

OPINION: CHINA IS STILL DEVELOPING P.31 | FEATURES: VALUES OF ANCIENT VILLAGES P.38

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SILK ROAD REUNION

Chinese and Central Asian leaders meet in Xi'an

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Cover Photo: Chinese President Xi Jinping
and his wife Peng Liyuan welcome Central
Asian leaders and their wives attending the
China-Central Asia Summit in Xi'an, Shaanxi
Province, on May 18 (XINHUA)

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OPINION

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Neighbors, Partners and Friends

At the China-Central Asia Summit on May 18-19 in Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, leaders exchanged views on institution building, cooperation and major international and regional issues, drawing a new blueprint for China-Central Asia relations.

This is the first time the heads of state of the six nations have met face to face since China established diplomatic relations with the five Central Asian countries 31 years ago. Over the years, China and Central Asian countries have exemplified a new model of international relations through mutual respect, good-neighborly friendship, solidarity and win-win cooperation.

The summit was held in a year that marks the 10th anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative. During his visit to Kazakhstan in September 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping put forward the initiative of jointly building the Silk Road Economic Belt, part of the Belt and Road Initiative, which also includes the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road. Xi'an is the starting point of the overland Silk Road, which stretched from there to connect China with Central Asia and beyond.

The gathering of the leaders of the six countries in Xi'an, which

served as the capital city of several Chinese dynasties, including the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 220) when the Silk Road was first explored, was therefore highly symbolic. Xi'an is now a major hub of the Belt and Road Initiative. Goods from across China and many participating countries are transported via the city through the China-Europe freight train service, one of the initiative's signature programs.

Thanks to the Belt and Road Initiative, China and the five Central Asian countries have become closer in economic and trade relations. In 2022, trade between China and these five countries reached a record high of \$70.2 billion, a year-on-year increase of 40 percent. China's imports of farm produce, energy products and mineral products from Central Asian countries all increased more than 50 percent. Its exports of machinery and electronic products to these countries surged 42 percent. The value of cross-border e-commerce between China and Central Asia soared 95 percent.

Agreements reached at the Xi'an summit show China and the five Central Asian nations will continue to deepen cooperation, with results benefiting the people in all of these countries. **BR**



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RUNNING IN THE SKY

The Optics Valley sky train, a self-driving suspended monorail, runs in Wuhan, Hubei Province, on May 9. After undergoing testing, the train is now in trial operation.

Through a fiber optic system on the train, the temperature of the track and cables, track vibration, and other operational environmental factors can be monitored in real time, so that warnings can be issued for any abnormalities to ensure smooth operation.



Flower Industry

Villagers work on a flower farm in Wenfeng Village in Huangping County, Guizhou Province, on May 13. In recent years, the county has encouraged farmers to maximize use of uncultivated land to develop its flower industry. The flower-growing industry in the county has boosted rural tourism and created jobs for locals.

Eliminating an Endemic Disease

There have been no new cases of Kashin-Beck disease (KBD) in Tibet Autonomous Region since 2018 and all 54 risk areas in the region have eliminated the endemic, local health authorities said on May 17.

KBD is an endemic disease of the joints, common among children and adolescents. Its clinical manifestations are painful, thickened and deformed limbs and joints and muscle atrophy.

Based on a survey conducted as part of a two-year KBD treatment campaign launched in 2021, Tibet now has 3,866 KBD patients, all discovered before 2018, 652 of whom have received surgeries. Funds of about 35 million yuan (\$5 million) have

been pooled for treatment of the disease and over 3 million yuan (\$428,491.8) of the funds has been used to support 1,630 KBD patients with heavy financial burdens in Tibet, the regional health commission said.

5G Base Stations

Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region had built 39,000 5G base stations by the end of April 2023, local authorities said on May 17.

Currently, all of the region's prefecture-level cities, all of its counties and 99.16 percent of its townships are covered by 5G networks. There are 15 5G base stations for every 10,000 residents in Xinjiang.

Last year, Xinjiang's information and communication industry invested 1.7 billion yuan

(\$242.8 million) in building 5G base stations, Ma Zhuqing, head of the regional communications administration, said.

Xinjiang is also speeding up integration and innovation of its key 5G industrial applications, with 70 major 5G applications in relevant industries underway, including the construction of a smart land port in the China-Europe freight train (Urumqi) assembly center, Ma said.

