

Zhanjiang special

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Zhanjiang bay in Guangdong province. The city aims to enhance cooperation with ASEAN members in port logistics, marine economy and tourism. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

A two-way path to economic growth

Port city widens cooperation with ASEAN countries, **Erik Nilsson** and **Zhao Huanxin** report.

The port city of Zhanjiang is intensifying its opening-up by enhancing cooperation with Association of Southeast Asian Nations countries, its mayor Wang Zhongbing said.

The southernmost city of Guangdong province envisions expanded partnerships with the 10-member bloc in such realms as port logistics, aquaculture, modern agriculture and tourism, Wang told China Daily.

"It is a two-way opening up," Wang said.

Zhanjiang has been designated as one of the pivot cities of China's Belt and Road Initiative. It has capital and human-resource advantages, and is a market for ASEAN members' farm produce and travelers, the mayor said.

Wang, who is also a deputy of the National People's Congress, the country's top legislature, is in Beijing attending a 12-day annual legislative session that concludes on Wednesday.

He said he was encouraged by Premier Li Keqiang's pledge to carry out a new phase of opening-up and mutually beneficial cooperation.

The premier told the legislative session on Saturday: "We will ensure that the Belt and Road Initiative creates bonds of peace, friendship and common prosperity."

The Belt and Road Initiative proposed by China refers to the Silk Road Economic Belt that links China with Europe through central and western Asia, and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road that connects China with Southeast Asia, Africa and Europe.

China sees the ASEAN bloc as a preferred partner of the "Belt and Road" cooperation, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said on Tuesday.

Zhanjiang is well positioned geographically and culturally, its mayor said.

"We're very close. The distance of Zhanjiang to ASEAN countries is the shortest by sea and air," he said.

"We have similar cultural foundations and backgrounds. So it's very easy for Zhanjiang and ASEAN people to communicate."

By last year, Zhanjiang had invested \$634 million to set up 11 enterprises in ASEAN countries. The outlay accounted for

91 percent of the city's total foreign investment, the mayor said.

Bilateral trade nearly doubled over the past five years to nearly \$800 million last year at an average annual increase of 18.6 percent, the city's Customs statistics showed.

Wang, who visited Indonesia, Thailand and Cambodia in December, said he strongly felt the friendly ties between China and ASEAN members and the prospects for win-win cooperation.

Zhanjiang set up a trade representative office in Cambodia in 2014 and opened another in Thailand during the mayor's visit.

It has supported investment in ASEAN countries by the city's construction firms; its electrical-appliance, sugar and feed producers; and its seafood and farm-produce processors.

Zhanjiang, in turn, encourages ASEAN businesspeople to open industrial parks in the city's Fenyong New and High-Tech Development Zone, the mayor said. A wholesale and demonstration center for tropical agricultural products from ASEAN countries will open in

Zhanjiang within the year, he said.

Thailand and Indonesia are expected to participate in the 2016 Aquatic Exposition and the 2016 China Marine Economy Expo in Zhanjiang, the mayor added.

Thailand will, for the first time, set up a national pavilion as guest country of honor at this year's marine expo, he said.

Days before arriving in Beijing for the legislative session, the mayor had traveled to Northeast China's Changchun, capital of Jilin province, and Heilongjiang province's Qiqihar city to promote tourism.

"With pristine air, clean beaches and pollution-free seafood, Zhanjiang has every reason to become an ideal (winter) destination for the north-easterners," Wang said.

Zhanjiang will subsidize travel agencies and create systems to allow tourists to enjoy the same pensions and healthcare as in their own cities, Wang said.

The mayor also said the Baosteel's massive steel and iron plant in Zhanjiang, which started trial operations in September, has been running

\$634 million

investment to set up 11 enterprises in ASEAN countries in 2015

smoothly. It has not emitted any pollution thanks to what he called the "world's strictest" prevention measures.

"Our goal is to have residents in Zhanjiang enjoy a better life, education, stable jobs, more satisfying income, more reliable social security and better social services," he said.

Achieving this requires innovation, he said.

For example, it had been difficult for Zhanjiang's rural residents to get healthcare.

"We found that the town hospitals and the village clinics were short of medicine, equipment and management," he said. "So the city has integrated urban and rural medical care, largely through drug distribution and management."

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Wang Zhongbing, mayor of Zhanjiang

Sugar maker sweetens revenue with upgrades

By HAONAN
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Lin Shuixi's sugar production company has maintained profitable operations over the past four years at a time when most sugar producers across China have suffered serious losses.

"Chinese sugar manufacturers have been experiencing a tough period due to rising production costs and falling prices in the domestic sugar industry," said Lin, founder and president of Jinling Sugar Industry Group in Zhanjiang, South China's Guangdong province.

Last year, the group, one of the leading sugar makers in the country, sold about 600,000 metric tons of sugar, most of which were deep-processed products, and generated revenue of about 3 billion yuan (\$460 million), roughly the same as in 2014.

Lin said much of the success could be attributed to the company's business strategy, which differs from that of most sugar companies in Zhanjiang.

"We attach greater priority to increasing product quality and nurturing our corporate brand, rather than expanding the scale of business," he said.

In 1989, Jinling Sugar started to develop high-quality sugar products in a bid to maintain the company's competitiveness. It invested an annual average of nearly 100 million yuan to upgrade its facilities

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Lin Shuixi, founder and president of Jinling Sugar Industry Group

until 2012, when it completed a technological revamp.

From 2013 to 2015, the company annually spent 20 million yuan in equipment maintenance and environmental protection.

The company's most-advanced devices, imported from Germany, are used to produce high-quality soft white sugar.

"High-quality sugar products can be used in a wider range of functions, such as medical treatment and textiles," Lin said.

As a deputy of the National People's Congress, Lin has attended the annual NPC session in Beijing four times, including this year's event.

"Innovation-driven development,



Lin Shuixi (center), founder and president of Jinling Sugar Industry Group, inspects the quality of products at the company's production facility.

agricultural modernization and supply-side reforms are the topics that I am mostly concerned with this year," he said.

Lin came up with four proposals for the panel discussions of the NPC session, one of which was to advance construction of communication infrastructure in rural areas to sup-

port the nation's Internet Plus strategy and agricultural development.

"Developing modern agriculture with the support of science and Internet technologies can effectively help weed out overcapacity, which is a major tenet of China's supply-side structural reform," he said.

"The modernization of traditional

agriculture will play an important role in driving Zhanjiang's development in the years ahead."

For the Zhanjiang city government, trade and economic exchanges with member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations continues to be a top priority during the 13th Five-Year Plan (2016-20), said Wang

Zhongbing, the city's mayor.

Jinling Sugar and Thailand's Trade Development Commission of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises launched a project in 2013 to facilitate trade in agricultural products between China and the ASEAN members, as well as the exchange between China's southern and northern areas.

The project has received support from Guangdong provincial government and the Ministry of Commerce.

The Beibu Gulf Agriculture Products Trading Center is located in Suixi county in Zhanjiang. Construction of the center, which will cost 1.6 billion yuan, is divided into three phases and will be finished in October 2018. When finished, the annual throughput of the trading center is expected to reach 3 million tons of agricultural products.

To date, 500 million yuan has been invested in the project. Construction of the first phase was completed in early February last year, and the latest-built cold chain logistics infrastructure also went into operation.

"We are now building an exhibition zone of agricultural products from the ASEAN member countries, which will cover an area of 50,000 square meters," Lin said.

To realize sustainable development, Jinling Sugar plans to plant sugarcane and other raw materials in ASEAN member countries by renting their land in the coming years.