

HOLIDAYNATION

Provinces report solid GDP growth

Figures highlight strong resilience of Chinese economy, say analysts

By ZHANG YUE and ZHOU LANXU

At least eight provincial-level regions in China saw their total GDP exceed 5 trillion yuan (\$737 billion) in 2022, with both Guangdong and Jiangsu provinces reaching over 12 trillion yuan, according to provincial government data.

The figures have once again proved the resilience of China's economy — the world's second-largest — and show potential for growth, analysts and company executives said.

While multiple cyclical and structural headwinds — from a gloomy global outlook to China's weak property market — may weigh on the country's near-term outlook, macro policy easing will help stabilize the economy, with targeted property sector support, relief measures for households and infrastructure spending being the preferred policy tools, they said.

Local statistics authorities nationwide are revealing their GDP figures for 2022, following the National Bureau of Statistics' announcement of last year's national GDP, which grew by 3 percent, last week.

Guangdong's total GDP is the nation's largest for the 34th consecutive year. Official data show that last year, its GDP came in at over 12.9 trillion yuan, up by 1.9 percent year-on-year.

Peng Peng, executive chairman at the Guangdong Society of Reform, a think tank, said that conventionally, the service sector played a major role in Guangdong's economic growth. Though the sector underperformed last year mainly due to the evolving COVID-19 situation, he expected a rebound in the industry this year, which will drive local economic vitality.

Jiangsu had the nation's second-highest total GDP, reaching 12.29 trillion yuan in 2022. The province accounted for about 10.2 percent of China's overall economy and has been an anchor of national growth.

When it comes to the growth rate, Fujian and Jiangxi provinces tied for first place, with both reaching 4.7 percent year-on-year.

Ding Changfa, associate professor of economics at Xiamen University, said that Fujian saw success mainly because its economic activity was less severely impacted by the epidemic. The prominent growth of the new

energy industry and new economy notably catalyzed overall growth in Fujian. In addition, he said the province's outstanding coastal port resources have made it possible to develop industries such as petroleum refining and chemical industry, making its industrial structure more balanced.

Ten provincial-level regions saw growth of more than 4 percent last year — Fujian, Jiangxi, Hunan, Gansu, Shanxi, Hubei, Shaanxi and Yunnan provinces, and the Inner Mongolia and Ningxia Hui autonomous regions.

Zhou Maohua, an analyst at China Everbright Bank, said that these regions have prioritized the expansion of domestic demand, with more efforts to be made this year to spur consumption, continuously deepen reforms, accelerate industrial upgrading and promote high-quality development.

In fact, the provincial governments are optimistic about this year, as they expect a gradual recovery in domestic activity.

China's provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities have set their growth targets for this year within a range of 4 to 9.5 percent, with most around 6 percent.

The top four provinces in terms of economic volume last year were Guangdong, Jiangsu, Shandong and Zhejiang. This year, Guangdong, Shandong and Zhejiang have set their growth targets at above 5 percent, while Jiangsu is seeking a rate at around 5 percent.

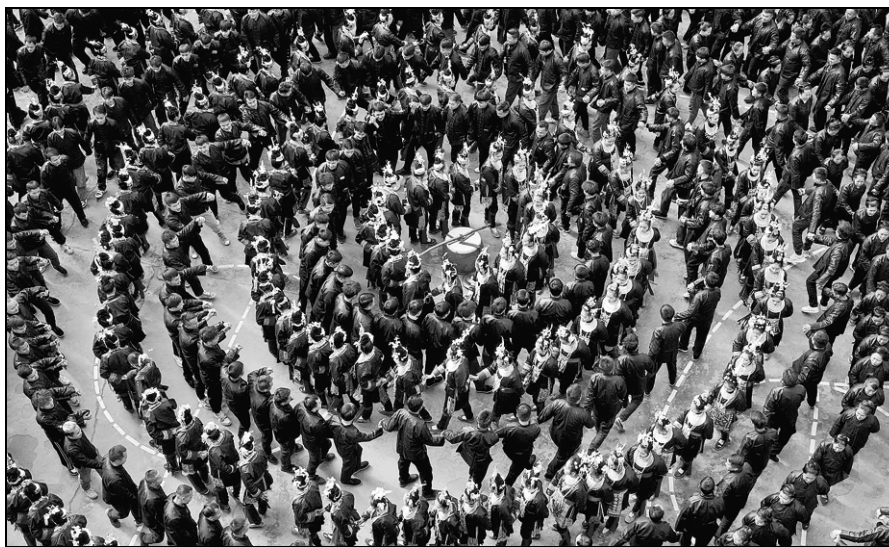
China will likely post above 5 percent economic growth in 2023 due to the further implementation of optimized COVID-19 control measures and a package of stimulus policies that are taking effect gradually, Zhou added.

Kang Yi, chief of the National Bureau of Statistics, said China's economic performance remained stable last year despite many challenges both at home and abroad.

Kang said China's economy this year is bound to see an overall improvement, adding that economic activity is gradually normalizing as the country enters a new phase of COVID-19 control.

