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GREAT EXPECTATIONS

World peace, development and win-win cooperation

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CONTENTS

EDITOR'S DESK

02 A Spring of Diplomacy

THIS WEEK

COVER STORY

12 Cementing Ties

Foreign leaders strengthen communication through official visits

16 The Doorbell Symphony

Europe seeks to enhance relations

18 A Friend From Afar

Lula's return is good news for China and Brazil

OPINION

22 From Codependency to Interdependency

Yale fellow addresses "bad-to-worse" Sino-American conflict

24 Cooperation Among Civilizations

Adapting to a changing global landscape

25 Will BRICS Only Benefit China? Definitely Not

Pursuing South-South cooperation with shared dividends

26 The Flow of Protection

Putting a river's ecological environment first

DOCUMENT

28 China's Position on the Afghan Issue

FEATURES

30 In the Zone

Hainan's customs service to become independent

34 Living Up to the Reputation

Hanfu industry drives growth in Caodian

36 The Road Less Traveled

Guizhou's efforts to attract more visitors

38 Crops Go Green

Maintaining food security while decreasing emissions

40 Young Minds Matter

Understanding the world to build a better future

42 Expansion Doesn't Come Cheap

China's e-commerce goes global

CULTURE

46 Peony Power

How one flower brought a city into full bloom

EXPAT'S EYE

48 Feeling Right at Home

A Barbadian reporter explores Chinese hospitality

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A Spring of Diplomacy

China has had a very busy diplomatic agenda recently. From late March to early April, leaders from several countries, from Spain to Brazil, visited to cement the bonds.

Despite rising unilateralism in certain quarters, the fact that many world leaders are traveling to China demonstrates how multilateralism featuring win-win outcomes remains the mainstream trend within the international community. For instance, during French President Emmanuel Macron's visit, the two countries signed documents on cooperation in diverse areas such as agrifood, aviation, civil nuclear energy, sustainable development and culture. Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez expressed Spain's willingness to deepen collaboration in the fields of electric vehicles, green energy and the digital economy — among others.

The visits also provided opportunities to address pressing global issues. The ongoing Ukraine crisis was one of the top concerns during the meetings between Chinese and visiting leaders. China's stance differs from that of the U.S., with the latter asserting in March that any call for a ceasefire in the current situation is unacceptable. China has worked to promote peace talks since the armed conflict

broke out a year ago.

During his meeting with President Xi Jinping, Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said Singapore believes all countries should respect each other, coexist in peace, pursue mutually beneficial cooperation, avoid conflict and jointly respond to risks and challenges.

Notably, the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia and Iran announced the restoration of the two countries' diplomatic relations after years of rivalry in Beijing on April 6 following a China-brokered deal. This move is a boon to the security and stability of the Middle East. It is considered a victory for dialogue and peace and a testament to China's diplomatic approach at work as well as its growing global role.

The world today is at a crossroads. Humanity, barely emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic, faces multiple challenges — a faltering economic recovery, intensifying geopolitical conflicts and a severe regression in the global development process. In this context, the international community should cherish solidarity more than ever. Confident, open and willing to step up, China is ready to team up with other countries and jointly find a path through adversity. **BR**



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RINGING IN REFORM

A ceremony on April 10 celebrates the listing of the first batch of shares under China's registration-based initial public offering (IPO) system on the main board of the Shenzhen Stock Exchange in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province in south China.

In a registration-based (as opposed to regulator approval-based) IPO system, companies can go public if they fulfill the necessary disclosure requirements. This is the system in place in many developed countries and regions.

China has rolled out the registration-based IPO reform, which it initiated in 2018, across the board this year.



The Connecting Link

The first international passenger train on the China-Laos Railway is ready to depart from Kunming, capital of Yunnan Province, on April 13, heading for the Lao capital of Vientiane. The train travels at a speed of up to 160 km per hour and the journey takes 10 and a half hours. Starting from April 13, one passenger train will operate daily from Kunming to Vientiane and vice versa.

COVID-19 Origins

China has been transparent in sharing its research results on the origins-tracing of SARS-CoV-2 with the international community, Shen Hongbing, deputy chief of the National Administration of Disease Prevention and Control and Director of the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention (China CDC), said at a press conference on April 8.

“Since the outbreak of COVID-19, we have been actively communicating and cooperating with the World Health Organization (WHO) and invited the WHO to send international experts twice to conduct joint

studies on SARS-CoV-2 origins-tracing in China,” Shen said.

