

# TOP NEWS



Chinese Premier Li Qiang (front, seventh from right) and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz (front, seventh from left) pose for a group photo on Wednesday with entrepreneurs from both countries before a symposium of the China-Germany economic advisory committee at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. WANG ZHUANGFEI / CHINA DAILY

## Mideast stability uncertain as US, Iran restart talks

As Washington increases military presence in region, experts warn of risks of armed conflict

By LIU JIANQIAO  
liujianqiao@chinadaily.com.cn

As Iran and the United States head for their next round of nuclear-related talks on Thursday in Geneva, Switzerland, experts noted that there are few signs of meaningful de-escalation in the military standoff between the two countries.

They said the risk of another armed conflict in the Middle East is rising sharply, with the US increasing its military presence in the region, withdrawing diplomatic personnel and escalating threats of possible strikes.

Iranian officials have signaled both openness to negotiation and readiness for confrontation.

On Tuesday, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said in a social media post that Iran is heading for the talks "with a determination to achieve a fair and equitable deal — in the shortest possible time."

On Monday, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei warned that any act of aggression and met with consequences. He emphasized that Iran's armed forces remain "vigorously ready round the clock" even as diplomatic efforts continue.

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian has described recent negotiations between Iran and the US as having "yielded encouraging signals", but cautioned that Iran has "made all necessary preparations for any potential scenario".

As negotiations progress, the US appears to be increasingly prepared for a potential conflict with Iran. US President Donald Trump said on Monday that Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, will lead a strike on Iran if he is ordered to do so. Trump, however, added that he would rather reach a deal with Iran.

Ding Long, a professor at the Shanghai International Studies University's Middle East Studies Institute, said the US' current strategy on Iran involves using sustained pressure to compel negotiation, with the ultimate aim of dismantling Iran's nuclear capabilities.

"In recent weeks, Washington has stepped up military deterrence in the hope of achieving its objectives without resorting to war. Nevertheless, the use of force remains an option. How the situation develops will largely depend on whether Iran is prepared to make substantial concessions," Ding said.

While the US has put forward three topics of conversation with Iran, the latter has agreed to negotiate only on nuclear-related issues, effectively narrowing the scope of the talks.

Iran has reportedly signaled concessions, including seriously considering a combination of sending half of its most highly enriched uranium abroad, diluting the rest, and participating in the

building of a regional enrichment consortium.

Ding said that it remains to be seen whether these moves will meet the US' expectations. "Washington appears to view Tehran's current internal and external challenges as a potential window of opportunity to advance its strategic objectives and is unlikely to ease pressure, whether through negotiations or military deterrence," he added.

Alex Vatanka, a senior fellow at the Middle East Institute in Washington, DC, said in a recent analysis report that the US' rapid military buildup across the Gulf has revived familiar anxieties in Iran, yet Tehran's assessment of Washington's intentions appears more nuanced and calibrated than at any time in recent years.

He said Iran believes that "the US is preparing for a short, high-impact military campaign that would cripple Iran's missile infrastructure, undermine its deterrent, and reset the balance of power" in the aftermath of last year's 12-day Iran-Israel conflict.

Faced with heavy domestic strains, Iranian senior officials frame the confrontation as "existential", Vatanka said in the report.

"This is why Iran's emerging doctrine seems to accept far greater risk. It cannot deter a strike, but it can raise the price of any continued conflict to a level that forces the United States to think harder before escalating," he added.

Ding, from the Shanghai International Studies University, said that if the US were to launch a military strike against Iran, the latter would almost certainly respond, and such retaliation would endanger US and Israeli assets in the region, as well as critical maritime routes such as the Strait of Hormuz.

"The potential for broader escalation is precisely what concerns policymakers in Washington and has contributed to heated internal debates within the US government," he said.

Sun Degang, director of Fudan University's Center for Middle Eastern Studies in Shanghai, said that Iran is unlikely to make major concessions on abandoning its nuclear program, which reduces the prospects of substantive progress in Iran-US negotiations and, in turn, heightens the risk of military confrontation.

Should the US carry out a strike against Iran, it would likely be a short-duration, high-intensity operation, Sun said, but emphasized that a potential retaliation by Iran, which is a major regional power, could quickly broaden the scope of the confrontation and lead to wider instability.

"If the US were to launch military action against Iran, the Middle East might be pushed into a wider conflict with far-reaching consequences felt well beyond the region," he added.