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'Grand' performance



Performers gather to sing the Dong ethnic group's "Grand Song" in Congjiang county, Guizhou province, on Wednesday. The song was recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization in 2009 as part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. LONG TAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

Environment: Green efforts bear fruit

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"The quality of the air and water is getting better, as is the quality of life," he said.

The monumental shift in the ecology and environment in Xiyunmen and the Qiangkuang Reservoir epitomizes the green transformation in Wulian and across the county.

From 2012 to 2021, China planted 64 million hectares of trees, carried out efforts to prevent and control desertification on 18.53 million hectares of land, and restored 800,000 hectares of wetland as part of broader steps in its green transitioning efforts, according to a white paper on China's green development this month.

In Wulian, local authorities have ramped up efforts to green its barren mountains over the past decade, with over 25,000 hectares of land being afforested and the acreage of orchards increasing to 36,000 hectares. The county's forest coverage reached 40 percent by the end of last year, higher than the national average of 24 percent.

The idea of "lush mountains and lucid waters as invaluable assets", a philosophy of development long

championed by President Xi Jinping, has been instrumental in the transformation of the county, said Wu Guangfeng, Party secretary of Wulian.

Wu said Wulian had been faced with major challenges for its green transitioning, including recurring droughts, barren landscapes and low incomes for rural residents.

One of the solutions, he said, was to encourage joint input from State-owned and private businesses, a move that eventually led to the greening of over 1,300 hectares of barren mountains.

Supported by 50 million yuan (\$7.37 million) from the public welfare lottery fund that was allocated by the central government, Wulian was able to encourage farmers to grow yellow peaches.

The farmers reaped rewards as canned yellow peaches flew off shelves across the nation during the peak of the COVID-19 epidemic.

Yu Jiacheng, a 58-year-old peach grower in Yuli township, said his family was able to rake in over 120,000 yuan last year from their yellow peach farms, which were established on unused mountain land.

"We never had to worry about the sales of our produce. We had buyers arriving immediately after the harvest," he said.

In a bid to build a beautiful countryside, China has worked to improve life in rural areas, advancing the construction of modern and livable homes with sanitary toilets as well as the treatment and recycling of domestic waste and sewage.

Meng said many of his fellow villagers had a difficult time adapting to new rules that require them to sort their trash to boost recycling, as previously they would simply drop their daily garbage near their houses.

After years of adhering to the rules, Meng said that now villagers don't like throwing away trash arbitrarily.

The development of a rural sewage system has also played a key role in the improvement of the quality of nearby water bodies and of the area's environment.

Chen Honggang, deputy head of the county department of water resources, said the sewage system now covers about half of the county's 632 villages, including Xiyunmen, and another 55 will be covered by the system this year.

Major soccer club quits league games

By SHI FUTIAN

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Recently relegated Chinese Super League club Wuhan Yangtze River on Wednesday announced its withdrawal from the Chinese Football Association in the latest blow to China's efforts to build itself into a soccer powerhouse.

"After careful consideration, Wuhan Yangtze River has decided that the club will not register to join any of the CFA's soccer leagues," the club's statement said.

The news instantly became a

trending topic on Chinese social media. Related news had been viewed over 100 million times on Weibo by Thursday afternoon, with most fans expressing frustration about the status of Chinese professional soccer.

Wuhan Yangtze River, formerly known as Wuhan Zall, was recently relegated from the nation's top-tier CSL to its second tier. The club won only eight matches during the 2022 season and ranked 16th among the 18-team CSL.

The club was established in 2009. Two years later, industrial giant Zall

Group took over the club.

For the past 12 years, the group invested over 3 billion yuan (\$450 million) in the club, according to the announcement. It later renamed the club Wuhan Yangtze River due to changes in naming rules.

Zall also pledged in the statement to pay all salaries owed to its players and coaches and help them find positions with other teams.

For the past few seasons, survival has become a problem for a number of clubs in all four of China's soccer tiers, including the recently relegated eight-time CSL champion

Market: Calls to improve regulation

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The revised Securities Law, which took effect in 2020, has stipulated that if holding reduction violates laws and regulations, such as in terms of the time and amount of reduction and relevant information disclosure, it will be punished with fines.

Dai Guanchun, a senior capital markets lawyer, said the tax burden facing major shareholders' holding reduction is relatively low, and it could be reasonable to appropriately raise related taxes to encourage more responsible behavior among major shareholders and protect the rights of small investors.

Liu Junhai, director of the Business Law Center at Renmin University of China, said that any potential tax mechanism regarding holding reduction should be designed in a way that provides incentives for big shareholders to maintain a steady holding in listed companies, avoids dampening their willingness to invest, and therefore helps to promote common prosperity.

The calls for better regulating the behavior of listed companies' major shareholders came as part of China's deepening capital market reforms, which aim to create a rules-based, transparent market environment that is appealing to global investors and more supportive of the real economy.

"Capital market reforms in China are likely to further improve market dynamics and transparency, bringing more high-quality investment options," said Senan Yuen, head of investment for China at Fidelity International.