He said the first phase of the joint studies was successfully conducted in Wuhan, Hubei Province, where the first COVID-19 cases were reported in China, with a research report on China’s part fully recognized by domestic and foreign experts as well as the WHO.

“Throughout the first phase of the joint studies, China provided the international experts with all materials related to the origins of the virus, and we did not hide any cases, samples or testing and analysis results,” he said.

Shen added that China had

continued to share its research results with the international scientific community after the end of the first phase of the joint studies in March 2021, with research findings published in academic journals both at home and abroad.

Rising Sea

China’s coastal sea levels last year reached their highest level since 1980, according to an annual report recording the sea-level changes in China released by the Ministry of Natural Resources on April 12.

The coastal sea levels in 2022 were 94 mm higher than the average levels recorded

between 1993 and 2011, the report said.

China’s coastal sea levels are rising more rapidly due to global warming, it said. From 1980 to 2022, they rose at a pace of 3.5 mm per year, while between 1993 and 2022, the pace went up to 4 mm per year.

The increased rate of sea-level rising could have a lasting impact on the ecological environment and the sustainable social and economic development of coastal regions, the report warned.

In 2022, higher coastal sea levels have worsened storm surges and contributed to flooding in coastal regions, according to the ministry.

Geothermal Power Station

China’s highest geothermal power station in terms of elevation, located in Tibet Autonomous Region, has generated more than 500 million kilowatt-hours of electricity since it went into operation in 2018, Xinhua News Agency reported on April 10.

The Yangyi geothermal power station in Damxung County, in the regional capital of Lhasa, is China’s only geothermal power station in commercial operation.

The station uses new technologies to fully recharge and recycle the tailwater produced by its power generation. Every year, it can help cut 420,000 tons of carbon dioxide emissions, 6,200 tons of nitrogen oxide, 12,000 tons of sulfur dioxide and save 116,000 tons of standard coal.

The region plans to build a national clean energy base in the future, with geothermal power playing an important role.

Masks No More

On April 12, China issued a new set of guidelines regarding the

use of masks by the general public to prevent COVID-19 infection, stating that it is now no longer mandatory to wear a mask when using public transportation.

People are advised to put on a mask when using public transportation and entering supermarkets, movie theaters and other indoor places with large gatherings.

Individuals have the discretion to choose whether or not to wear a mask in outdoor settings such as public squares and parks. Students are no longer required to wear masks at school, according to the guidelines.

However, under specific circumstances, the use of masks remains mandatory. These include when a person has tested positive for COVID-19 or is displaying related symptoms, during local outbreaks and when visiting medical institutions and nursing homes.

Deepwater Gas Field

China's first independently developed and built ultra-deepwater gas field Shenhai Yihao, or Deep Sea No.1, has been upgraded to remote control production and can now ensure safe and stable production during typhoons, the China National Offshore Oil

Corporation (CNOOC) said on April 10.

The biggest challenge ultra-deepwater gas fields face is the frequency of typhoons in summer and autumn, but the production equipment of Deep Sea No.1, located in the waters off Hainan Province, is currently in optimal operating condition, Liu Xiaogang, General Manager of CNOOC's Hainan subsidiary, said.

Deep Sea No.1 has a maximum operational water depth that exceeds 1,500 meters and has provided over 4.5 billion cubic meters of gas since entering operation in June 2021.

Dark Sky Community

The Xichong Community in the southern Chinese metropolis of Shenzhen has been certified as an International Dark Sky Community, the first one of its kind in China, according to the Shenzhen Astronomical Observatory, Xinhua reported on April 7.

The recognition from the International Dark-Sky Association (IDA) marks an important milestone in Shenzhen's efforts to achieve equilibrium between urban development and dark sky protection.

An International Dark Sky



Setting Sail

Tourists board a vessel during the trial operation of the Baiyangdian Lake water bus service in Xiongan New Area, Hebei Province in north China, on April 7. The service features 100 vessels powered by liquefied petroleum gas, making them more cost-efficient and environmentally friendly than oil-fueled boats.

Community is a town, city, municipality or other legally organized community that has shown exceptional dedication to the preservation of the night sky through the implementation and enforcement of a quality outdoor lighting ordinance, dark sky education and citizen support of dark skies, according to the IDA.

Located at the southeast end of Shenzhen's Dapeng New District, Xichong is about 60 km from the city proper.

Xichong is well-shielded

from urban light pollution as the picturesque destination is flanked by mountains on three sides, with the sea embracing its fourth side. This is where the Shenzhen Astronomical Observatory is located.

