

Heilongjiang plans revitalized trade with Russia

Province was surpassed in 2010 as exports to neighboring nation fell

By TIAN XUEFEI

After registering a decrease in trade with Russia over the past three years, the provincial government of Heilongjiang recently proposed plans to revitalize the sector by improving the structure, scale and efficiency of its cross-border commerce.

Heilongjiang, the traditional leader in Sino-Russian trade, had record exports and imports with the neighboring country in 2008, when the value reached \$11.08 billion. But last year, the volume fell to \$7.47 billion, lagging behind Zhejiang and Guangdong provinces for the first time.

The financial crisis that began in the second half of 2008 was partly to blame, but outdated methods and the existing import-export structure are also cited as reasons for the drop.

In response, the provincial government is looking for new international trade resources and more innovative methods.

Heilongjiang now has 1,280 privately owned companies that comprise province's main force in trade with Russia. The sector was before dominated by State-owned enterprises.

According to the provincial foreign trade bureau, Heilongjiang's exports of construction machinery, farming equipment, electric appliances and automobiles have grown steadily, but authorities now look for increased shipments of farm produce, textiles and many light industrial products to Russia.

It also plans to increase imports of energy and raw materials, such as timber, paper pulp, petroleum, fertilizers and electricity to ensure adequate supplies for local economic development.

In the past five years, the province imported 15 million tons of crude oil and petroleum products, 7.7 million tons of iron ore, more than 40 million cubic meters of timber and 4.27 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity from Russia.

"To improve the trade quality, we plan to expand trade with Russia to many fields and a higher level," the provincial foreign trade bureau said.

More comprehensive

Both provincial and local governments have developed programs for more comprehensive cross-border trade and cooperation, including construction of more trade and

development zones, logistics parks and wholesale markets in border towns on both sides.

Another significant step to boost business cooperation was the establishment of a Heilongjiang-Russia electric power organization in January, 2010, with 44 members from both sides.

The next step in the province's plan is more partnerships with Russia for petroleum, natural gas, wood, mineral resources and infrastructure.

The foreign trade bureau is also looking at greater trade and business cooperation with Russia through various shows and events.

In addition to the annual Harbin International Economic and Trade Fair — China's largest Sino-Russian business cooperation show — the bureau plans to arrange local businesses to participate in commodity exhibitions and trade fairs in Russian cities including Vladivostok, Blagoveshchensk, or even Moscow.

The provincial government has ambitious goals for the future.

It wants to turn the province into a Russia-oriented distribution center — with border cities such as Suifenhe, Tongjiang, and Heihe as regional hubs — with its influence reaching across the nation and even to the rest of Asia and Europe.

To date, Heilongjiang has established trade links with 225 countries.



Harbin's famed Zhongyong pedestrian street is lined with Russian-style buildings that evoke its international history.

LIU DAXIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Improved services, facilities to boost tourism

By XUE FEI

Authorities in Northeast China's Heilongjiang province are looking to increase tourism to boost economic growth and have their sights set on 12 major resorts.

A number of new facilities were built at the resorts beginning last year, with 2.1 billion yuan (\$321.7 million) invested overall.

"To attract more tourists and get them to stay, we have to improve services and facilities at the sites," said Ji Bingxuan, Party chief of the province.

"Last year was just the beginning, but we've already done a lot. We chose these 12 because they represent the province's best — winter attractions, vast forests, a place where people can escape the summer heat and city life — and the large rivers and lakes on the border between China and Russia," Ji added.

One example is Beijicun, the northernmost village in the country, nicknamed "China's North Pole". Russia is just across the Heilong River.

The village's major attractions are the snow and ice in winter and tours in summer, when the sun shines about 20 hours a day.

Another tourist site in the north of the province, Wudalianchi, which has a series of volcanic lakes with mineral springs, is both a health resort and a site for scientific research.

The local government plans to turn it into a "volcano museum" by integrating entertainment with education.

Other lake zones set for development are Jingbo, Xinghai, and Lianhua, all surrounded by mountains and distinct local cultures.

New infrastructure for tourism sites include roads, parking lots,



Popular winter resort Yabuli also offers a retreat from the heat of summer.

ZHAO TIANHUA / FOR CHINA DAILY

rural life are the major attractions. Authorities say after the infrastructure is improved, the sites will become business and trade zones.

An already-popular tourist attraction is Yabuli Ski Resort in southern Heilongjiang, the largest ski area in China and the venue for the third Asian Winter Games in January 2007, which is also on the improvement blueprint.

New infrastructure for tourism sites include roads, parking lots,

Water activities, the woods and

restaurants and shopping facilities, on which the province already spent about 860 million yuan last year.

