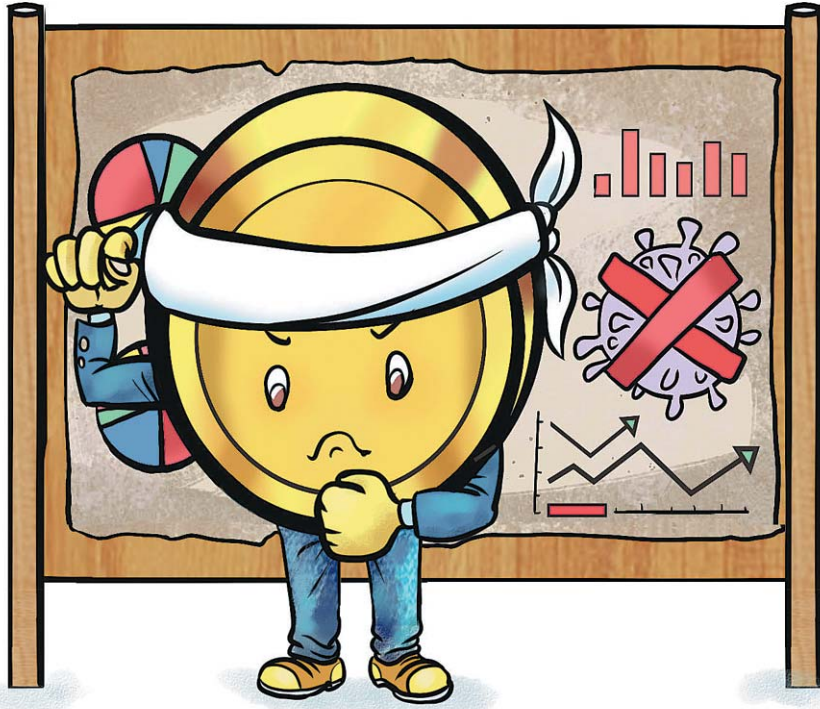


Combating COVID-19, protecting economy

Governments, NGOs, State-owned enterprises, private-sector companies and individual entrepreneurs employ innovative ways to continue the multi-pronged battle against the novel coronavirus

Editor's Note: Ever since the novel coronavirus pneumonia exploded into a full-blown COVID-19 (named by WHO) epidemic in late January, governments at the national, provincial and local levels in China have worked tirelessly to not only contain the pathogen's spread and save lives but minimize the outbreak's impact on various economic sectors. Extraordinary policy decisions, supportive measures and financial help were extended in quick time to rescue or protect vulnerable sectors like micro, small and medium enterprises. As the world watched with admiration and disbelief the massive scale of China's stunning fight against COVID-19, the nation's financial institutions, customs departments, telecom operators, internet-based firms, retail giants and myriad other business entities jumped on the virus-warrior bandwagon. Contributing their financial, production or service might across sectors in creative and innovative ways, they kept the wheels from coming off in the world's second-largest economy that is also the world's largest nation. On this and the next page, China Daily reporters' fascinating accounts from a business perspective record the nation's remarkable resilience in the face of the unexpected, testing socio-economic challenge.



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

Financial institutions make all-out efforts to give credit where it's due

By JIANG XUEQING
jiangxueqing@chinadaily.com.cn

The outbreak of novel coronavirus pneumonia in China has seen various types of lenders making an all-out effort to meet the financing needs of a range of businesses devoted to disease prevention and control.

Banks and rural credit cooperatives stepped up credit issuance with the aim of supporting these companies to keep producing medical products and protective supplies, said Pan Guangwei, executive vice-president of the China Banking Association.

As of noon of Feb 18, the banking sector had provided more than 704 billion yuan (\$101 billion) in loans to support the fight against the epidemic, according to data released by the association.

Industrial and Commercial Bank of China Ltd, the largest bank in China by total assets, extended loans worth 1.7 billion yuan from Jan 24 to Feb 11 to companies that directly participate in the production of epidemic prevention supplies and daily necessities.

Considering that the Ministry of Finance will offer a 50-percent interest discount, the one-year interest rate on those loans will work out to less than 1.6 percent.

