OPINION: THE PUSH TO PEAK CARBON P.31 | FEATURES: REUSABLE ROCKET RECOVERY P.38

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Cover Photo: The headquarters of the China Satellite Network Group in Xiongan New Area, Hebei Province, on March 20 (VCG)

EDITOR'S DESK

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Three Regions, One Future

Jing-Jin-Ji is the name given to the integrated megaregion of China that includes the capital Beijing (Jing), neighboring Tianjin (Jin) and surrounding Hebei Province (also officially known by the historical one-character name Ji). Coordinating the development of the three regions became a national-level strategy in 2014, with the aim of relieving Beijing of functions non-essential to its role as China's capital, maintaining regional economic growth, improving infrastructure connectivity, and promoting ecological conservation and the sharing of public services.

Over the past decade, Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei have, by breaking down administrative barriers and promoting policy coordination, achieved a leap in economic size and intensified industrial collaboration. The region's GDP grew from around 5.5 trillion yuan ($809 billion) in 2013 to nearly 12 trillion yuan ($1.76 trillion) in 2025. Its industrial structure has been continuously optimized, with the service industry accounting for over 70 percent and a collaborative model of "research and development in Beijing and commercial use in Tianjin and Hebei" becoming established.

Located in Hebei, Xiongan New Area is the primary destination for relocating functions previously undertaken by Beijing that are not related to its role as the capital. It is also often dubbed China's "city of the future." The Beijing Daxing International Airport, which opened in 2019 in Beijing's southern suburbs, has also been a driver of regional development.

The three places have also jointly pursued major ecological projects including sandstorm, soil erosion and river basin pollution control. The Beijing-Tianjin sandstorm source control project has completed afforestation of more than 667,000 hectares, and the average concentration of PM2.5, fine particles with a diameter of 2.5 micrometers or smaller, a key indicator of air pollution, in the region has decreased over 70 percent since 2013.

As urbanization increases the size of China's cities, the country is increasingly turning to regional integration as a means to relieve pressures on urban infrastructure and ensure people's well-being continues to improve. Jing-Jin-Ji is at the forefront of this approach. **BR**

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XINHUA

PANDA PARADISE

Giant panda Meng Lan eats bamboo at an indoor exhibition hall of a new facility at the Beijing Zoo in Beijing on July 15. The zoo's brand-new facility officially opened that day, and offers a more comfortable and enriching environment for the 10 giant pandas that live there.


XINHUA

Market Vitality

The Starlight Night Market in Jinghong, Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan Province, on July 14. The number of visitors to the market has surged during the summer peak tourist season. The market offers food and cultural products produced by the many ethnic minority communities who live in the area.

Water Pollution Control

China has unveiled an action plan to tackle pollution in rivers, ponds, ditches and other water bodies close to communities, according to a document recently made public by the General Office of the State Council, Xinhua News Agency reported on July 14.

The plan aims to largely complete pollution checks and cleanup work at industrial parks administered at the provincial level or above by 2030. It also seeks to largely eliminate black and odorous water bodies in counties and townships, and curb the direct impact of livestock and poultry farming on waters in key areas.

By 2030, waters near communities should generally be free of unusual discoloration, foul smells and visible waste, the plan said.

China has made steady progress in improving the quality of its major rivers in recent years. Pollution in smaller tributaries, ponds, canals and ditches, however, has become more prominent and is increasingly affecting people's daily lives and living standards.

The latest campaign extends water pollution control efforts to counties and rural areas, while covering both surface water and groundwater.

Fewer Sandstorms

China has recorded fewer and weaker spring sandstorms over the past two decades, after decades of efforts to curb desertification, official data released on July 12 showed.

The average number of spring sandstorms, a recurring weather hazard across north China particularly between March and May, fell from 12.5 times a year two decades ago to 9.6 times in recent years, according to the National Forestry and Grassland Administration, which released the data to mark the International Day of Combating Sand and Dust Storms.

The decline is closely linked to years of ecological restoration efforts, including the Three-North Shelterbelt Forest Program, an afforestation initiative launched in 1978 to curb desertification and improve the ecological environment in north China.

During the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-25), China rehabilitated 10 million hectares of sandy land.

Banning Fuel Cars

South China's island province of Hainan has set the goal of banning the sale of combustion-engine cars by 2030, taking the lead in the country's transition toward new-energy vehicles (NEVs), Xinhua reported on July 14.