This year, the focus is on local cuisine and developing culinary attractions that combine "culture, health and pleasure — and making sure every dish has a story behind it," according to the Heilongjiang tourism bureau.

Russian food and local ethnic dishes are highlighted.

The government's plans even

include better public lavatories. It has set higher standards for hygiene, eco-friendliness, and size and shape.

It has already built some state-of-the-art bathrooms at major tourist sites that use biotechnology to break down the waste and produce marsh gas at the same time.

To promote the province all across the nation, the government has established closer ties with media groups such as the Xinhua News Agency, China Central Television, People's

Daily, Hong Kong's Economic Times and Wen Wei Po, and sina.com.

According to the provincial tourism bureau, Heilongjiang received 159 million tourists last year, up 44.5 percent from 2009.

Its tourism revenue totaled 88.3 billion yuan, growing 35.9 percent from the previous year. The proportion of tourism revenue in Heilongjiang's gross domestic product rose to 8.63 percent in 2010 from 5.09 percent in 2005.

Harbin Fair fully booked, offers far-ranging agenda

By XU XIAO

In a sign of its influence, all 3,000 exhibition booths for this year's China Harbin International Economic and Trade Fair were already booked in April by businesses from home and abroad, fully two months before the opening date of June 14.

"It's not just an exhibition," said Chen Dianyun, deputy director at

the Council for the Promotion of International Trade in Heilongjiang province and director of the Harbin trade fair office.

"The provincial government sees it more of an opportunity to further boost reform and opening-up, as well as a means to enhance social and economic development."

The event — also widely known as the Harbin Fair — held in the northeastern industrial powerhouse of

Heilongjiang province neighboring Russia, is the nation's second-biggest international trade fair, following only the Canton Fair in South China's Guangdong province.

Approved by the State Council in 1990, it is one of 28 events directly sponsored by the Ministry of Commerce.

This year's sponsors also include the National Development and Reform Commission, China Coun-

cil for the Promotion of International Trade, the provincial governments of Heilongjiang and Zhejiang, and the city government of Harbin.

Thirteen overseas governments — both national and regional — and a number of trade promotion agencies will also give their support to the event.

The annual fair, which has been held 21 times before, is an important channel for bilateral economic ties between China and Russia, as well as the world, noted Chen.

This year's expo will have a total exhibition area of 86,000 square meters, a scale Chen described as a "breakthrough."

Specific show areas

The fair will have areas for green food, biotechnology, new materials, equipment manufacturing, economic cooperation, machinery and electronics, home decoration materials, light industry, traditional Chinese medicines, furniture, culture and tourism.

It will also have pavilions for Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, and for foreign countries, Chen said, noting an unprecedented number of countries will send delegations to the fair.

To date, companies and trade agencies from 23 countries — including Russia, Japan, South Korea, Thailand, North Korea, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, the United States, Australia, and South Africa — have reserved 366 booths. The number of participating countries increased 47 percent from the last Harbin Fair.

Nineteen regions in Russia will send a joint delegation, with their businesses reserving 138 booths.

Thailand will join in the fair for the first time with 31 booths.

Japan will also participate in the event in spite of the devastating earthquake and tsunami in March. Its number of exhibition booths will be almost the same as last year's event.

76 major activities

Chen said that the five-day Harbin fair will have 76 major activities, including an opening ceremony, international and domestic business matchmaking events and business forums. It will have many new elements after the long preparation since the last year's event closed on June 19.

The China-Russia Business Forum — a traditional event at the expo — will be raised to a state-level event because the Russians will come for the first time in the name of a national delegation instead of the different regional delegations in previous sessions.

Several bilateral cooperation projects between the two countries will be discussed at the fair, Chen noted.

He also said that the fair will be more practical than ever by arranging more face-to-face business talks between Chinese and foreign companies, adding that promoting the regional image is no longer the focus of the event.

He noted that the fair will highlight emerging industries including new materials, new energies and biotechnology.

Chen promised that participants will enjoy more considerate services than ever with a team of volunteers to supplement services offered by professional staff.



ZHAO TIANHUA / FOR CHINA DAILY

The Volga Farm, a Russian-style resort, is on a wetland area near Harbin.

Songhua River fest fetes historic wetlands

By ZHAO BIAN

Several decades ago, the northeastern province of Heilongjiang was known across the nation as the "northern wildlands."

In addition to vast virgin forests, its widespread wetlands of rivers, streams, lakes and marshes constituted greatly to the wildness.