Postal Savings Bank of China Co Ltd also offered loans to white-listed small businesses that are engaged in controlling disease and ensuring people's livelihoods.

Liang Tao, vice-chairman of the commission, said on Feb 15: "Banking and insurance regulators do not allow banks to withdraw or reduce loans issued to the industries that are severely affected by the outbreak, such as retail, wholesale, catering, logistics, culture and tourism, as well as the companies that have great potential but suffer temporary difficulties."

China CITIC Bank Corp Ltd allocated special-purpose credit

funds totaling 10 billion yuan to Hubei province, encouraging its branches located in key areas of the coronavirus outbreak to increase loan issuance.

The bank also strengthened online financing service by extending almost 30 million yuan in loans online to nearly 200 small businesses transporting disease control supplies.

"Apart from increasing loans and cutting lending rates, financial institutions either waived or lowered several types of fees for medical institutions, pharmaceutical companies, medical equipment suppliers, construction companies and security agencies that joined the fight against novel coronavirus," said Pan of the China Banking Association.

The China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission has instructed banks and insurers to take multiple measures, such as cutting lending rates for small businesses by 0.5 percentage point from last year and waiving extra interest charges on overdue loans, to help micro- and small-sized enterprises get through temporary difficulties caused by the novel coronavirus pneumonia.

Liang Tao, vice-chairman of the commission, said on Feb 15: "Banking and insurance regulators do not allow banks to withdraw or reduce loans issued to the industries that are severely affected by the outbreak, such as retail, wholesale, catering, logistics, culture and tourism, as well as the companies that have great potential but suffer temporary difficulties."

Internet firms pit tech against pathogens

By FAN FEIFEI
fanfeifei@chinadaily.com.cn

Chinese internet-based businesses are pulling out all the stops to contribute big money, donations, medical supplies, equipment, technologies, expertise and innovations to help combat the novel coronavirus.

E-commerce giant Alibaba Group has launched a global direct sourcing platform to expedite the delivery of medical supplies directly to Wuhan, the epicenter of the outbreak, and other epidemic-stricken areas.

The platform serves as a network, informing sellers of medical supplies and their products with the needs of affected hospitals and local authorities, the company said.

On Jan 25, Alibaba announced it had set up a special fund of 1 billion yuan (\$143 million) for medical supplies. The fund will be used to purchase medical equipment and medicine from home and abroad, and deliver to Wuhan.

Jack Ma, founder of Alibaba has also donated 100 million yuan through his charitable foundation to help find a vaccine for the novel coronavirus.

Following the launch of the 300 million yuan outbreak response fund and the 200 million yuan fund to assist developers in providing technical support, Tencent Holdings Ltd added another 1 billion yuan to a special fund for the epidemic control on Feb 7, totaling 1.5 billion yuan so far.

The fund will be deployed for purposes such as procurement of medical supplies, provision of technical support, reward for the people who contribute to the battle, assistance for the infected and their families, research and development of anti-vi-



JD Logistics employees handle parcels in Wuhan, Hubei province, on Feb 7. ZHU XIANGXIN / CHINA DAILY

rus solutions, and improvement of medical facilities.

"With novel coronavirus pneumonia plaguing China and other countries across the globe, numerous front-line contributors commit themselves to the battle to help and save those who are suffering from the disease and protect more people from infection," said Leon Guo, senior vice-president of Tencent and chairman of the Tencent Charity Foundation.

"The extraordinary efforts made by the seemingly ordinary people are empowering us to play our part in the battle, giving us the confidence to win the battle," Guo said.

Chinese e-commerce giant JD has mobilized its resources across the company, from retail, logistics, technology to health and other departments or wings, to provide immediate support for the anti-virus fight.

This includes initiatives like launching robot and drone deliveries

to address last-mile delivery challenges during this period; implementing AI technology to provide instant support on queries related to the epidemic; providing free health consultation with top doctors across the country; and ensuring consumers' needs for food, epidemic prevention supplies and other daily necessities are met.

JD has allocated 1 billion yuan to support the fight against the novel coronavirus outbreak. Funds cover the donation of health and safety protection equipment and medical supplies, logistics costs to Hubei province and the daily supply of necessities to places that are most affected by the epidemic.