Overseas Chinese Conference

The 2023 Overseas Chinese Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) Conference kicked off in Jiangmen, a Pearl River Delta city in Guangdong Province, on May 17, creating a platform for overseas Chinese to better

understand the economic construction and development of the country and the GBA.

More than 700 people from around the world attended the three-day event, which included parallel forums and special seminars.

Organizers are expecting overseas Chinese working and living around the world to play a role in accelerating the construction of the GBA and help it attract more foreign talent, capital and technology.

Located in the western part of the prosperous Pearl River Delta, Jiangmen is a major bridge connecting the GBA and Chinese people overseas, with more than 5.3 million Jiangmen natives living in more than 180 nations and regions.

Sea Scorpion Fossils

Researchers from China and the United Kingdom have discovered fossils of a previously unknown eurypterid, more commonly referred to as a sea scorpion. Discovered in east China's Zhejiang Province and dating back 450 million years, the fossils are the earliest ever found in China, Xinhua News Agency reported on May 16.

The joint working group, led by the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Nanjing Institute of Geology and Palaeontology, published their findings in the *Journal of Paleontology*.

Having a round head with a parabolic shell, the 15-cm-long species looks cuter than previously found eurypterid species, Wang Han, a major participant in the research and a Ph.D. student with the institute, said.

However, it was actually a fierce ocean predator, Wang added.

Zhang Yuandong, a researcher with the institute

and a member of the research team, said the discovery sheds light on the early evolution of eurypterids. Fossils of other marine life found in the deep sea, such as sponges, were also discovered.

The emergence of new materials and the progress of paleontological research methods will provide the basis for further studies of Chinese eurypterids, Zhang said.

Children's Sci-Fi Awards

The 14th Xingyun (Nebula) Awards for Chinese science fiction announced the winners of its children's science fiction awards on May 12. The announcement was made in Sanxingdui, near the Sanxingdui Ruins site in the city of Guanghan, Sichuan Province.

The main awards this year include the gold award for medium-length and long novels, the gold award for short stories, and the new star award.

The awards for children's science fiction aim to encourage more youngsters to read and write science fiction, and to promote the development of children's science fiction writing, publication and theoretical research, thus laying a foundation

for the overall development of science fiction.

Aviation Accessibility

China's regional aviation accessibility has improved over recent years, according to a recent industry report, Xinhua reported on May 14.

The travel time to reach smaller cities has generally shortened, a report jointly released by China Air Transport Association and other research institutes said.

The improved accessibility supports coordinated regional development and the country's rural vitalization, helping smaller cities and counties share the dividends of the country's big market and boost local economies.

The report highlights the need for a more comprehensive and interconnected network that encompasses both regional and trunk air routes.

Archaeological Base

A base for archaeological research and the protection of cultural relics in South and Southeast Asia was put into use in Kunming, capital of Yunnan Province, on May 17.

The base was jointly built by the National Cultural Heritage Administration and



Museum Day

A sign promoting International Museum Day in downtown Fuzhou, Fujian Province, on May 16. Fujian Museum in Fuzhou was the country's main venue for this year's International Museum Day, which fell on May 18.

the provincial government, and it has a total construction area of over 9,800 square meters. It is equipped with a specimen exhibition hall and warehouse, a room for the collection and analysis of information on cultural relics, and a room for research on the technological conservation and restoration of cultural relics.

According to Yang Decong, deputy head of the Yunnan

Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism, the base will cooperate with archaeological academic institutions in South and Southeast Asian countries to carry out research on ancient civilization, heritage protection and personnel training.

Located on the country's southwest border, Yunnan is an important link between China and South Asian and Southeast Asian countries.



Disaster Prevention

Elementary school students take part in an earthquake evacuation drill in Hefei, Anhui Province, on May 12, which is National Disaster Prevention and Reduction Day in China.

Steady Growth

China fully returned to normal social and economic operation in April, with multiple output and demand indicators registering faster growth, data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) showed.

Value-added industrial output went up 5.6 percent year on year, 1.7 percentage points higher than in March.

In particular, the production of new-energy vehicles and solar cells surged 85.4 percent and 69.1 percent year on year, respectively.

Retail sales of consumer goods, a major indicator of the country's consumption strength, surged 18.4 percent year on year to nearly 3.5 trillion yuan (\$500.6 billion).