By 2030, all newly added and replaced private vehicles, as well as all new and replacement vehicles in public service and commercial operation in Hainan, must be NEVs, with the exception of special-purpose vehicles, according to the province's 2026-30 plan for building a national demonstration zone for ecological civilization.

It is estimated that by that time, the share of NEVs in Hainan's total vehicle fleet will rise from 23.75 percent in 2025 to 45 percent. The province will also improve its charging infrastructure network, with the vehicle-to-charging-pile ratio kept below 2.5 to 1, said the recently issued plan.

Hainan first proposed the goal in 2018 of banning the sale of fuel cars by 2030, becoming the first Chinese provincial-level region to announce such a target.

Unemployment Rate

China's surveyed urban unemployment rate edged down to 5 percent in June from 5.1 percent in May, data showed on July 15.

The average jobless rate for the first half of 2026 stood at 5.2 percent, according to data released by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). The government has set a full-year target of around 5.5 percent for 2026.

NBS deputy head Mao Shengyong told a news conference organized by the State Council Information Office that the unemployment rate for workers with local household registration stood at 5 percent in June, while the rate for migrant workers was 4.9 percent. Among migrant workers from rural areas, the rate was 4.8 percent.

By the end of the second quarter, the total number of rural migrant workers working outside their hometowns reached 192.27 million, up 0.5 percent from a year earlier.

Medical Insurance Enrollment

China's basic medical insurance program saw steady growth in enrollment in 2026, with more than 4 million additional people signing up compared with the same period last year, an official said on July 9.

The participation rate remained stable at 95 percent, Zhang Chenguang, an official at the National Healthcare Security Administration (NHSA), told a news conference.

The rise has been driven by a series of measures to expand coverage, including efforts to encourage China's largest cities to lift household registration restrictions on flexible workers seeking to enroll in basic medical insurance where they live or work.

Authorities have also introduced cross-provincial sharing of individual basic medical insurance accounts, allowing spouses, children, parents and other close relatives to use one another's account balances.

China has also continued to expand its healthcare safety net. In March, the government issued new rules on the long-term care insurance scheme. Under the scheme, insured people who are unable to carry out normal daily activities are entitled to regular personal care and nursing services, with eligible care costs reimbursed.

"The long-term care insurance scheme now covers 320 million people, while more than 50,000 certified long-term care workers have been trained," Liu Juan, another official at the NHSA, said at the news conference.

Essential Drug List

China on July 9 unveiled its new national essential drug list comprising 794 medications, which serves as a guide for medical institutions' procurement and prescribing, an update eight years after the release of the current version.

According to the National Health Commission, essential medicines are those that meet the country's basic healthcare needs, with reliable supplies, equitable access, and comparatively high cost-effectiveness.

Medicines on the updated list are preliminarily estimated to account for 71 percent of the total volume of drugs used by the country's public medical institutions, said Gong Xiangguang, a senior official at the commission.

The new list will take effect in September this year. According to the NHSA, all newly added drugs on the list have been included in the national reimbursement drug list.

The update adds 68 pharmaceuticals and biological products to the previous version released in 2018, according to Hu Xin, a chief pharmacist at the Beijing Hospital. The updated list also adds 31 medicines indicated for use in children, including five drugs developed specifically for pediatric use.

China released its first national essential drug list in 1982, and had updated the list three times before the latest version since the country launched a new round of national medical reform in 2009.


XINHUA

Inbound Boom

A tourist interacts with a Sichuan Opera performer at a hotpot restaurant housed in a former underground air-raid shelter in Chongqing on July 10. Since the beginning of this year, inbound and outbound passenger traffic at Chongqing Jiangbei International Airport has continued to grow.


XINHUA

Virtual Retreat

A visitor tries a VR device during an exhibition featuring the Qianlong Garden at the National Museum of Classic Books in Beijing on July 14. The garden was built by Emperor Qianlong (1711-99) of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) as a private retreat for his later years. The exhibition runs from July 9 to December 6.

Retail Sales

China has set a goal of raising total retail sales of consumer goods to around 60 trillion yuan ($8.8 trillion) by 2030 and further strengthening the role of consumption in driving economic growth, according to a government plan on expanding consumption during the 15th Five-Year Plan period (2026-30).