JD Logistics, the logistics arm of JD, started to provide delivery of medicine to local pharmaceutical companies in Hubei province on Jan 21. Leveraging JD Logistics' supply chain capabilities and technology, the unit had delivered over 1,600 tons of epidemic prevention materials and

necessities from all over the country to Wuhan and surrounding areas as of Feb 6.

Moreover, JD has mobilized to put its autonomous delivery robot technology to work in Wuhan. Its autonomous delivery robot successfully made its first delivery in the city on Feb 6. The robot departed from JD's Renhe delivery station and delivered products to Wuhan Ninth Hospital, which is the designated hospital for the treatment of the novel coronavirus pneumonia in Wuhan.

"JD autonomous delivery robots can help reduce human-to-human contact, making them an ideal solution for last-mile delivery solution in Wuhan during this unique time, protecting both our customers and our employees," said Kong Qi, head of autonomous driving at JD Logistics.

Internet search giant Baidu Inc announced the establishment of a 300 million yuan special fund to support virus control and prevention, while promoting long-term public health education and security.

In addition, Baidu Maps enables the public to check the density of people in public places, including business areas, hospitals, and transport hubs, to prevent potential exposure risk to the virus.

It also developed an AI-powered, contactless infrared sensor system for fast, multi-person temperature monitoring, which is now operational in Beijing's Qinghe Railway Station.

Cao Lei, director of the China E-Commerce Research Center, said the donations from major tech enterprises embody their social responsibilities and have positive social impact, as the novel coronavirus spreads throughout the country and concerns everyone.



Customs officers inspect the unloading of imported masks at the Yantai Penglai International Airport in Shandong province on Jan 29. TANG KE / FOR CHINADAILY

Customs fast-tracks clearances for medical supplies

By JING SHUIYU
jingshuiyu@chinadaily.com.cn

The General Administration of Customs has opened special channels at all clearance sites across the country to fast-track clearance services for imported supplies related to epidemic prevention.

To surmount the challenges of the outbreak, the GAC said overseas donations for anti-epidemic purposes can be released upon registration before appropriate formalities are completed.

Imported medicines and medical devices can be picked up on their arrival to ensure there is no delay in their clearance.

Since Jan 30, the value of China's daily imported supplies for the epidemic prevention has averaged

above 150 million yuan (\$21.43 million), Jin Hai, general director of the GAC's department of general operations, said at a news briefing.

According to him, customs offices nationwide have offered fast-track services to overseas donations and ensured "zero delays" in customs clearance for imported drugs and medical devices.

In a notice that the GAC issued in late January, all customs districts are required to devote themselves fully to fast clearance of medical supplies for preventing and controlling the novel coronavirus-related contagion.

On Feb 4, overseas donations worth about 13 million yuan arrived at an airport in epidemic epicenter Wuhan, capital of Hubei province. Local customs provided guidance

throughout the process, cleared the supplies as soon as possible and helped deliver them to the front lines of epidemic prevention.

By Feb 8, donations from 21 countries and one international organization were delivered to China, including 7.03 million surgical masks and 299,500 protective suits, Wang Bin, deputy general director of market operations department with the Ministry of Commerce, said at a news conference.

Beijing Customs also opened green lanes for fast clearance of imports at Capital International Airport, Daxing International Airport, Beijing Post Office and other ports of entry.

The customs department also provides a 24/7 clearance service, and acquired-cargo information. It

has handled customs formalities before their arrival, so that such supplies can be cleared without delay.

On Jan 30, when 20 tons of anti-epidemic supplies from abroad arrived by air in Beijing, customs officers, who had been waiting near the landing field, immediately cleared them without delay. It only took 45 minutes from the airplane landing till the cargo release.

According to the GAC, between Jan 24 and Feb 2, China imported 94,000 batches or 240 million pieces of anti-epidemic supplies, valued at 810 million yuan.

Among them, protective articles accounted for nearly 75 percent of the total batches, valued at 610 million yuan. These included 230 million pieces like masks, protective suits and safety goggles.



An employee of the Guizhou Rural Commercial Bank grants an "anti-epidemic" preferential loan to a farmer at the bank's Danzhai branch in Danzhai county, Guizhou province, on Feb 13. HUANG XIAOHAI / FOR CHINA DAILY