Xinhua contributed to this story.

## Cooperation: Nations complementary powerhouses

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Li underlined the need for both countries to strengthen the foundation of traditional cooperation in sectors such as machinery, equipment and chemicals, seize new opportunities for future development, and create a favorable environment for investment and business.

China will unwaveringly expand high-level opening-up and actively address reasonable concerns of German and other foreign enterprises, he said, and it is hoped that the German government will provide an open, fair and nondiscriminatory business environment to allow enterprises from both countries to cooperate and compete following market principles.

Merz said that Germany and China are important economic and trade partners for each other.

Germany supports German com-

panies in investing and deepening their presence in the Chinese market, and it is ready to continuously improve the business environment and welcomes more Chinese enterprises to invest and operate in Germany, he said.

In recent years, bilateral trade has consistently exceeded \$200 billion, while two-way investment stock has surpassed \$65 billion, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

Merz's visit comes at a pivotal moment as Germany seeks to rebalance its economic ties with China amid an evolving geopolitical landscape. He is accompanied by a significant delegation of Germany's most influential business leaders.

DHL Express Global CEO John Pearson said that economic cooperation between Germany and China remains a cornerstone of global trade stability.

Both nations are manufacturing powerhouses with complementary strengths — German engineering and innovation paired with China's huge consumption market, industrial scale, digital transformation and green development momentum — and this synergy fosters supply chain diversification, technological collaboration and joint efforts toward decarbonization, he said.

"We see China not only as an indispensable market, but also as a dynamic engine for innovation and sustainable growth. China holds immense strategic significance for our global network, serving as a critical hub in global trade flows and a key driver of cross-border e-commerce and supply chain resilience," he said.

Anna An, president of Henkel Greater China, said that China has been a key market for Henkel for 55 years and plays an increasingly

important role in its global business.

"With China's strong market resilience, steadily improving market environment and focus on high-quality development, we remain confident in its long-term potential. We also see China-Germany cooperation as an important platform to promote innovation and support the sustainable growth of industrial and consumer markets," An said.

Oliver Blume, CEO of Europe's largest carmaker, Volkswagen Group, said: "Our 'In China for China' strategy continues to gain momentum. At our development center in Hefei, Anhui province, we have now created all the conditions necessary to develop, test and locally manufacture the next generation of intelligently connected vehicles."

Contact the writers at caodesheng@chinadaily.com.cn

## Panama government slammed for forceful port takeovers

By LU WANQING and WU KUNLING in Hong Kong

Officials and experts in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region have condemned the Panamanian government's forceful takeover of two key ports on the Panama Canal operated by Hong Kong-based conglomerate CK Hutchison, stating that the move severely trampled upon the international trading order and rule of law.

On Monday, Panama took over control and operations of the Balboa and Cristobal ports from Panama Ports Co, a subsidiary of CK Hutchison. The move follows a January ruling by the Central American country's Supreme Court, which said the contract between PPC and the Panamanian government on operating the two ports was unconstitutional, effectively stripping the company of its legal standing to run the terminals.

Hong Kong Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development Algernon Yau Ying-wah lodged a protest on Tuesday with Panama's consul general in the city against the takeover.

The HKSAR government said in a statement that the takeover was

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"forceful" and "an act of undermining the spirit of the contract", and also expressed its "strong dissatisfaction" with and "condemnation" of Panama's move.

A government spokesperson reiterated that the Supreme Court's ruling "disregarded facts and breached faith". The statement reaffirmed that the affected Hong Kong firm had over the years invested heavily in Panama and generated a substantial number of local jobs. As the relevant company had initiated and commenced arbitration proceedings, the forceful takeover gravely damaged the legitimate rights and interests of the Hong Kong enterprise and undermined the spirit of contracts, the spokesperson said.

The spokesperson emphatically added that the HKSAR government will "firmly support and safeguard the lawful rights and interests of Hong Kong enterprises overseas".

On Tuesday, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning described the country's stance on the issue as "clear and explicit" at a news conference.

She added that China will "resolutely defend the legitimate rights and interests of its enterprises".

In a separate statement on Tuesday, CK Hutchison said that PPC had ceased operations at the two ports on Monday amid a takeover it considered "forceful" and "unlawful".

According to PPC, the Panamanian government's representatives arrived "uninvited" at the ports on Monday and told PPC personnel on site that the concession "no longer exists" and operations must halt immediately.