The plan, which was recently approved by the State Council, the highest state administrative organ, also aims to significantly increase the ratio of household consumption to GDP and achieve relatively fast growth in total goods and services consumption.

It outlines other targets in areas including optimizing the consumption structure, continuously improving consumption capacity, enhancing the supply of goods and services, and significantly improving the consumption environment.

China's consumer market achieved remarkable results during the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-25), with total retail sales of consumer goods reaching 50.1 trillion yuan ($7.4 trillion) in 2025, surpassing the 50-trillion-yuan ($7.4 trillion) mark for the first time.

The average contribution rate of final consumption expenditure to economic growth during 2021-25 stood at 58.8 percent, up 10 percentage points from the previous five-year period.

The 15th Five-Year Plan period will see China's consumer market development enter a critical stage of both scale expansion and quality improvement, with a solid foundation for consumption, sound upgrading momentum and abundant innovation vitality.

In its approval of the plan, the State Council emphasizes the need for efforts to increase domestic demand, adopt specific actions to boost consumption, expand services consumption, upgrade goods consumption and diversify business forms.

It also urges local governments at all levels to make consumption expansion a key task in their economic and social development during the 15th Five-Year Plan period, while implementing the plan's objectives and policy measures in line with their local conditions.

Railway Passenger Trips

A record number of passenger trips were made across China in the first half of 2026, with more than 2.3 billion recorded, up 5 percent from the previous year, according to data released on July 13 by the China State Railway Group Co. Ltd. (China Railway), the national railway operator.

An average of 11,468 passenger trains were operated daily during the six-month period, a 5.8-percent year-on-year rise, figures from China Railway show.

Adapting to the passenger flow growth brought by the country's visa-free entry and transit policies, China's railway network has facilitated increased travel for foreign passengers, recording over 12.31 million foreign passenger trips in the first half, a surge of 33.6 percent year on year.

During the period, cross-border rail travel continued to grow, with the China-Laos Railway carrying 188,000 trips, up 25.9 percent from a year earlier, while the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong high-speed railway handled 16.96 million cross-border trips, an increase of 13.8 percent year on year, China Railway said.

Meanwhile, China Railway has been coordinating with local cultural and tourism departments to promote tourism, operating 1,797 tourist trains nationwide during the first six months. It has also expanded its "quiet carriage" and pet-friendly travel services.

Power Load

China's peak electricity load climbed to a record high of 1.518 billion kilowatts (kw) on July 10, according to the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), the country's top economic planner.

The figure was 10 million kw

NUMBERS

China's Service Outsourcing Industry in January-May

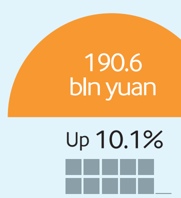
(All growth rates are y.o.y., $1=6.79 yuan as of July 16)

Service outsourcing contracts inked by firms in China

Total value

Offshore service outsourcing executed contract value

of foreign-funded enterprises



higher than the previous record, the NDRC said, adding that multiple provincial-level regions, including Guangdong, Guangxi, Ningxia and Gansu, have also reported record-high power loads since the start of summer.

The NDRC attributed the nationwide surge in power consumption to multiple factors, including robust industrial demand driven by the rapid growth of hi-tech manufacturing, new-energy vehicles and computing equipment.

The service sector, including battery charging and Internet data services, also contributed to the surge in power consumption, while increased air-conditioner use played a part as well, the NDRC said.

In recent years, China has made major strides in power infrastructure development, helping ensure a stable electricity supply during peak periods and effectively supporting economic and social development as well as meeting people's basic needs, the NDRC said.

China's total installed power generation capacity had reached 4.01 billion kw by the end of May, according to data from the National Energy Administration. The figure put China at the top of the world by this measure.

Global Shipping Center

Shanghai has ranked second among leading international shipping centers, according to a report released on July 10.

Surpassing London, Shanghai secured the second spot in the 2026 Xinhua-Baltic International Shipping Center Development Index (ISCDI), after Singapore, according to the report. It marked the city's highest-ever ranking since the index was introduced in 2014.

Jin Yu Cheong, head of Baltic Exchange Asia, noted that Shanghai's success extends far beyond mere cargo volumes. The Baltic Exchange is the world's leading source of independent maritime market data.

"It is supported by a mature and diverse maritime ecosystem, bringing together shipping companies, financial institutions, insurers, legal services, shipbrokers, shipyards and technology providers," Jin said.