The production index of the services sector rose 13.5 percent year on year in April, 4.3 percentage points faster than in March.

In the first four months of the year, fixed assets investment rose 4.7 percent year on year to

14.75 trillion yuan (\$2.1 trillion), with investment in hi-tech manufacturing and services increasing 15.3 percent and 13.4 percent, respectively.

While major economic indicators have pointed to sustained economic development, NBS spokesperson Fu Linghui warned of challenges including the complex international situation and insufficient domestic demand.

Looking forward, China will expand demand, accelerate the development of a modern industrial system, and work hard to promote high-quality economic development, Fu said.

Auto Exports

A total of 1.37 million China-made vehicles were exported in the first four months of this year, surging 89.2 percent from the same period last year, according to the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers.

Passenger vehicle exports jumped 110 percent year on year to top 1.14 million units, while

exports of commercial vehicles climbed 31.5 percent from the same period of last year to 228,000 units.

In the January-April period, exports of new-energy vehicles also soared 170 percent year on year to 348,000 units, the data also revealed.

Forex Settlement Surplus

China's banks saw a net foreign exchange (forex) settlement surplus of approximately \$5.5 billion in April, the country's forex regulator said.

Forex purchases by banks totaled \$186.9 billion that month, and sales reached \$181.5 billion, data from the State Administration of Foreign Exchange (SAFE) showed.

"The country's forex market operated steadily in April, with supply and demand mostly balanced," Wang Chunying, Deputy Director and spokesperson of the SAFE, said.

Foreign direct investment in

China maintained a net inflow in April, and overseas investors purchased domestic securities for two consecutive months.

"This indicates that China's economic development prospects and the value of renminbi assets have boosted global investor confidence further," Wang said.

During the first four months of 2023, forex purchases by China's banks came in at \$732.9 billion, and sales totaled \$742.7 billion.

Business Confidence

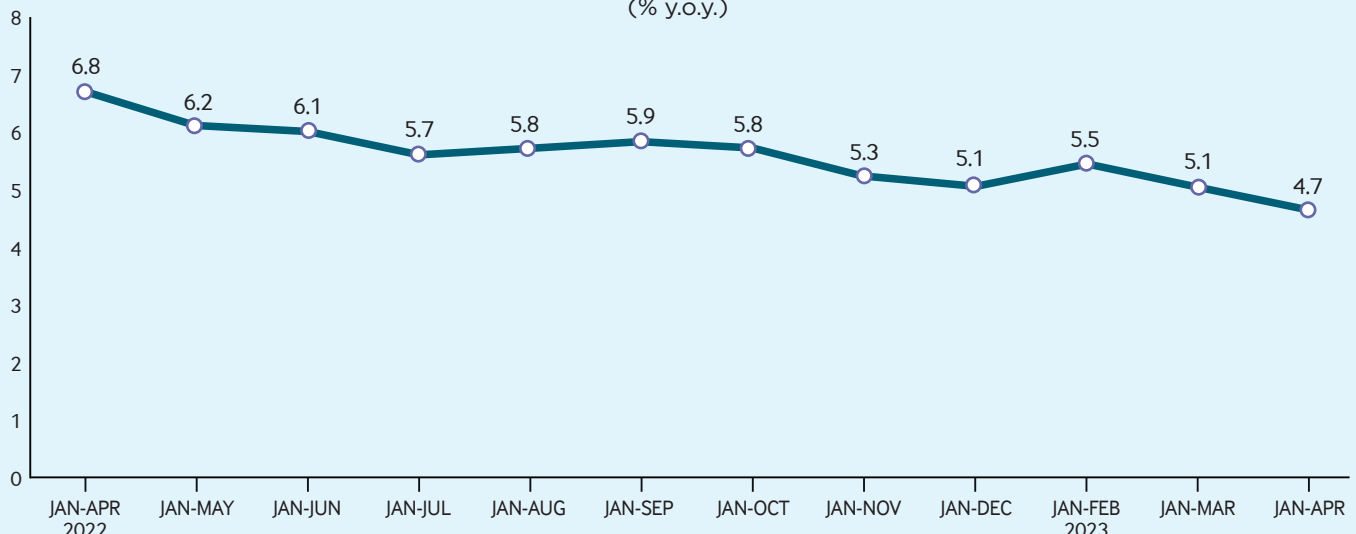
The China Retail Performance Index, a barometer of retailers' expectations for the sector, stood at 51.1 percent in May, climbing 0.3 percentage points from April and staying in the expansion zone for five consecutive months, according to the China General Chamber of Commerce (CGCC).