In August 2021, local authorities in Shenzhen began efforts to establish a dark sky community in Xichong. Over the course of one year, the community saw upgraded lighting facilities as well as the formulation of environmental standards.



Out in Bloom

Visitors admire the flowers at the Greater Bay Area Flower Show in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province in south China, on April 8. The 10-day flower show opened at the Shenzhen Fairy Lake Botanical Garden that same day, attracting 80 exhibitors from 13 countries and regions including Australia, Britain and the United States.

Improved Performance

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) registered a further increase in their activities in the first quarter (Q1) of this year as the country's economy continues its robust recovery, industrial data showed.

The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Index, based on a survey of 3,000 SMEs from eight major industries, came in at 89.3, up from 88 in the fourth quarter of 2022, the China Association of Small and Medium Enterprises said in a report.

The figure, although still below the boom-and-bust line of 100, reversed the downward trend seen since the April-June period of 2021.

The sub-indexes for all eight major sectors rallied in Q1 of this year, with that of the hospitality plus food and beverage industry, the information transmission, computer services and software industry, and the transportation,

postal and storage industry marking the more significant increases among all sectors tracked.

Thanks to the country's overall recovery momentum and expanding market demand, SMEs were more confident in business development. This sense of rekindled confidence was in turn reflected in their improved market expectations, the association said, adding their capital shortage had eased.

But the association still cautioned about the difficulties of rising labor and housing costs, calling for efforts to improve the business environment and maintain the continuity, stability and transparency of government policies.

NEV Sales

Nationwide new-energy vehicle (NEV) sales expanded 34.8 percent year on year to about 653,000 units in March, data from the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers

showed on April 11.

NEV sales in Q1 of 2023 totaled nearly 1.59 million units, up 26.2 percent from a year ago. During that same period, the market share of NEVs in China's auto market reached 26.1 percent.

The output of NEVs in the country reached 674,000 units in March, soaring 44.8 percent year on year.

Thanks to the NEV boom and the rapid growth in auto export, industry insiders are optimistic about the development of China's auto sector this year, Chen Shihua, Deputy Secretary General of the association, said.

China's auto sales expanded 9.7 percent year on year to about 2.45 million units in March, according to the association.

Auto sales in Q1 totaled 6.08 million units, down 6.7 percent year on year.

Hydrogen Pipeline

China plans to build a 400-km hydrogen pipeline to more effectively

transfer clean fuel from the country's resources-rich west to energy-consuming regions in the east.

The project designed to channel hydrogen from Ulanqab in Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region to Beijing will be the country's first trans-regional, long-distance hydrogen pipeline, Ma Yongsheng, Chairman of Sinopec, China's largest oil refiner and operator of the pipeline, said.

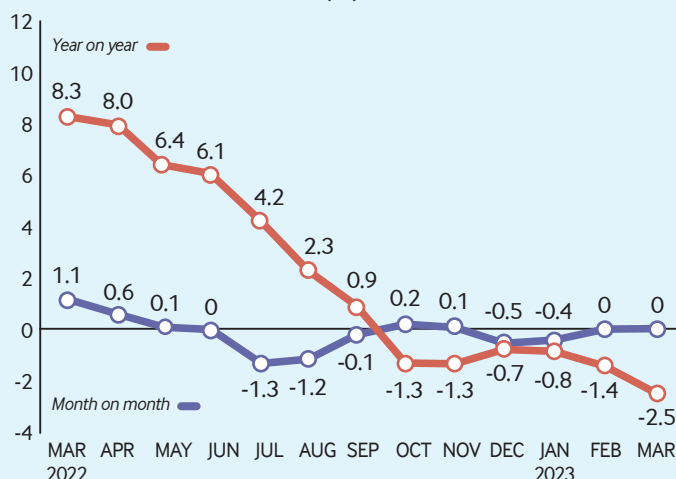
In the initial phase, the pipeline will be able to handle about 100,000 tons of hydrogen each year. It has the potential to increase its capacity by 500,000 tons in the long run.

After going into operation, the supply from Inner Mongolia will replace the current hydrogen production from fossil fuels in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, playing a pioneering role in trans-regional hydrogen transmission and helping promote the country's energy upgrades, Ma said.

