

Shanxi bounces back from COVID to break 2 trillion yuan barrier

Province's governor tells People's Congress and Political Consultative Conference of impressive GDP growth achieved over past 12 months



By YUAN SHENGGAO

Shanxi's GDP surpassed the 2 trillion yuan (\$316 billion) benchmark for the first time in 2021, according to Lan Fo'an, governor of this North China province.

Lan made the remarks at the sixth session of the 13th Shanxi People's Congress and the fifth session of the 12th Shanxi People's Political Consultative Conference, which were held concurrently in the provincial capital of Taiyuan on Jan 19-23.

On behalf of the provincial government, Lan delivered a government work report to more than 1,000 delegates and representatives of the two sessions.

In the report, the governor said that a record 2.26 trillion yuan GDP was achieved with a 9.1 percent year-on-year increase in 2021. Such a milestone development was driven

by steady fixed asset investment, strong local market demand and rapid growth in international trade.

Lan said Shanxi's increases in fixed asset investment and consumer goods retail volume, which stood at 8.7 percent and 14.8 percent, were both higher than the national average.

In addition, the province's imports and exports represented an increase of 48.3 percent from 2020.

The governor said the achievements were made despite the COVID-19 pandemic, as a result of the province's effective measures in both virus prevention and control and stabilizing socioeconomic growth.

In addition to the increases, Shanxi has seen substantial improvement in the quality of economic operations.

In the past year, Shanxi made strides in an economic transformation strategy that reduces reliance on coal mining, upgrades traditional industries and fosters emerging industries as new growth engines.

According to Lan, the total investment made by Shanxi's enterprises in technological upgrades had

increased 11.3 percent from 2020.

Traditional industries including coal mining, electricity, coking and steelmaking are using the latest technologies to upgrade their operations toward more advanced levels, leading to both improvements in efficiency and reduced emissions.

The coal mining industry, for instance, saw more than 75 percent of its capacities upgraded to an advanced level by the end of 2021.

In the electricity sector, Shanxi saw an increasing amount of power generated from new and renewable energy resources like solar, wind and natural gas. The power generation capacity from such resources reached 38.89 million kilowatts in 2021, accounting for 34.3 percent of the provincial total.

Lan said such a transformation in the electricity industry is in line with Shanxi's energy revolution strategy and the nation's long-term plan for peak carbon and neutrality.

In addition to trends in the energy industry, conservation practices in other industries led to a steady reduction in energy use. Lan said it looks set that Shanxi would meet its 2021 goal of reducing energy con-



The sixth session of the 13th Shanxi People's Congress is held in Taiyuan, capital of the province, from Jan 20-23. LI LIANJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

sumption per-unit of GDP by 3.2 percent.

When the Shanxi Provincial People's Congress session closed, it proposed 10 tasks for the government this year.

These include accelerating industrial transformation for high-quality development. In this area, the focus will be on improving the operational efficiency of traditional industries and fostering new growth engines by enhancing emerging industries, modern services, tourism and agricultural modernization.

Another mission for the government is to create a better business environment for all market players, especially private enterprises. The

session asked for more proactive policies for the ease of doing business, like lowering the threshold for market access and helping enterprises reduce operational costs.

The Shanxi Provincial People's Congress session also suggested governments help to launch more projects relating to basic infrastructure, new infrastructure and the improvement of people's life quality to spur socioeconomic development.

It suggested continual efforts be made to promote urbanization for a balanced rural-urban development. A highlight this year is to develop an integrated economic zone between Taiyuan and the city of Xinzhou.

In the area of improving people's livelihoods, the congress proposed measures to promote professional skills training, offer more free healthcare services, further invest in education, have its social security system include more people, and invest in more grassroots cultural projects.

Other proposals from the congress session include measures to encourage innovation and entrepreneurship, boost environmental protection in the Yellow River drainage basin, reform State-owned enterprises and the financial system, and open wider to the world.

Guo Yanjie contributed to this story.