A reading above 50 indicates expansion and below that mark, contraction.

The steady growth of the

NUMBERS

Fixed Assets Investment Growth in China
(% y.o.y.)



index pointed to an across-the-board recovery in the retail sector and stronger confidence among retailers, according to the CGCC.

Swap Connect

The trading of Swap Connect, an interest rate swap market access scheme, was officially launched on May 15, according to the People's Bank of China (PBC), the country's central bank.

Under the program, domestic and overseas investors will be allowed to conduct renminbi interest rate swap trading and clearing via infrastructure institutions on the Chinese mainland and in Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), the PBC said in an online statement.

With institutional arrangements made in trading, clearing and settlement, investors will be able to participate in financial derivatives markets on the mainland and in HKSAR without changing their existing trading

practices, the central bank said.

The rollout of the scheme marked an important step in China's financial opening up and reflected the firm determination of the Chinese Central Government to support the long-term prosperity, stability and development of HKSAR, Pan Gongsheng, Deputy Governor of the PBC, said at the launch ceremony.

The Swap Connect will consolidate and improve Hong Kong's status as an international financial center, provide a more convenient channel to manage interest rate risks, and steadily promote China's financial opening up, the central bank said.

Free Trade Agreement

China and Ecuador signed a free trade agreement (FTA) on May 11, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

The agreement was signed by China's Commerce Minister Wang Wentao and Ecuador's Minister for Production, Foreign

Trade, Investment and Fisheries Julio Prado via videolink after a year of negotiation, the ministry said.

The FTA will help the two sides achieve high-standard mutual opening up, create a better business environment, further tap the potential for trade and investment cooperation, and promote the sustainable, stable and diversified development of bilateral trade, it said.

Once the FTA goes into effect, as much as 90 percent of the goods traded between China and Ecuador will be exempted from tariffs, while 60 percent of them will enjoy zero tariffs immediately, according to the deal.

China and Ecuador will proceed with respective domestic procedures so that the FTA can come into effect at an early date, the commerce ministry said. The two sides will also conduct further negotiations in areas of common interest to seek upgrading of the FTA.

China is Ecuador's second largest trading partner. In 2022, the two countries witnessed double-digit growth in trade for the second year in a row, with bilateral trade reaching \$13.1 billion, up 19.7 percent year on year.

Ride-Hailing Rise

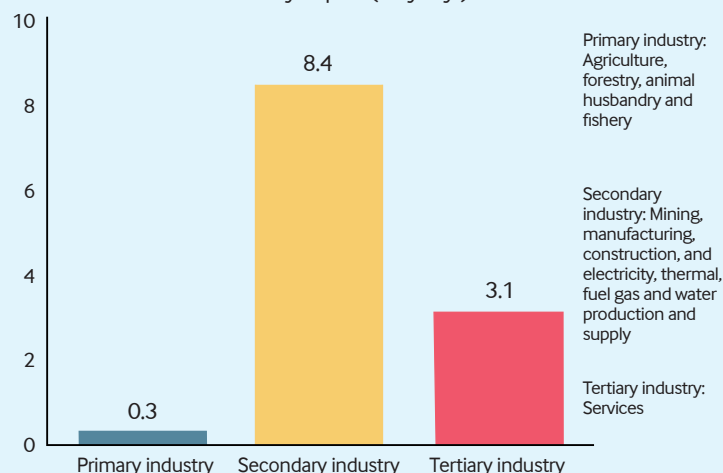
The number of China's online ride-hailing companies had reached 309 by the end of April, two more than in March, data from the Ministry of Transport showed.

By the end of April, the number of authorized vehicles and drivers had reached 2.3 million and 5.4 million, up 2.2 percent and 3.4 percent month on month, respectively, according to the ministry. In April, 706 million trips were made using ride-hailing apps.

In 2022, online ride-hailing trips made up about 40.5 percent of total taxi trips, an increase of 6.4 percentage points from a year earlier.

