CHINA

Hospital ship departs

Medical personnel gather at the dock before boarding the PLA Navy hospital ship *Silk Road Ark* at a naval port in Zhanjiang, Guangdong province, on Sunday. The vessel sets sail for islands and reefs in the South China Sea and along China's southern coast to provide medical services and healthcare support. HE KEXIN / XINHUA

Policy 'milestone' for GBA yacht tourism

New measures on private vessels from SARs lauded as economic boosters

By LU WANQING in Hong Kong
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The Hong Kong and Macao special administrative region governments and tourism industry leaders on Sunday welcomed a new policy allowing private yachts from both SARs to enter or exit the nine mainland cities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area with greater ease.

They described the move, rolled out on Saturday, as a "milestone" for solo yacht tourism and the yacht economy. The next phase is intended to open up the southern route for mainland yachts to the two SARs, streamline customs requirements and enable mutual recognition of credentials, making cross-border travel more convenient for high-end travelers.

The State Council, China's Cabinet, said on Saturday that the new policy, effective immediately, includes waiving a "guarantee" requirement previously imposed on Hong Kong and Macao yachts for temporary entry to and exit from the mainland, as well as eliminating "temporary ship nationality registration".

Under the new arrangements, yachts from Hong Kong and Macao can enter and exit the mainland through designated ports in the nine Greater Bay Area cities in Guangdong province — Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Foshan, Huizhou, Dongguan, Zhongshan, Jiangmen and Zhaoqing — and are permitted to sail only within these cities.

The Transport and Logistics Bureau of Hong Kong and Macao's Marine and Water Bureau welcomed the measures, adding that the guarantee-free arrangement and removal of temporary registration requirements would significantly reduce the financial burden on yacht owners handling cross-border procedures, while maintaining their original vessel registration.

Previously, yacht owners from Hong Kong or Macao whose vessels entered mainland waters were required to place a mandatory deposit and apply for a license — the costs often reaching several hundred thousand yuan and potentially monthslong approval processes.

In his 2025 Policy Address, Hong Kong Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu highlighted major initiatives aimed at developing the city's high-end yacht industry, including a solo travel system for yachts entering the mainland's Greater Bay Area, as well as measures to facilitate both Hong Kong yachts heading north and mainland yachts traveling in the opposite direction.

Timothy Chui Ting-pong, executive director of the Hong Kong Tourism Association, called the latest policy a "full demonstration" of the central authorities' strong support for integrated tourism development in the Greater Bay Area and regional growth.

He said a yacht individual travel program is key to positioning the region as a global destination for high-spending travelers, and to developing Hong Kong into a hub for yacht leasing, trading and tourism.

Chui added that the industry should also encourage mainland yachts to enter Hong Kong, noting that attracting high-spending visitors is vital for the city's tourism expansion.

Legislator Priscilla Leung Mei-fun described the policy as a "milestone" in the development of the Greater Bay Area, noting its potential to stimulate marine recreation by leveraging complementary strengths — Hong Kong's marinas, maritime services and high-end tourism capabilities, alongside Guangdong's coastlines, islands and coastal leisure resources.

She said faster cross-border yacht movement is only the first step, and envisioned further innovation, including mutual recognition of yacht licenses and more efficient border inspection procedures.

Lo Wai-kwok, chairman of Business and Professionals Alliance for Hong Kong, urged Hong Kong to work with other cities in the region to further simplify customs procedures for cruise vessels, yachts and passengers.

He said he plans to meet industry stakeholders to discuss how the new policy can translate into tangible growth for Hong Kong's yacht economy.

Sino-French youth to bolster tech ties

By YAN YUJIE
and **LI YINGQING** in Kunming

Officials, experts and business leaders from China and France gathered in Yunnan province over the weekend to explore opportunities for cooperation in technology and innovation between the two countries.

The 2026 China-France Young Leaders Program, which opened in Kunming on Friday, included visits to Pu'er and the Xishuangbanna Dai autonomous prefecture. The event was co-organized by the Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs and the France China Foundation.

Nicolas Macquin, president of the France China Foundation, said the organization has long been committed to promoting people-to-people exchanges between the two countries, with the goal of strengthening ties between French businesses and universities, and their counterparts in Yunnan.

Wu Ken, president of the Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs, said the program would serve as a catalyst for greater exchanges and interactions between Chinese and French youth, helping to deepen practical cooperation across various sectors and further strengthen bilateral friendship.