Cities to unite and create integrated economic zone

By YUAN SHENGGAO

The integration of Taiyuan and Xinzhou — two cities in central Shanxi province — will gain momentum with the 70-kilometer-long Taiyuan-Xinzhou Avenue scheduled to be in place this year.

This is according to the government work report delivered by Shanxi Governor Lan Fo'an at the sixth session of the 13th Shanxi People's Congress and the fifth session of the 12th Shanxi People's Political Consultative Conference held in Taiyuan on Jan 19-23.

In the report, Lan required construction of the avenue to be completed this year. He called this project a landmark and pilot facility for the urban integration program that was proposed in 2021.

In March 2021, the State Council released a guideline for the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25), requiring Shanxi to foster a city cluster in its central region.

Grasping this historic opportunity, the Shanxi Committee of the

Communist Party of China and the Shanxi provincial government proposed a plan to promote the development of Taiyuan-Xinzhou Integrated Economic Zone in the month that followed.

The Promotional Center for the Development of the Taiyuan-Xinzhou Integrated Economic Zone was founded on Dec 29, marking when the operation of the zone began officially.

The zone's two operational centers in Taiyuan and Xinzhou were established on Dec 29 and 30 respectively.

According to the plan, it will comprise a number of economic zones and industrial parks in the two cities. They include Zhongbei High-Tech Zone and Yangqu Industrial Park in Taiyuan, and Xinzhou Economic Zone and Yuanping Economic and Technological Development Zone in Xinzhou.

The Taiyuan-Xinzhou integrated zone is designed to host industries relocated from the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, where an integrated



Delegates to the sixth session of the 13th Shanxi People's Congress in discussion. SHI XIAOBO / FOR CHINA DAILY

regional development plan is in place.

The integrated economic zone in Shanxi will mobilize resources in both cities to build industrial clusters centering on new materials and advanced equipment manufacturing, and foster new engines for the province's economic development, according to the plan.

Wei Tao, Party secretary of Taiyuan, said authorities of both Taiyuan and Xinzhou will work out "a unified plan and a unified organization" to ensure the smooth operation of the zone.

Road connectivity will be highlighted at the early stage of the zone's development.

According to local officials, in addition to the Taiyuan-Xinzhou Avenue, a total of 3,800 km of roads will be built over four years to link the various industrial parks within the integrated economic zone.

With respect to its connectivity to the rest of the country, a high-speed railway and a freight rail line to link Xinzhou and Xiong'an New Area in Hebei province have been planned.

Guo Yanjie contributed to this story.

Year of progress in green development

By YUAN SHENGGAO

The past year has been a year that has made people believe "green mountains and clear waters are as good as mountains of gold and silver", said delegates and representatives at the two sessions of the provincial legislative and political consultative bodies in Shanxi, which were held from Jan 19-23.

"The increasing ratio of clean energy utilization and growing forest coverage are demonstrations of Shanxi's successful transformation toward green, sustainable development," said Qu Zhongrang, board chairman of Shanxi-based Dadi Environmental Investment Group and a representative of the 12th Shanxi People's Political Consultative Conference.

The past year saw an increase of 346,000 hectares of new forests in Shanxi and an addition of nearly 1 million households in using clean fuels for heating.

Qu's company is an enterprise mainly engaged in the repair and restoration of the ecological environment in Shanxi. Its projects have covered more than 9,700 square kilometers in the west of the province for improving soil-eroded areas through planting vegetation and using engineering measures.

Yang Yuguo, head of Anze county and also a member of the Shanxi People's Political Consultative Conference, said his county is one of the beneficiaries of the improved environment.

He said the county's afforestation efforts led to the addition of more than 2,100 hectares of trees last year, pushing its forest coverage rate to 75.8 percent.

The ever-growing area of vege-

tation and efforts in pollution control have also contributed to better air and water quality.

"The past year saw 295 days, or 80.8 percent of the whole year, boasting good and excellent air quality," Yang said. "Qinhe, the major river in Anze, saw its water quality stabilized at Grade III or better."