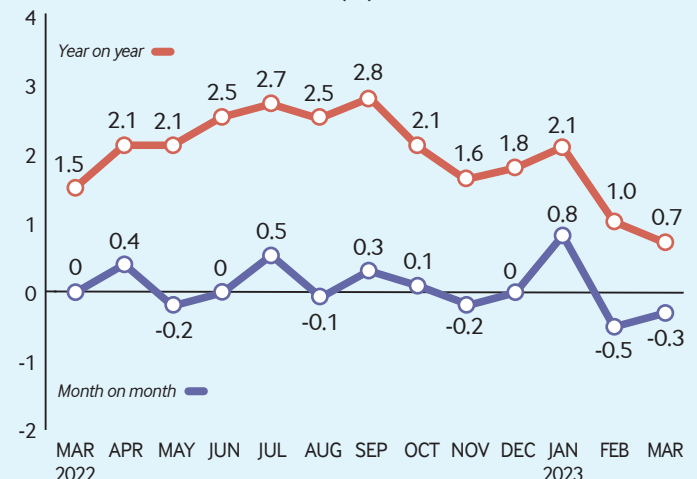
The project has been

NUMBERS

China's Producer Price Index Growth (%)



China's Consumer Price Index (CPI) Growth (%)



included in the country's oil and gas network construction plan released by the National Energy Administration in March.

Civil Aviation Growth

The civil aviation sector recorded steady growth in March, according to a report released by VariFlight, a China-based civil aviation data service provider.

It showed daily domestic flights amounted to about 11,657 on average that month, surging 133.52 percent year on year.

The figure also represented a 3-percent increase compared with the same period in pre-pandemic 2019.

The number of average daily international flights stood at around 589, up 43.07 percent compared to the level registered in February.

Rising Cargo Throughput

In Q1 of this year, cargo throughput of the Beibu Gulf Port in

Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region in south China reached 68.77 million tons, up 5.5 percent year on year, the port operator said.

According to Beibu Gulf Port Group, the port handled more than 1.6 million twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) of containers during the period, up 14.7 percent year on year.

The waiting time for berth decreased 44 percent year on year and the goods loading and unloading efficiency of container ships increased by 14 percent year on year in Q1, the group said.

The port serves as an important transit point in the New International Land-Sea Trade Corridor, a trade and logistics passage jointly built by western Chinese provincial regions and Singapore.

Expanding Capacity

European commercial aircraft manufacturer Airbus and its Chinese partners have signed an

agreement to expand the A320-family final assembly capacity with a second line at the manufacturer's site in Tianjin.

The deal between Airbus, Tianjin Free Trade Zone Investment Co. Ltd. and the China Aviation Industry Co. Ltd. was inked on April 6.

The new assembly line will contribute to Airbus's goal of producing 75 A320-family aircraft per month by 2026 throughout its global production network, Airbus said.

At present, Airbus has four assembly facilities worldwide for its A320 family, located in Toulouse in France, Hamburg in Germany, Mobile in the United States and Tianjin in China. Its Asia final assembly line in Tianjin, known as FAL Tianjin, went into operation in 2008 and has so far assembled more than 600 A320-family aircraft.

By late March 2023, the number of the Airbus fleet in service in the Chinese mainland had surpassed 2,100.

Forex Reserves

China's foreign exchange (forex) reserves came in at more than \$3.18 trillion in late March, up 1.62 percent from a month earlier, according to the State Administration of Foreign Exchange (SAFE) on April 7.

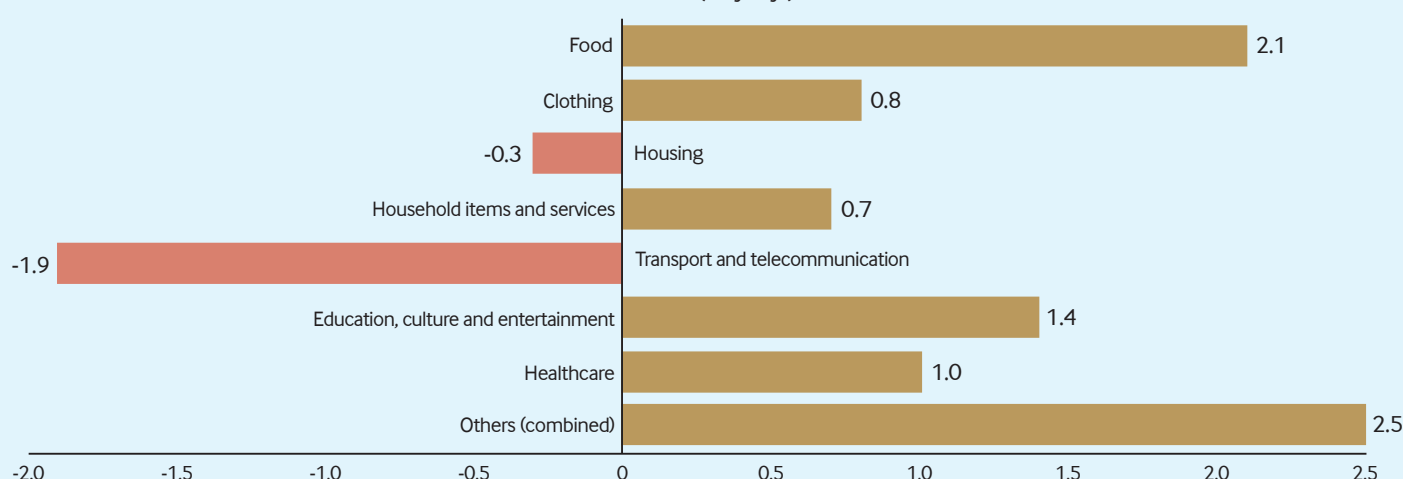
The forex regulator attributed the increase in forex reserves to the combined impact of currency translation and asset price changes.