Technology and innovation emerged as key topics among participants. Thomas Mulhaupt, executive director of the France Asia Foundation, said France and China complement each other well in the fields of technology and artificial intelligence.

He said France has the capacity to produce outstanding engineers and foster startups within an integrated ecosystem, making it an attractive destination for technological innovation.

At the same time, there is much to learn from China's leading companies, startups and universities, which cultivate a large number of exceptional engineers every year, he added.

"We've witnessed the emergence of Chinese companies like DeepSeek, which are making significant strides in the AI race," Mulhaupt said.

Emmanuel Miquel, head of Buyout France, shared a similar view, highlighting how innovation cooperation represents a particularly promising avenue for China-France collaboration.

"China has introduced many innovations that have accelerated industrial development. This is evident in the automotive sector, where an increasing number of BYD vehicles can be seen across Europe," Miquel said.

He added that France also excels in innovation across a wide range of industries, including the food and automotive sectors.

Agathe Graviere, program manager at the France Asia Foundation, noted that Chinese innovations are playing an increasingly prominent role on the global stage and urged that France work more closely with China to keep pace with rapid technological advancements.

"We can begin with student exchanges, allowing French and Chinese students to explore and learn from each other. This could be followed by collaborations between companies from both countries to jointly develop cutting-edge technologies," she said.

Representatives from both countries said that, in addition to technology and innovation, China and France can also strengthen cooperation in agriculture and rural development.

Marion Bertagna, vice-president of the France China Foundation, said that during the visit to Pu'er, she was particularly interested in learning how the city promotes rural vitalization through tourism development. "This approach to economic development is truly worth learning from," she said.

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Thirst for matcha hikes production

By LIU BOQIAN
and **YANG JUN** in Tongren, Guizhou

An industry report released on Sunday has revealed that China is on track to produce nearly 70 percent of the world's matcha this year, after its export volume overtook Japan's for the first time in 2025.

Matcha is a finely ground green tea powder that can be added to milk, cakes and a wide range of drinks and food items, giving off a grassy aroma and a gentle bitterness.

"The global matcha market is growing very rapidly. Over the past five years, its compound annual growth rate has exceeded 10 percent, far outpacing the growth of avocados and plant-based milk and placing it among the top tier of health foods," Yu Yingjie of the China Tea Marketing Association said at the 2026 Matcha Conference on Sunday.

As matcha surges in popularity around the world, industry experts have called on China's matcha sector to strengthen ecological cultivation and certification standards.

Katrin Rougeventre, a French tea expert, said the rapid global rise in demand for matcha has been driven by its health and wellness appeal, as well as its spread through consumer culture in the United States.

According to the report, China produced 12,000 metric tons of matcha last year, and output is projected to rise to 18,000 tons this year.

The provinces of Guizhou and Zhejiang are among the country's leading producers, while Hubei province is developing quickly. The report was released in the city of Tongren, Guizhou, one of China's key matcha-producing regions.

A matcha exhibition at the 2026 Matcha Conference in Tongren, Guizhou province. LI HE / FOR CHINA DAILY

"In the current global matcha landscape, China and Japan are the core players. China has the edge in scale, cost and efficiency, while Japan dominates the high-end market," Yu said.

As China's matcha industry grows, quality control and export compliance have become practical challenges.

In Guizhou, a traditional tea-growing region, local experts have long called for stricter cultivation and testing standards for tea, including matcha. Because matcha tea plants are cultivated under shaded conditions before harvesting, the plants receive less sunlight, humidity rises, and the risk of pests and disease increases.

"Since matcha is consumed whole, pesticide residues, heavy metals and microorganisms all require stricter control. Given the huge export volume, compliance in overseas markets is also an issue that must be addressed," said Song Bao'an, a pesticide expert and president of Guizhou University.