Grade III is a Chinese national standard for water that can be used for drinking, irrigation and industrial supply.

"While the improved environment benefits the health and livelihoods of locals, it also proves a big draw to investors," Yang said.

Unlike the two session's delegates and representatives who are keen on statistics, ordinary residents in Shanxi have also felt the improvements through what is happening around them.

Wang Guiqing, a resident in the village of Wujiashuang in Shuozhou, is happy with the new change in heating this summer.

"We used to heat the rooms by burning coal in stoves," Wang said. "It filled the rooms with a pungent and choking smell and the chance of monoxide poisoning was high."

"We use an air heating system this winter, which not only eliminates all the pollutants but also keeps the indoor temperature at a stable 22°C."

Wang's village is one of the early beneficiaries of a clean heating program launched by the city of Shuozhou last year.

The city plans to invest in installing new, clean-fuel-fired heating systems in all its urban and rural areas. The program is scheduled to be completed by the winter of 2023.

Wu Jia contributed to this story.

Business environment a top government priority

By YUAN SHENGGAO

With improving the business environment remaining high on the government's agenda in Shanxi, local business representatives said they are confident in the future development of their enterprises.

During the sixth session of the 13th Shanxi People's Congress and the fifth session of the 12th Shanxi People's Political Consultative Conference held concurrently from Jan 19-23 in the provincial capital of Taiyuan, Shanxi Governor Lan Fo'an said in his government work report that creating a good business environment is crucial to improving the province's competitiveness and supporting its high-quality growth.

"We should continue to make efforts to create a predictable, reliable and sustainable business environment for enterprises based on the principles of the rule of law and market orientation and according to international standards and practices," Lan said.

The governor added that the business circle is the major driver for Shanxi's economic growth and the government hopes to build a harmonious government-corporate relationship to jointly boost local socioeconomic development.

The two sessions' delegates and representatives from the business



A delegate to the sixth session of the 13th Shanxi People's Congress puts forward proposals at the meeting. LI ZHAOMING / FOR CHINA DAILY

circle showed resonance with the governor and said they are sure there will be a promising future for businesses in Shanxi.

"As the government work report of Governor Lan has reaffirmed and proposed a number of measures for improving the business environment, we feel encouraged in our development," said Chu Dequn, board chairman of Shanxi-based MeetAll Supermarkets and a delegate to the 13th Shanxi People's Congress.

These measures include practices to streamline business approval procedures, reduce administrative service costs, improve administra-

tive service efficiency through the use of online platforms and digital technologies, as well as whole-process assistance from officials to help businesses grow.

Chu said thanks to the government's initiatives for the ease of doing business, MeetAll has expanded rapidly both in domestic and overseas markets.

Through its e-commerce business platform, MeetAll has developed cooperative ties with about 270 supermarket and retail companies throughout the country. It has also developed 265 purchasing bases in 15 foreign countries, supplying high-quality overseas

farm products to Chinese consumers.

Wang Yuan, president of Shanxi Huaxiang Group and a delegate to the 13th Shanxi People's Congress, said the province's private-sector economy has achieved rapid and healthy growth thanks to the government's preferential treatment.

He takes Huaxiang, a privately-owned manufacturer of automobiles, machinery and electronics, as an example, saying that it reported the fastest growth in its history in the past year despite the challenge of COVID-19.

"The growth can be partially attributed to the government's effective measures in pandemic control and prevention, and its incentives offered to enterprises for resuming business activities," Wang said.

The executive said he is also impressed with the government's efficiency in administrative services.

"We launched three industrial parks in the city of Linfen last year for the production of smart home appliances, industrial equipment and new energy vehicles," Wang said. "The projects are proceeding at a speed beyond our expectations because of the whole-process assistance from the government."

Wu Jia contributed to this story.



Delegates to the sixth session of the 13th Shanxi People's Congress discuss a provincial government work report delivered by Shanxi Governor Lan Fo'an. LI ZHAOMING / FOR CHINA DAILY