters, (2) Bundle Of Charm, (4) Adefill, (5) Yellowfin. Race 2: (3) Smart Folks, (9) Daily Trophy, (11) All is Ready, (12) Dashing Glory. Race 3: (4) Regent Glory, (7) Diamond Flare, (10) Triumphant Warrior, (11) Spangle Fortune. Race 4: (2) Go Hero, (10) Precision Goal, (12) Asian One, (13) Eagle Run. Race 5: (1) Euro Rocks, (3) Self Improvement, (9) Robot Knight, (11) Crazy Treasure. Race 6: (4) Mission Bravo, (6) Lucky Banner, (7) Starship Eighty, (13) Jubilation. Race 7: (3) Victory Moments, (6) Hong Kong Hall, (9) Monta Frutta, (11) Lightning Bolt. Race 8: (2) Woodfire Bro, (4) Perfect Team, (5) Massive Action, (14) Silver Up.

# SPORT

Our continued focus is to ... keep securing more results in an attempt to persuade the government to keep us at tier A at HKSI

LOCAL BILLIARD SPORTS COUNCIL CHAIRMAN VINCENT LAW, HEAPING PRAISE ON HONG KONG SNOOKER PLAYERS WHO ARE DELIVERING RESULTS DESPITE THE THREAT OF LOSING ALMOST ALL OF THEIR FUNDING

## FOOTBALL

# MAGPIES' HARRISON SEEKS HK PASSPORT

Newcastle United academy star, whose mother was born here, is taking the step because he says winning with the city side would help his career

Lars Hamer  
lars.hamer@scmp.com

Rising Newcastle United academy star Alfie Harrison is applying for a Hong Kong passport with an eye on representing the city at international level.

The 18-year-old, who has been dubbed Erling Haaland 2.0 because of his matching hairstyle and shared love of scoring goals with the Manchester City mega star, said he was considering the move because it would be "a benefit to my career".

Although from England, Harrison is eligible to represent Hong Kong because his mum was born in the city. He said he was "definitely interested" in the opportunity should it arise.



"It's all getting sorted at the minute but [representing Hong Kong] is something I'd be interested in," he said.

"I think it'd be a good experience and something that would benefit my career. So yeah, I'd definitely be interested."

The highly rated midfielder moved from Manchester City to their Premier League rivals in February and scored 11 goals in as many games in the Under-18 Premier League North.

He had been with City since he was nine years old and his technical ability earned him a scholarship as an attacking midfielder with the treble winners.

Manager Pep Guardiola had him to train with his first-team ahead of their Champions League group stage fixture against Young Boys last November. However, Harrison ultimately decided to move north to further his career and increase his chances of getting into the senior squad.

"Obviously, Newcastle is such a big club and it looked like a good chance that would progress my career," Harrison said. "Since I've come I've loved every minute of it and I'm not looking back. Every kid's dream is to break into the first team and if I can prove myself, that would be great."

Despite crashing out of the Soccer Sevens in the semi-finals, Harrison put on a good show for his prospective new home fans, scoring two goals in five games, the second of which levelled the score at 1-1.

The left-footed midfielder, who spent most of his time during the seven-a-side games in Hong Kong out on the right side of the pitch, carried the ball into the penalty area before cutting inside and smashing it past goalkeeper Jacob Pazikas.

Hong Kong team striker Michael Udebuluzor, 20, who plays for German third-tier club FC Ingolstadt 04, was born in the city when his Nigerian father, Cornelius Udebuluzor, was playing for local side Rangers FC.

Udebuluzor had to wait for about nine months to have his passport application approved when he decided he wanted to represent the city in international competition.

He received his passport last September just weeks after Hong Kong head coach Jorn Anderson and the Football Association announced their frustration with the lengthy process.

Udebuluzor made his Hong Kong debut three days after getting his passport, scored twice in his first five appearances and started the city's final game against Palestine at the Asian Cup in January.

It's all getting sorted ... but [representing Hong Kong] is something I'd be interested in

ALFIE HARRISON

Despite the family connection, the Bradford-born youngster visited the city for the first time at the weekend for the HKFC Standard Chartered Soccer Sevens.

It was not a triumphant homecoming, however, with his young Magpies squad losing 3-2 in the Shield semi-final to Glasgow Rangers on golden goal.

"My mum was born in Hong Kong and lived here until she was about three or four," Harrison said. "My granddad was in the army at the time and my nana was pregnant, so my mum was born here."

Harrison said the passport process was under way, but would not divulge how far along that application was.