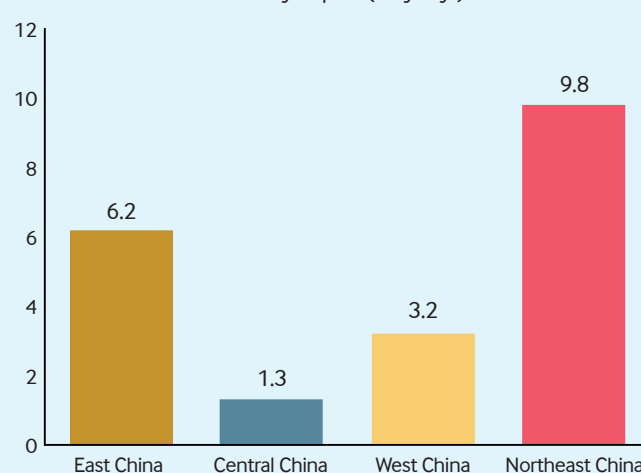
Fixed Assets Investment Growth in China by Sector

January-April (% y.o.y.)



Fixed Assets Investment Growth in China by Region

January-April (% y.o.y.)



(Source: National Bureau of Statistics)



JAPAN

Protestors rally in front of the headquarters of Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) in Tokyo on May 16, demanding the immediate suspension of the government's plan to discharge into the sea the nuclear-contaminated water from the crippled Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant



FRANCE

U.S. actor and President of the Uncertain Regard Jury John C. Reilly poses during a photocall at the 76th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes on May 17. The event opened on May 16 and will run until May 28



THAILAND

Pita Limjaroenrat, leader of the Move Forward Party, casts his ballot at a polling station in Bangkok during Thailand's general election on May 14. Pita said on May 15 that he had invited several other parties previously in the opposition to form a coalition government after his party won the most seats in the lower house of parliament



BELGIUM

European Commissioner for Economy Paolo Gentiloni speaks at a press conference on the Spring 2023 Economic Forecast in Brussels on May 15, saying the EU's economy has avoided a recession and is now on a path of moderate growth in 2023 and 2024



CROATIA

A man stands in water as flood waters hit Gracac, Zadar County, on May 15. A total of 256.4 mm of rain fell in Gracac that day, the highest since records began in 1960, according to Croatia's State Hydrometeorological Institute



NEW ZEALAND

Police officers stand guard at the site of a hostel fire in downtown Wellington on May 16. At least six were killed and up to 30 others were believed unaccounted for after a blaze broke out overnight in the four-story building

THIS WEEK PEOPLE & POINTS

↓ VETERAN NURSE WINS GLOBAL AWARD

Zhang Jinyuan, 94, has recently received the 2023 International Achievement Award from the Florence Nightingale International Foundation, the International Council of Nurses' premier foundation. As one of the most prestigious honors in global nursing and healthcare, this award is offered biennially to a practicing nurse with at least 10 years of experience.

Zhang worked in clinical nursing in Nanchang, Jiangxi Province, for more than four decades. In 2003, she was awarded the Florence Nightingale Medal, the top honor in international nursing, established in 1912.

After retirement, the then 71-year-old and her former colleagues established the Jiangxi Red Cross Volunteer Nursing Service Center in 2000, focusing on community-level nursing. To date, the center, which draws together more than 19,000 volunteers, has provided services to more than 700,000 residents in 350 communities.



Home Exchange

Gmw.cn

May 15

The five-day May Day holiday this year saw the rise of many trends, one of which is house swapping—the exchange of homes between two strangers who are traveling to each other's cities. In the face of sky-high room prices at hotels, zero-cost home swaps are attracting Chinese young travelers in droves.

This type of homestay is not only free of charge, but also gives home swappers a chance to share tips on how to travel like a local, skip the tourist traps, and discover hidden restaurants, biking routes,

and more. What's more, it can foster lasting social connections that may evolve into friendships.

However, despite its rising popularity among adventure-seeking Gen Z, house swapping comes with many problems, even dangers. Possible risks include property damage, theft, and even kidnapping. Also, some swappers have labeled their supposedly free homes with rental and cleaning prices, thereby blurring the boundaries between home swaps and bed and breakfasts.

Therefore, vacationers should make sure they do research on their house swap partners beforehand. Meanwhile, occupancy agreements signed by both parties should be in place to minimize risks and guarantee a safe experience.



The Next China Is China

China Newsweek

April 24

In late March, China saw the arrival of over 100 foreign executives, who were here to attend either the China Development Forum (CDF), an annual forum on China's economic development in Beijing, or the Boao Forum for Asia annual conference, an event committed to presenting an Asian vision for shared prosperity, in Hainan Province. Amid global challenges and uncertainties, their presence is a vote of confidence in the Chinese market.