He added that continued investment in digital innovation, green port development and maritime services has further strengthened the city's global competitiveness.

Shanghai Port's container throughput surpassed 55.06 million twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) in 2025, setting a new record. TEUs are the international standard unit used to quantify containerized cargo, ship capacity and port throughput.

This year's index also underscored China's expanding footprint on the global shipping landscape. The country is now home to seven shipping centers in the global Top 20.

Jointly launched by China Economic Information Service, a leading economic information service institution under Xinhua News Agency and Baltic Exchange in 2014, the ISCDI has become one of the most influential benchmarks for evaluating the development of major shipping centers worldwide.

New-Energy Vehicles

China's new-energy vehicle (NEV) sector reported continued growth in the first half of 2026, with output and sales both exceeding 7 million units during the period, latest industry data showed on July 9.

NEV output from January to June reached 7.438 million units, while sales stood at 7.446 million units, according to data released by the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers.

Pure electric vehicles accounted for 67 percent of the total NEV sales during the period, the data showed.

NEVs accounted for 49.42 percent of all newly registered automobiles in China in the first six months of the year, up 4.45 percentage points from the same period of 2025, according to the Ministry of Public Security.

(Source: *Ministry of Commerce*)

ITALY

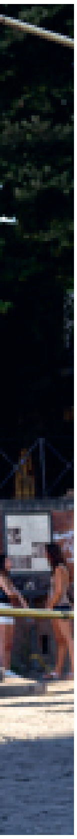
A girl plays with bubbles on a square beside the Tiber River in Rome on July 12. The 24th edition of Along the Tiber Rome, a popular summer event featuring culture, music and gastronomy, will run until the end of August

SPAIN

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez (third right, front) arrives at the site of the lifting of routine border checks at the land border crossing between Gibraltar and Spain on July 15. Routine border checks were lifted in line with new border arrangements under the post-Brexit agreement between the European Union and the United Kingdom

GERMANY

Chancellor Friedrich Merz (center) speaks during his summer press conference in Berlin on July 15, at which he said he does not want the United States to interfere in German elections



CANADA

Police officers collect evidence at the scene of a shooting at a street festival in Toronto on July 12. Two people were killed and six others injured in the shooting

JAPAN

Japanese protestors gather outside the National Diet Building in Tokyo on July 10 in opposition to a series of dangerous policies and bills recently promoted by the government of Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi

FRANCE

Soldiers participate in the annual Bastille Day military parade in Paris on July 14

DELIVERY RIDER WINS TOP LITERARY AWARD

Wang Jibing, a 56-year-old delivery rider, has earned one of China's most prestigious literary honors with verses born in the fleeting moments spent waiting for meals to be ready, for elevators and for customers to open their doors.

His poetry collection, *Dichu Feixing*, which translates as *Low Flight*, was announced as one of the winners of the ninth edition of the Lu Xun Literature Prize on July 15. This collection captures the unvarnished realities and emotional subtleties of his life as one of the country's more than 10 million food delivery riders. After several odd jobs, Wang became a rider in Kunshan, Jiangsu Province, in 2019 and has since published four anthologies.

The coveted prize, named after literary titan Lu Xun (1881-1936) and awarded every four years, recognizes outstanding works across various genres.

Unreasonable Hospitality

Gmw.cn

July 13

A growing number of China's hotels have adopted a rolling 24-hour checkout policy, allowing guests to stay for a full day regardless of when they arrive. Experimentation with this seemingly modest reform points to a broader debate about consumer rights.

The change challenges the long-standing convention of requiring guests to leave by noon, a rule designed chiefly to simplify housekeeping schedules and maximize operational efficiency. For travelers arriving on late-night flights or trains, however, the old system can mean paying a full day's rate for barely half a day's stay. The new approach therefore addresses a widely shared sense of unfairness.

Hotel managers say flexible checkout can raise cleaning and supply costs by 10 to 20 percent. Even so, early adopters have found that the additional expense can be partly offset by stronger demand. Late-night bookings have risen, customer loyalty has improved, and some hotels report that repeat guests now account for more than 60 percent of their clientele.

The 24-hour policy exemplifies a more customer-centered model of hospitality. Delayed checkout, free luggage storage, variable pricing and similar services share a common goal: to provide a more satisfying guest experience.