## GUARDIOLA COY ON CHANGES TO SQUAD

Pep Guardiola admitted to being in the dark over Manchester City's summer transfer plans following their FA Cup final loss to Manchester United. The 2-1 defeat at Wembley on Saturday meant City fell short of becoming the first team in English football history to win back-to-back league and cup doubles.

Having been pushed to the final day of the English Premier League season by Arsenal and fallen at the quarter-final stage in the Champions League to Real Madrid, the manager was asked whether, after missing out on retaining two of the three trophies they won in their historic treble season a year ago, there would need to be changes in the squad.

"Right now I don't know what's going to happen," he said. "I don't know the players [who] are going to make a decision whether to continue with us or want to leave or not. Players come in, come out. Right now, I'm really pleased with the team, how they behaved all season. I couldn't say different."

Several members of Guardiola's squad have been involved in each of City's record four consecutive league titles, including six players that started Saturday's final and two more among the substitutes. It was suggested earlier in the campaign they were struggling to live up to the standards set in their treble year and at one stage during November and December they posted a run of one league win in six.

However, they recovered to drop only six points from December 16 until the end of the season to beat the Gunners to the title by two points. Guardiola would not be drawn on whether the squad was ripe for wholesale changes after another record-breaking year.

"Next season is next season," he said. "It's far away. Right now it's difficult for me to process even after winning the Premier League. It's a question of calm, [being] relaxed. We will be back as best as possible and next season we'll have to do this and that, step by step, we'll see what happens. From my point of view the season has been amazing ... Week in and week out in a good mood, good vibes."

Deutsche Presse-Agentur

## Home triumph



Ferrari driver Charles Leclerc celebrates after winning his home Formula One Monaco Grand Prix. He admitted he was fighting back tears and struggling to see as he raced to an emotional victory. His win prompted a standing ovation and unbridled celebrations from a huge crowd as he ended his run of wretched luck on home soil, and a sequence of 39 races without a victory since his triumph in the 2022 Austrian Grand Prix.

Leclerc was a comfortable winner in Monaco ahead of McLaren's Oscar Piastri and Ferrari teammate Carlos Sainz, as Red Bull suffered another weekend of disappointment with series leader Max Verstappen finishing sixth and Sergio Perez crashing out on the opening lap. "It's the race that made me dream of becoming a Formula One driver one day," Leclerc said. "I was thinking of my dad." His father died in 2017. Photo: AFP

## CUE SPORTS

# Snooker pair shine despite funds plight

Ng On-ye seals British Open title while Wang secures spot on World Tour

Mike Chan  
mike.chan@scmp.com

Faced with the threat of losing almost all of their funding, Hong Kong's snooker players have been doing their best to convince the government to reverse its decision to kick them out of the elite sports institute next year.

And head coach Wayne Griffiths, who has responsibility for billiard sports, heaped praise on his charges for continuing to deliver results despite a seemingly bleak future.

On Sunday, Ng On-ye won the women's British Open for the first time in her career, while compatriot Wang Yuchen reached the final four of Q-school in Leicester a day earlier to earn a spot on the men's World Snooker Tour for the 2024-25 and 2025-26 seasons.

Robbie Capito, meanwhile, became the first Hongkonger to walk away with the UK Open Pool Championship title a fortnight ago.

Removal from the Hong Kong Sports Institute's elite list would result in a funding cut of up to 80 per cent, and take away the athletes' rights to use the best training facilities.

"This was On-ye's 20th world

ranking event victory in a career spanning over 14 years," Griffiths said. "The fact that she can stay so long at the very top of the sport is a testament to her work ethic and mental strength."

"She works hard and smart and is a fantastic role model for all young athletes in Hong Kong."

Ng, 33, beat Mink Nutcharut of Thailand 4-1 to win her third ranking title of the season, after previous victories in Australia and Albania.

But the world No 2, who also beat former world champion Reanne Evans in the semi-final, will not be joining Wang, Marco Fu Ka-chun and Cheung Ka-wai

on the world tour next month, with the two qualifying spots going to women's world champion Bai Yulu of China and the top-ranked Nutcharut.

"For our players to be still returning world-class results under the shadow of the news that the government is considering removing billiard sports from HKSI, makes everyone involved with the sport very proud of our talented and dedicated players," Griffiths said.

"Our continued focus now is to keep working hard and to keep securing more results in an attempt to persuade the government to keep us at tier A at HKSI

until we return to the [Doha] Asian Games in 2030."

Vincent Law Wing-chung, chairman of the local Billiard Sports Council, said the players deserved recognition for delivering results under tremendous pressure. "I think their resilience and abilities have explained why billiards is a tier A sport and deserves to be so," he said.