A half-century later, the province is now known as the "northern granary" and an important industrial base. And the wildness is gone, although Heilongjiang still has the largest area of wetlands and forests in the country.

But this week, the province will host a wetland festival to revive the memory of the old days.

The first-ever Harbin Songhua River Wetland Festival will open in the provincial capital of Harbin on June 5.

The 15-day event will be inaugurated at Anti-Flood Square next to the Songhua River, a monument to the heroism of residents in fighting the flood of 1998, the biggest of the century.



XIE GUOFEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

A major event in Sino-Russian trade, the Harbin Fair has participating businesses from across the world.

National book expo 'improves well-being'

By ZHAO XIE

The 21st National Book Expo held in Northeast China's Heilongjiang province from May 27 to 30 is being hailed by the provincial government as a "significant event to both facilitate trade and improve the spiritual well-being of the local residents."

Previously called the national book fair, its name was changed in 2007. It is now China's largest publication trade show.

Over the past two decades, the expo has gone from a mere book fair to a more comprehensive event with exhibits, transactions, information exchanges, networking and other cultural activities.

This year, the session's sponsors are the General Administration of Press and Publications and the Heilongjiang provincial government.

The event's organizers said that the local government wants to do more than just making it a trade facilitator.

It wants to use the opportunity to showcase the province's recent developments in the publication industry and help increase public interest in reading.

According to the organizers, more than 100,000 business representatives from 31 provinces and regions in China — including Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan — took part in the event.

The exhibition area reached 63,000

square meters, with over 300,000 publications on display and about 4,000 booths.

In addition to the main venue at the Harbin International Exhibition, Convention and Sports center in the provincial capital of Harbin, the book expo was also held in the cities of Qiqihar, Mudanjiang, Jiamusi, Daqing and Jixi.

The organizers said the use of so many locations made the book show a truly unique event, providing the widest influence and the highest level of development in its history.

They also noted it allowed as many people as possible to access various publications from all over the country, but was not limited to books and publications, with a

number of other activities held concurrently.

Other events included a publishing industry forum, where officials from the General Administration of Press and Publications, provincial government leaders, business leaders and scholars shared their insights on industry developments.

There were a number of interactive activities involving customers, authors and publishers, including a readers' conference and a display of photos from local people and publishers.

Publishers from across the country also participated in a ceremony to donate books to rural libraries in Heilongjiang.



FU DI / FOR CHINA DAILY

A big petrochemical project is under construction in Daqing to process oil locally produced and imported from Russia.

'Hong Kong Week' to woo island's investors

By ZHAO SHIJUN

Heilongjiang will hold an investment promotion event in Hong Kong to attract businesses in the special administrative region to join its new industrial development program, said the province's governor Wang Xiankui.

Wang will head a delegation of local business leaders and government officials at "Heilongjiang Week" in Hong Kong from June 7 to 11.

The event is sponsored by the Heilongjiang provincial government, the Hong Kong Trade Development Council and Hong Kong-Heilongjiang Council for the Promotion of Economic Cooperation.

The event will promote both traditional and emerging industries

including energy, petrochemicals, equipment manufacturing, mining, biotechnology, agriculture and food, forestry, new materials, services, tourism, border trade and finance.

Wang said the provincial government hopes businesses in Hong Kong will invest in the "strategic sectors".

Heilongjiang has the nation's largest oil field in Daqing and now is the first station on the new Russia-China oil pipeline network.

The province will implement a number of petrochemical projects to process locally produced and imported oil.

Wang said another highlight is agriculture. Boasting fertile and unpolluted

farmlands, the province is already the nation's largest producer of organic and pollution-free farm produce.

The governor noted that the potential for a "green agriculture" has not been fully explored, adding that businesses in Hong Kong are welcome to participate in developing an extended industrial chain for the sector — from production and processing to trade.

Wang also suggested that Hong Kong investors pay attention to the booming cross-border trade and tourism between Heilongjiang and Russia.

At present, a bonded area is under construction in the border city of Suifenhe, where Hong Kong businesses are encouraged to invest in every field — from infrastructure

and manufacturing to trading and financial operations.

The governor said a brand-new tourism project — the development of the Heixiazhi Island — is also awaiting Hong Kong investors.

The island on the Heilong River was for a long time disputed territory between China and Russia.

But an agreement between the two countries in 2005 settled the dispute, with half of the land belonging to China and another half to Russia.

At present, the Heilongjiang government is planning to make the Chinese part of the island a tourism resort, which Wang said can attract travelers because of its controversial history and proximity to an exotic land.



LIU DAXIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Agriculture is showing new investment potential, with the local government promoting 'green' growth in organic and pollution-free products.