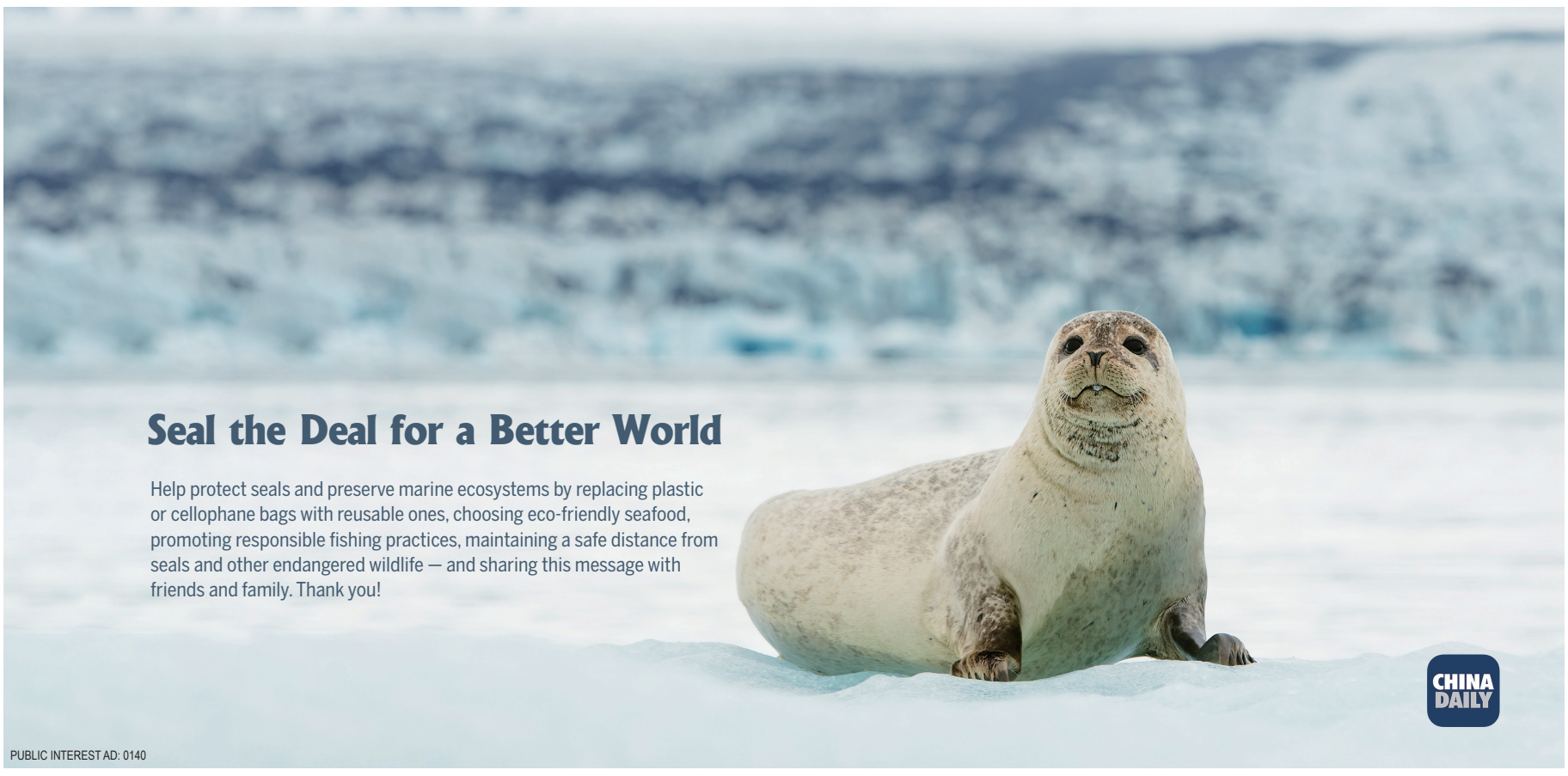
"A problem is that EU standards are even stricter. That is why we need early-warning systems for maximum residue limits (MRLs), expanded sampling and stronger penalties."

Song and his team have been testing biological control techniques in matcha gardens across Guizhou. One method is "using grass to suppress grass", relying on clovers' fast-spreading growth to curb weeds in tea fields.

According to Song, an abandoned tea garden at a 6.67-hectare demonstration base in Tongren reached a yield of 9.6 metric tons per hectare after all inputs met organic production standards.

The water extractives content, a key source of tea flavor, also improved.

Industry insiders said these techniques are likely to be promoted more widely in the near future, creating room for Chinese-made matcha to move toward higher quality and greater value.

As Rougeventre put it, the fast-growing matcha market is being shaped by rising demand for organic products and a stronger focus on health-conscious consumption, while China's challenge is to improve product consistency.

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