"I just fail to see any sensible counterargument."

Wang bounced back from a two-frame deficit to beat Wales' Dylan Emery, securing a spot on the world tour for the next two seasons. It will be his second time on tour, having previously played for two seasons from 2016.

Born in Henan in 1997, Wang, who is the city's top-ranked player, moved to Hong Kong via the Quality Migrant Admission Scheme in 2020. Griffiths, who has been at the helm as head coach since 2010, compared the 26-year-old to three-time ranking tournament winner Fu.

"Wang's unflappable manner around the table is very similar to Fu. Neither of them gives a lot away in terms of body language," he said. "This affects opponents more than one might think."

"Add to this a rock-solid technique, a strong desire to win and an improving mindset, and we have another talented player representing Hong Kong on the world tour."



Ng On-ye works out her next move during the British Open women's snooker final against Mink Nutcharut of Thailand. Photo: Handout

## EXTREME FITNESS

# HK\$40m target and new route for Trailwalker

Mike Chan

The organisers of the Oxfam Trailwalker have added a new route and set themselves an ambitious fundraising target to celebrate the 40th edition of the famous race in Hong Kong.

Alongside the traditional 100-kilometre challenge will be a shorter 40km version, while officials are hoping to bring in a record HK\$40 million in donations.

The previous largest total was \*

the HK\$38 million collected in 2018.

First held in 1981, what should have been the race's 40th anniversary event was curtailed by Covid-19 restrictions, so organisers are celebrating this year instead.

All 1,300 team slots across both events, which take place on the weekend of November 15 to 17, are expected to be oversubscribed by the time registration closes at 6pm on June 23.

A draw will take place on July 2 to determine which teams get to take part.

Michael Wong Ho-ming, the charity's director of fundraising and communication in the city, said organisers were taking the opportunity to test the public's response to a shorter route.

"We believe the Trailwalker spirit is to have four runners completing 100km within 48 hours," he said. "But there had been people asking about a shorter route over the years."

"So, we want to see what it is going to be like, in terms of both the overall response and the amount of funds raised.

"Perhaps some of them will want to challenge the full distance after a first try."

Both routes will start at Pak Tam Chung in Sai Kung, with the shorter version ending at Gilwell Campsite, Fei Ngo Shan, and the full distance at the Harrow International School Hong Kong in Tuen Mun.

Teams tackling the shorter version have 20 hours to reach Kowloon Peak.

Former champion Ferdinand Tsang Fuk-cheung, who was part of the quartet that shattered the

## Haughey on a roll in Olympic countdown

Swimming superstar downs world champ in 100m freestyle at Mare Nostrum series

Lars Hamer

Siobhan Haughey underlined her status as an Olympic gold medal favourite with another dominant win in the pool.

The Hongkonger swept aside her opposition in the 100m freestyle on the final day of the Mare Nostrum Swim Tour leg in France, touching the wall in a time of 52.55 seconds.

Haughey finished a full second ahead of Marrit Steenbergen, who came out on top when the pair raced in the same event at the World Aquatics Championships in Doha in February.

France's Beryl Gastaldello, who took gold in the 50m freestyle the day before, finished third with a time of 53.89, slower than the 53.77 she posted to be fastest in the heats.

The win was Haughey's third from three races in Canet-en-Roussillon, having won the 100m breaststroke and 200m freestyle events 24 hours earlier. Her time in the 100m free was her second best of the season, after the Hong Kong record 52.02 she posted at a World Cup series meet in Berlin.

With three legs across three countries in nine days there is little time for recovery, and Haughey will be racing in the 100m in freestyle and breaststroke again in Barcelona tomorrow, with her first race scheduled for 11.25pm Hong Kong time.



3 Victories for Hong Kong's Siobhan Haughey at the Mare Nostrum Swim Tour leg in France - 100m and 200m free and 100m breaststroke

The three-part annual Mediterranean series then wraps up in Monaco on Saturday and Sunday.

Separately in France, Hong Kong's Adam Chillingworth was seventh in the men's 200m breaststroke final in 2:15.06, more than five seconds off the Olympic qualifying time.

Japan's Ipppei Watanabe, a former world-record holder in the event, won in 2:07.62. Compatriot Yu Hanaguruma was second in 2:08.40 with France's Antoine Marc third in 2:10.92.

Hong Kong's Natalie Kan Cheuk-tung, who won bronze with Haughey at the Asian Games in Hangzhou in the 4x100m medley and freestyle relays, was also in action.

Kan was the eighth seed in the 50m butterfly and stayed there throughout, finishing in 27.09 in a race Sweden's Sara Junevik won in 25.74.