Earlier this month, CK Hutchison confirmed that PPC had decided to take Panama to arbitration proceedings. PPC and CK Hutchison will continue to consult with legal advisers regarding the ruling and forceful takeover, the purported termination of PPC's concession and all available avenues of recourse including additional national and international legal proceedings against the Republic of Panama to reserve all rights and recourse against them, the statement said.

Lau Siu-kai, a consultant to the Chinese Association of Hong Kong & Macao Studies, told China Daily that Panama's move amounted to "a bla-

tant attempt to seize private property under the guise of law", which he believes was carried out under the "powerful intimidation and coercion" of the United States. He also expressed confidence that CK Hutchison would file a lawsuit against Panama with support from the central authorities.

The incidents will reinforce the understanding that "enterprises have nationality" and that enterprises must rely on the State to protect their own interests, Lau said, adding that the case will also encourage Hong Kong's enterprises to better align their interests with national interests.

Nicholas Chan Hiu-fung, a lawmaker representing the legal sector and also an HKSAR deputy to the National People's Congress, China's top legislature, described the Panamanian government's action as a blatant case of administrative power overriding legal norms. He said it would have far-reaching implications, compelling international shipping companies and traders to reassess the risks of overreliance on the shipping route.

Contact the writers at wanqing@chinadailyhk.com

## Shift: Cities, hotels are adapting to new pace

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On Foshan's Xiqiao Mountain, visitors can try a modified bungee jump that lowers participants gently instead of dropping them at full speed. In river valleys, "lying-flat rafting" lets travelers float downstream under blue skies, doing little more than drifting and daydreaming.

Hotels and destinations are adapting, too. Comfort now outranks proximity. Properties advertise spacious rooms, later checkout times and surroundings conducive to walking rather than rushing. Cities are rerouting visitors toward museums, historical neighborhoods and cultural venues — places that reward time spent rather than time counted.

The cultural dimension of slow travel may be its most striking feature. Young travelers are not simply

resting; they are looking inward and outward at the same time. The same China Youth Daily report found that historical sites were the top travel draw for young people (57.2 percent), followed closely by natural landscapes and intangible cultural heritage experiences. Many would rather spend an afternoon learning a traditional craft or wandering an old alleyway than ticking off another landmark.

For some, slow travel is a conscious rejection of pressure. Others describe it as self-care. What emerges is not laziness, but a recalibration. In slowing down, young Chinese travelers are redefining what it means to go somewhere.

Travel, increasingly, is no longer about how far you go — but how deeply you arrive.

"When you rush, every city ends up looking like the same photo. When you stay, you begin to notice the small things — the way shop owners talk, the rhythm of the streets," said Pan Yuchen, a university student visiting Chengdu in southwestern China, a city often seen as a symbol of slow travel for its famously unhurried pace.

"Comfort over hustle — that's when travel stops being movement and starts becoming connection."

## Youth: Internships should emphasize mentorship

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Government policy can further support this transition by incentivizing companies to offer supervised internships and by clarifying legal frameworks that allow the younger generation to work limited hours safely and constructively. These programs should emphasize mentorship and learning rather than cheap labor.

In today's world, scientific and technological capabilities are essential to national competitiveness. At the same time, societies also require leaders — CEOs, entrepreneurs and public decision-makers — to integrate technology with judgment, ethics, communication skills and a global perspective. These capabilities are not cultivated by technical training alone.

This reality has implications for families and education systems. Parents should resist forcing artistically inclined or creatively minded children into majors or careers that

do not align with their strengths. Exploration is not inefficiency; it is discovery.

China's demographic trends add urgency to this task. With a shrinking working-age population, every young person's potential matters more than ever. Helping the young develop confidence, skills and a sense of economic belonging is not only socially responsible; it is strategically essential.

History shows that societies investing early in youth development reap long-term dividends. By integrating moral education, early work experience and opportunity in the digital era, China can ensure that young people are not left behind, but fully prepared to lead.

The author is president, executive vice-chancellor and distinguished professor of social science at Duke Kunshan University in Kunshan, Jiangsu province. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## People's voice



Members of various civic groups attend a rally on Tuesday near the Japanese parliament in Tokyo to oppose Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's recent policy push. Takaichi's moves to accelerate Japan's constitutional revision, expand its military capabilities and strengthen national intelligence functions have raised concerns over the country's future direction. JIA HAOCHENG / XINHUA