With the arrival of the CEOs and entrepreneurs came a massive wave of foreign investment. On April 6, Airbus, the world's largest manufacturer of

“The global community must urgently address the growing shortages of funding faced by many developing countries, strengthening their capacities to make critical investments in sustainable development.”

Li Junhua, UN Under Secretary General for Economic and Social Affairs, in a press release on May 16

“The Chinese players have done an incredible job when it comes to hard skills, batteries, artificial intelligence and semiconductors. What is needed going forward is to internationalize their offerings... in order to win market share.”

Howard Yu, Director of the Center for Future Readiness at the International Institute for Management Development, commenting on the rise of Chinese auto brands as evidenced by the center's global indicator released in May

aircraft, announced its plan to open a second final assembly line in Tianjin. AstraZeneca, a global biopharmaceutical company, has decided to invest \$450 million in building a manufacturing and supply base in Qingdao, Shandong Province. Panasonic, a Japan-based electronics giant, also plans to invest more than 50 billion yen (\$365 million) in China by the end of 2024. And the list is still growing.

“The next China is China,” said Joe Ngai, Managing Partner of McKinsey Greater China, at this year’s CDF. This declaration is not a proud boast, but a statement grounded in hard facts. China has a supply chain that encompasses all the categories listed in the UN’s industrial classification. A thriving digital economy is another attractive factor. With continuous growth in the digital realm, new market sectors will emerge and new methods of integrating different industries will be invented.

As China’s industrial landscape continues to evolve, foreign companies are also shifting their focus within the Chinese market from low-end, labor-intensive manufacturing to hi-tech industries. The next China is China, but a China that has gone through many upgrades.

Family Breakups? *Yangcheng Evening News* May 11

Duanqin, a term that literally means severing familial ties, has recently caught media attention. Many born in the 1980s and 1990s are reportedly cutting off their distant relatives by dropping the age-old tradition of attending family reunions on special occasions.

Their voluntary detachment from far-off uncles, aunts, and cousins is rooted in the complex interactions of many social factors. The past decades have seen China break away from the shackles of nepotism, therefore making people less dependent on blood ties for personal

success. The traditional family structure of several generations living in a single household is becoming a thing of the past. The country’s rapid urbanization has led many young adults to leave their hometowns for big cities.

The widening of generation gaps is another reason. Invariably pressured by their relatives to marry, find a decent job, and have kids, many Chinese youngsters choose to steer clear of any event that may lead to such embarrassing encounters. Therefore, *duanqin* is not a passive retreat from society, but shows young people’s eagerness for a new type of interpersonal relationship that is based on freedom of choice and shared values.

↓ SENIOR DIPLOMAT VISITS EUROPE

Li Hui, Special Representative of the Chinese Government on Eurasian Affairs, has been in the spotlight for his recent role in mediating the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Li visited Ukraine, Poland, France, Germany and Russia in May. The purpose of his visit was to push forward communications between the parties to find a political solution to the Ukraine crisis, the Foreign Ministry said.

Born in Heilongjiang Province in 1953, Li began his diplomatic career in 1975. From 1997 to 1999, he served as the ambassador of China to Kazakhstan. He was vice foreign minister from 2008 to 2009 before becoming China’s ambassador to Russia, a position that he held for a decade.

Li received the Order of Friendship, a Russian award for those who contribute significantly to closer cooperation, from President Vladimir Putin in May 2019.



“The result makes the Milky Way no longer look special. The research team is preparing for higher-precision measurements in the future, with the hope of finally uncovering its spiral structure.”

Xu Ye, a lead researcher at the Purple Mountain Observatory in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, speaking about a recent discovery that finds the Milky Way more like a common multiple-arm galaxy than a special one with four spiral arms extending to outer regions

“Replacing free sugars with non-sugar sweeteners does not help with weight control in the long term.”

Francesco Branca, Director of the Department of Nutrition and Food Safety at the World Health Organization, commenting on a recently issued recommendation against the use of non-sugar sweeteners for weight control



COVER STORY

A MEETING OF SOLIDARITY

Leaders of China and five Central Asian countries pave the way
for a new stage of cooperation By Ma Miaomiao