

Q&A WITH LOCAL LEADER



Inner Mongolia focuses on stable growth

A river runs through the prairie in Dong Ujimqin Banner, the Inner Mongolia autonomous region. HASBAGENA BORJIGIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

By YUAN HUI and DU JUAN in Hohhot

Editor's note: Despite China's economic slowdown, the Inner Mongolia autonomous region recorded better than average economic growth over the last two years thanks to the opportunities provided by the Belt and Road Initiative. The region is becoming more open to the world, especially to Russia and Mongolia to the north. China Daily spoke recently to Wang Jun, Inner Mongolia's Party chief, to find out more.

The Inner Mongolia autonomous region has realized stable economic growth despite the general economic slowdown over the past two years. How did the region achieve this result?

Wang: The new economic situation requires new policies to cope. Inner Mongolia is traditionally a region based on the energy industry. Thus, we have been making efforts to adjust the industrial structure to ensure stable growth when commodities prices are falling. At the same time, the local government has put a focus on improving efficiency and quality, and enhancing reform.

For the first three quarters of the year, the region's GDP growth was 7.5 percent. The region's fixed investment grew by 14.4 percent compared to the same period last year. The income of urban and rural residents increased by 8.1 percent and 8.8 percent year-on-year, respectively.

Those performance indicators are better than neighboring provinces and autonomous regions, a credit to policies the authority has maintained.

Besides the energy industry, in which sectors has Inner Mongolia made progress?

Wang: In recent years, the high-tech industry, livestock product processing and equipment manufacturing sectors all achieved higher than average growth in the region.

Meanwhile, the tourist industry, logistics and financial information sectors are developing rapidly.

In the past, Inner Mongolia's major economic growth contributor was the coal industry and the others lagged behind. However, the structure is quickly shifting to a more healthy and reasonable one.

What are the key sectors to be developed in the future?

Wang: We will build Inner Mongolia into a major clean-energy provider to other places in the country by developing the coal chemical industry. Meanwhile, we will develop nonferrous metal processing, equipment manufacturing, livestock product processing and cultural tourist industries aimed at improving our economic structure.

After 60 years of development, Inner Mongolia has had much experience in those sectors, and we have confidence that the region can make a bigger contribution by accelerating the development of those industries. For instance, clean energy will help the country to reduce carbon emissions. Livestock product processing and tourism will meet the growing demand from consumers and improve living standards.

By developing those industries, there will be more jobs in the region, which will greatly increase the income of our residents.

Inner Mongolia is a frontier for the country's openness to the north. You have visited Mongolia and Russia in the last year. What did the visit achieve?

Wang: Inner Mongolia will become more open to those countries. We agreed on cooperation in mainly three sectors. First, we will strengthen cooperation on energy exploration and development. Second, all sides would like to improve infrastructure construction to increase communication. Third, we will promote cross-border tourism.

In the last year, the region's import and export volume grew by 21.4 percent compared to the previous year.

What specific plans does the government have in terms of being more open to Mongolia and Russia?

Wang: Inner Mongolia has 16 inland ports, which are responsible for about 65 percent of land freight volume between China and Russia and up to 95 percent of freight volume between China and Mongolia. Inner Mongolia owns the geological advantages in terms of openness to Mongolia and Russia.

The government will seize the opportunities provided by the national strategy to deepen our cooperation with Russia and Mongolia. We have prepared several official documents on accelerating cooperation, which provide guidelines for future actions.

The local government also established platforms for cooperation. In March, the central government listed Manzhouli, the biggest inland port to Russia, and Erenhot, the biggest inland port to Mongolia, as the national-level pilot free trade zone when Inner Mongolia was listed among the key regions during the construction of Belt and Road Initiative.

The authority will establish the zone with a faster pace. The next move is to expand cooperative agreements. Make them solid. During the process, we will be more actively seeking cooperation with and openness to Mongolia and Russia.

Inner Mongolia has paid much attention to improving people's livelihoods in the recent years. How do you view those moves?

Wang: We indeed did lots of work on this. We have organized a series of projects to provide support to the poor and create jobs.

For example, the local government decided to provide one metric ton of thermal coal per person annually to low-income

Quick Biography



YUAN YONGHONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Wang Jun, 63, of Datong, Shanxi province, is the head of the Inner Mongolia Party Committee of the CPC and the head of the Inner Mongolia legislature. He graduated from Shanxi Institute of Mining and obtained a master's degree in philosophy from the Party School of the Central Committee of the CPC.

Before he was elected to his current position in 2012, he was governor of Shanxi province from 2009 to 2012 and the head of the State Administration of Work Safety in 2008.

SOURCE: INNER MONGOLIA GOVERNMENT OFFICE

Inner Mongolia at a glance

Established: 1947
Land: 1.18 million sq km
Population: 25 million (as of 2014).
Geography: Officially, Inner Mongolia is classified as one of the provincial-level divisions of North China, but its great breadth means that parts of it belong to Northeast China and Northwest China as well. It borders eight provincial-level divisions, as well as Mongolia and Russia.
Terrain: The region's landscape includes mountains, deserts, rivers, lakes, plateaus and plains.
Economics: Inner Mongolia is rich in mining resources. It has the world's best reserve of rare metals



and contains China's biggest grassland pasturing area.
GDP: 1.78 trillion yuan (\$280.21 billion) in 2014, up 7.8 percent year-on-year

SOURCE: INNER MONGOLIA GOVERNMENT WEBSITE

residents each winter. We also offer a 10,000 yuan (\$1,572) study subsidy for each college student from a poor family every year.