Rethinking Overseas Study

China Newsweek

July 6

For decades, the aspirations of Chinese students studying abroad followed a familiar map: the U.S., the UK, Australia and Canada. UNESCO data released in February, however, show that the geography of overseas study is becoming increasingly diverse. While the U.S. and the U.K. remain the leading destinations,

> "China is not only a huge market, but is also in a period of accelerated agricultural modernization, with growing demand for high-end agricultural machinery."

Bernard Krone, fourth-generation head of German agricultural machinery company Krone, commenting on its recent injection of an additional 19.6 million yuan ($2.9 million) into its Chinese sales and service subsidiary based in Tianjin

> "Young Tibetans today understand both our own traditions and the outside world. That allows us to build a bridge between them."

Dawa Drolma, a Tibetan craftswoman in Sichuan Province, who has adapted centuries-old Buddhist copper casting traditions for contemporary markets to produce rings, necklaces and pendants, in a recent interview with Xinhua News Agency

European countries including Germany, France, Spain, Italy and Switzerland, alongside emerging destinations such as Russia, the Middle East and Southeast Asia, are attracting a growing share of Chinese applicants.

The shift is driven less by prestige than by pragmatism. Countries with lower costs and fewer admissions hurdles are therefore gaining appeal. Spain, for instance, recognizes China's national college entrance examination results, making it easier for Chinese students to apply to local universities. Generous scholarships have made universities in the Middle East increasingly attractive.

As more Chinese firms expand overseas, graduates with international experience and cross-cultural skills are in rising demand. Students who have lived and studied overseas are often better equipped to understand local communication styles, workplace norms and business cultures.

Yet the most profound shift may be psychological. Chinese students and their families are becoming more willing to look beyond the aura of the Ivy League and the pull of global university rankings, focusing instead on how well an institution aligns with a student's goals, interests and personal aspirations.

From Manufacturers to Innovators

People's Daily

July 13

Japanese automobile manufacturer Nissan has signed an agreement with Chinese carmaker Chery to dedicate a production line at its Sunderland plant in the UK to manufacturing right-hand-drive vehicles for the Chinese firm. This is the first time a major Japanese automaker will build cars for a Chinese brand in the UK.

For decades, China served primarily as a major manufacturer for international brands. Today, many Chinese companies are exporting not only finished vehicles but also technologies, platforms and manufacturing solutions.

The shift is, in part, the result of the rapid rise of China's new-energy vehicle (NEV) industry. The country has led the world in NEV production and sales for 11 consecutive years, with both surpassing 7.4 million units in the first half of 2026. More significantly, Chinese carmakers have built advantages across the value chain, from batteries and electric powertrains to intelligent driving systems.

Rather than merely narrowing the technological gap with established rivals, Chinese firms are beginning to shape the industry's direction. The era in which China simply manufactured for others is giving way to one in which international carmakers increasingly manufacture with, and for, China.

ENERGY EXPERT HEADS THE CAE

Zhang Yuzhuo, an expert in clean coal technology, has recently been appointed president of the Chinese Academy of Engineering (CAE). Founded in 1994, the Beijing-based CAE is China's highest advisory academic institution in the fields of engineering sciences and technology.

Zhang, 64, has built a distinguished career in the energy sector. He led the construction of the world's first coal-to-liquids facility with an annual output of 1.08 million tons of oil products, making China the only nation mastering million-ton-scale direct coal liquefaction. He has held key leadership positions such as board chairman of energy giant Sinopec and head of the State-Owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council, which oversees state-owned enterprises.

The CAE currently has 979 members. Membership of the CAE represents the highest reputation and level of academia in the engineering community.

"The facts have fully demonstrated that more and more Taiwan compatriots have seen through the lies and schemes of the DPP (Democratic Progressive Party) authorities."

Zhu Fenglian, a spokesperson for the State Council Taiwan Affairs Office, debunking the claim by the region's ruling party that "the mainland is dangerous," at a July 15 press briefing, saying more than 11.7 million trips have been made by Taiwan residents to the mainland since 2024. The region has a population of 23 million

"The implementation of AI is so massive in China. Companies, state-owned enterprises and government agencies are all applying AI at different levels."

Kiwi Aliwarga, President Commissioner of UMG IdeaLab, a venture builder in Indonesia, during the 2026 China Smart Energy Conference, which ran from July 9 to 11 in Chengdu, Sichuan


进化
10