"Strengthening the crackdown on illegal securities activities is essential to create a fair and transparent marketplace that attracts capital at home and abroad, which will, in turn, help real economy enterprises get more financing," said Dong from Wuhan University of Science and Technology.

Guangzhou FC, whose future is clouded by financial problems.

Moreover, before the 2021 season started, six clubs, including 2020 CSL champion Jiangsu FC, had been disqualified from the professional leagues due to financial difficulties.

For Wuhan Yangtze River, the problem appears to be concerns over the club's playing ability.

"We are not professional enough in soccer, and the overall Chinese professional soccer environment is now very problematic," Yan Zhi, CEO of Zall Group, was quoted as saying by Sina Sports. "The management and the results of our club are also not ideal. So please forgive us for making this decision."

Doctor couple serve as frontline health guards

By WANG JIAN in Nanchang and ZHANG XIAOMIN

Cao Hehuai and Ke Dongfeng, both village doctors in Nanchang, Jiangxi province, have specially prepared medicines to treat fever, cold and diarrhea as the area braces for potential COVID-19 cases during the Spring Festival holiday.

Since 1994, the husband and wife team has been working as the only staff members of a clinic in the village of Shangban.

In recent weeks, the couple and their small clinic have become a lifeline for about 3,000 villagers amid a surge of COVID-19 cases.

"We have weathered the initial wave of infections, with about 90 percent of villagers getting infected," said Cao, 51. "We saw about 80 to 100 patients each day, mainly people with sudden fevers."

"The biggest problem we had then was a shortage of medicines, so we are better prepared this time," he added.

They have also taken steps to ensure that critically ill patients can

be transported to hospitals in a timely manner.

Village doctors, who are deemed as frontline health guards, know their fellow villagers well and play a pivotal role in sending severe cases to large hospitals for intensive medical care.

Experts said that since 80 percent of medical resources in China are in urban areas, the collaboration model helps optimize the allocation of such resources and better ensures the health of rural residents at a time when COVID-19 cases are surging.

With their decades of experience, Cao and Ke have been doing well in their battle against the pandemic.

With strong knowledge about the health status of the villagers, they have provided care for those who are dealing with chronic diseases.

"In recent years, we have been regularly paying visits to poor villagers and people over age 60," Cao explained. "Some have high blood pressure, diabetes, chronic cardiovascular and cerebrovascular disease. We show them how to take



Cao Hehuai (left) takes the blood pressure of a patient in Shangban in Nanchang, Jiangxi province, on Jan 13. WAN XIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

their medication and what symptoms to watch out for."

For nearly 30 years, the couple have been working almost every day.

In the small clinic, which covers about 150 square meters, they treat most common diseases, such as fever and stomachaches, and conduct routine blood tests, blood sugar tests, urine tests and electrocardiograms.

They receive an annual subsidy of about 30,000 yuan (\$4,422) for their work.

The couple always waive the vil-

lagers' medical fees and sell medicines at a low price.

After decades of working in the village, they are treated like family members by the villagers.

"Our daughter, who is a primary school teacher, and our son, a college student, respect us for working as village doctors. We have strong emotional connections with the villagers," Cao said. "I hope that I can stay longer at this post and that all the villagers will lead healthier lives."

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Magnitude-5.6 quake hits county in Sichuan

By HUANG ZHILING in Chengdu huangzhiling@chinadaily.com.cn

A magnitude-5.6 earthquake struck Luding county in the Ganzi Tibetan autonomous prefecture in Sichuan province at 3:49 am on Thursday, according to the China Earthquake Networks Center.

The epicenter was 11 kilometers underground at 102.01 degrees east longitude and 29.63 degrees north latitude in Luding. There have been no reported casualties or other damage as of late Thursday.

The center detected more than 100 smaller earthquakes in the nearby area in the following hours.

After the earthquake, the Sichuan Fire Rescue Corps sent 184 people, 34 vehicles and three dogs to the scene to carry out disaster investigation and search and rescue work, and the Sichuan Forest Fire Brigade sent 100 people, 22 vehicles and three dogs to the scene, according to the Ministry of Emergency Management.

"Transportation, communication and power supplies near Moxi, the

town at the epicenter, and in the Luding county seat are normal, and no reports of casualties, house collapses or property damage have been received," said Luo Chukai, deputy head of the publicity department of the Luding county committee of the Communist Party of China.

The earthquake was strongly felt in Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan, which is 220 km from the epicenter, as well as in the Aba Tibetan and Qiang autonomous prefecture, the Liangshan Yi autonomous prefecture and the city of Ya'an in Sichuan.

The Sichuan Earthquake Administration and the CENCC had an emergency meeting, where experts said that the earthquake was an aftershock of the magnitude-6.8 earthquake in Luding on Sept 5, that killed 93 people, with the two epicenters 8 km apart.

Mountainous Sichuan is prone to earthquakes. The 2008 Wenchuan earthquake killed 69,226 people, with 17,923 others reported as missing.

Zhang Kun contributed to this story.