Affected by monetary policy and expectations of major economies, the U.S. dollar index fell and prices of global financial assets climbed last month, the regulator said.

It added that China's forex reserves are expected to remain generally stable as the country has solid economic foundations and broad prospects for development.

SAFE data also showed China's gold reserves had risen to 66.5 million ounces as of March, up 580,000 ounces from the end of February.

China's CPI Growth by Type
March (% y.o.y.)



(Source: National Bureau of Statistics)



PHILIPPINES

A woman holds up a sign during a protest in Quezon City on April 11 against the U.S.-Philippines Balikatan joint military exercises. More than 17,000 Philippine and U.S. troops kicked off the most extensive joint military activities in decades amid criticism that this undertaking will escalate regional tensions rather than promote peace and stability



BRAZIL

A visitor looks through a digital zoom binocular at the Latin American Defense and Security Exhibition in Rio de Janeiro on April 11. About 400 domestic and overseas brands participated in the four-day exhibition



SWITZERLAND

Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus speaks during a press briefing at the World Health Organization's headquarters in Geneva on April 6. On the eve of its 75th anniversary, the organization marked the occasion by calling for "a renewed drive for health equity in the face of unprecedented threats"



UNITED STATES

People take part in the Easter Bonnet Parade in New York City on April 9. The annual event took place on Manhattan's legendary Fifth Avenue near St. Patrick's Cathedral



FRANCE

Photograph taken on April 6 shows the Gilded Wooden Mask recovered from the sarcophagus of the Egyptian pharaoh Amenemope, who ruled between 1001–992 B.C. or 993–984 B.C., during the opening of an exhibition titled Ramses and the Gold of the Pharaohs in Paris. The event runs from April 7 to September 6



NEPAL

People pull the chariot of Lord Bhairav, a Shaivite and Vajrayāna deity worshipped by Hindus and Buddhists, during the first day of the Bisket Jatra Festival in Bhaktapur on April 10. The annual festival welcomes the arrival of spring and marks the start of the Nepali New Year



THIS WEEK PEOPLE & POINTS

↓ TAIWAN BUSINESS LEADER VISITS MAINLAND

Liu Chao-shiuan, Co-President of the Cross-Straits CEO Summit, recently led a delegation of entrepreneurs from Taiwan to meet with business counterparts and officials on the mainland.

Consisting of hundreds of entrepreneurs and heads of industrial and commercial organizations, the summit was established in parallel in Beijing and Taipei in 2013 to promote economic and trade exchanges across the Taiwan Straits.

During his trip, Liu expressed hopes that the summit will play a greater role in deepening cross-Straits industrial cooperation and integrated development to bring benefits to people on both sides and contribute to national rejuvenation.

Born in Hengyang, Hunan Province, in 1943, Liu moved to Taiwan with his parents when he was a child. The former university professor and politician became the summit's co-president in September 2019.



Next in Fashion

Rednet.cn

April 7

Lately, American denim brand Levi's has announced its plan to begin testing artificial intelligence (AI)-generated fashion models in a bid to provide its customers with a more diversified and personalized shopping experience. With a few clicks, in 10 seconds or thereabouts, each customer will be able to see how a particular fashion item would look like on a model customized to match his or her own age, body type and skin tone.

While clothing brands have applauded these virtual models for their capacity for faster and cheaper production of images, customers have remained skeptical over whether these avatars

will present a realistic rendering of their actual body shapes. Some also worry that these models will completely replace human models and lead to massive waves of unemployment in the fashion industry.

At least at this stage, this much-feared substitution is not occurring. On top of their rigid expressions and postures that always lack that spark of humanity, these AI-generated models, which are based on real humans, may entail legal risks.

Instead of panicking over an AI takeover that may never occur, regulatory authorities should direct their attention toward the creation of a set of protocols that will ensure the safe deployment of the technology. Meanwhile, fashion brands should always keep customers informed whenever an AI-generated model is used.



The Big Reshuffle

China Newsweek

March 27

In March, a drastic price war swept across China's automobile sector. Dongfeng Motor Group, a leading automaker based in Wuhan, capital of Hubei Province, fired the first shot by introducing a steep discount of up to 90,000 yuan (\$13,067), a combination of price cuts and government subsidies, for many of its gas-powered models. The discount catapulted the brand to new heights,

"WTO (World Trade Organization) members need to remember that trade is a source of resilience."

Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, WTO Director General, in a recent interview with Xinhua News Agency

"China's policy is mainly economically and socially oriented rather than hegemonic or egoistic."

Adrian Severin, a former member of the European Parliament, during a recent webinar on China's ties with the Middle East hosted by the Institute of Regional Studies, a think tank based in Islamabad, Pakistan

showering it with huge profits and enormous popularity. Other automakers followed suit, each offering their own package deal to boost the sales of gas-powered vehicles.

While these discounts have temporarily enlivened the sales of traditional vehicles, a sector increasingly threatened by the rise of new-energy vehicles, some in the industry worry that hefty sales promotions will lead to widespread misconceptions about discount levels and ultimately become a detriment to the industry.

While these worries add a sobering note to the current car purchasing spree, the price war in March was not entirely irrational. In fact, the frenzied price cuts are part of a continuous attempt among auto manufacturers to stay afloat in an industry that is shifting quickly. Although China has become the world's largest market for automobiles, brands face cutthroat competition and have to do everything they can to survive.

Still, companies including BYD, Geely Auto and Great Wall Motor have managed to emerge as leading players. What has powered their rise is a continuous focus on technological innovation. As the cards are being reshuffled, only those with a strong innovative mindset can remain in the game.

The Curse of Poor Ratings

Southern Daily
April 4

Poor customer ratings and reviews have always been a nightmare for China's vast population of couriers and ride-hailing drivers. They often face heavy fines or declines in delivery orders in the wake of customer complaints.

While moderate penalties should definitely be in place to protect consumers against poor work ethics, many external factors, such as traffic jams and extreme weather conditions, can all result in severe delays and poor customer reviews.

A good reputation is everything for businesses wanting to thrive in the current digital age, in which every online comment, photo and rating can haunt a brand indefinitely. Many delivery and ride-hailing companies tend to be entirely user-oriented, sometimes forgetting the fact that their drivers also have a right to impartial treatment when disputes arise.

Therefore, more energy needs to be invested in creating a set of clearly outlined procedures, aided by in-car dash cam recorders and other powerful digital tools, whereby workers unsatisfied with low ratings or customer complaints can appeal for reassessment and tell their side of the story.

↓ ENTREPRENEUR TO BUILD CHINA'S OPENAI

Wang Huiwen, cofounder of e-commerce giant Meituan, inaugurated his new startup Guangnian Zhiwai, meaning Light Years Away, in Beijing on April 6. The company focuses on the development and application of AI.

Wang, a pioneer of China's Internet industry, retired as senior vice president of Meituan in 2020 and, like several other Internet tycoons, began exploring the potential of AI. In February, Wang announced he would enter the AI business and build China's version of OpenAI, the U.S. tech company that recently attracted attention with its AI-based chatbot ChatGPT. Wang said he planned to pour \$50 million into Guangnian Zhiwai.



Meituan CEO Wang Xing subsequently announced his participation in the investment of Wang Huiwen's new company and that he will serve as a director.

"What is amazing in China is always the energy, the speed, the optimism and the ability to go fast. That's what we see in the aviation sector as well."

Guillaume Faury, Airbus CEO, in a recent interview with Xinhua

"For some lucky people discoveries can come from unlikely places—even while you're having a bite to eat."

Anthony Romilio, a researcher with the University of Queensland, Australia, commenting after an international team confirmed fossilized footprints found in a restaurant in southwest China belonged to long-necked dinosaurs that lived around 100 million years ago

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COVER STORY

CEMENTING TIES

Diplomatic activities to boost confidence in global recovery

By Ma Miaomiao