The government also provides at least one job to every family without any income. We hope all those measures can improve the

lives of residents in the region.

In the last year, the entire region spent 244 billion yuan on improving people's livelihoods. For the first half of this year, we still spent 110.5 billion yuan on the sector even though financial conditions were tight.

Authorities at all levels have kept the share of spending on livelihoods at more than 70 percent of the overall government finances.

The latest move is that we plan to invest 80 billion yuan over three years on improving living conditions, healthcare, water quality, electricity, TV service, and increasing the number of convenience stores in rural areas. We believe the investment will improve the lives of rural residents.

Better public service will contribute to the stability of urban and rural areas and create a basic foundation for healthy economic development in the future.

Inner Mongolia has a fragile ecological system, facing some environmental problems such as desertification. However, the region is a draw for both domestic and foreign tourists. How can the region balance economic growth and environmental protection?

Wang: Inner Mongolia is the biggest and most comprehensive ecological system in northern China with diversified landscapes from forests to deserts. Its ecological safety doesn't only concern its own development, but also the ecological stability of China's northeastern, northern and northwestern areas.

A good natural environment is the best situation for the residents in the region. Thus, we respect nature and protect it. During the development of big projects, we strictly follow codes to protect the environment.

Last year, the region planted more than 672,000 hectares of forest. Forests cover 21 percent of the whole region.

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CRIME

Probe continues into HK shopping death

By KAHON CHAN in Hong Kong
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The National Tourism Administration urged Hong Kong authorities to look into the death of a mainland tourist after a shopping brawl, and to safeguard the rights of all mainland visitors in the region.

The death also shed light on a deceptive tactic used by some mainland group-tour organizers to push tourists harder at retail shops and take profits away from the city's partners.

The victim, 54-year-old Miao Chunqi, was reportedly a construction contractor from Harbin, Heilongjiang province. He was pronounced dead at 10:45 am at Hong Kong's Queen Elizabeth Hospital on Tuesday.

Miao, according to the police, was trying to break up a brawl between two female tourists inside a jewelry shop in Kowloon when four men stepped in and beat him. He was left unconscious and the attackers fled.

The Hong Kong police arrested two alleged attackers on Monday, identified as a local tour guide and a mainland tourist. A search for the remaining two continued into Tuesday evening. The case was listed as manslaughter. The motive for the attack is under investigation.

The two female tourists who started the row were also arrested for fighting in a public place. One of the women was identified as "group leader" — a tour member who offers voluntary assistance to the guide.

The National Tourism Administration expressed deep concerns about the incident in a statement released on Tuesday. The agency said it hopes Hong Kong authorities will conduct a thorough investigation.

Hong Kong's Tourism Commission extended its deepest condolences to the victim's family. It attached great importance to the incident and has urged a self-reg-



Miao Chunqi, a 54-year-old tourist from the Chinese mainland, died on Tuesday after a shopping brawl in Hong Kong. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

ulatory industry association, the Travel Industry Council, to review whether the local organizer had broken rules on group tours.

The commission is also working with Shenzhen authorities to gather information on the tour group. The group consisted of 19 people who took a three-day trip to Hong Kong. The group continued on a sightseeing trip to Macao on Tuesday.

The local agent that received the tour was identified as Tian Ma International (Hong Kong) Travel. The jewelry shop in Hung Hom district was typical of those that only open their doors to mainland groups. But unlike previous shopping rows, there was no sign of direct involvement by the staff of

the shop or tour organizer.

The industry in Hong Kong has since suspected the involvement of agents disguised as tourists. Yiu Si-wing, a legislator elected by the travel industry, said it has become more common for mainland tour organizers to hire people to pressure fellow tourists, even by force.

"The so-called 'shadow tourists' made commitments with the agency or organizer prior to coming to Hong Kong, to pressure and cause clashes," Yiu said. Such tactics fall into a regulatory vacuum and eats into the profits of local organizers, as commissions are paid directly to their mainland counterparts.

ECONOMY

Hundreds of projects to invite private capital

By XINHUA

Seven Chinese provinces announced 287 public-private partnership projects on Tuesday that will be open to private investors. The projects, collectively worth around 940 billion yuan (\$148 billion), include municipal works, highways, rail, airport, water conservation and energy projects.

They were announced during a PPP promotional teleconference organized by the National Development and Reform Commission in cooperation with the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce.

PPPs are collaborative projects between governments and private companies that are mainly funded and operated by the latter.

Such partnerships could help improve structural reforms related to investment and financing and energize private investment while improving public products and services, said Zhang Yong, deputy head of the NDRC.

940 billion yuan

the total value of 287 public-private partnership projects to be undertaken in seven Chinese provinces

China is turning to PPPs to bridge a large financing shortfall in infrastructure construction, in a bid to temper the economic slowdown caused largely by the ongoing real estate downturn.

The government said it will streamline approval procedures for PPPs, and roll out tax breaks and other financial rewards to boost their development.

The capability of local investment financing has dropped since last year for various reasons, therefore local authorities could support PPP projects with capital raised by bond issuance, Xu Kunlin, head of the NDRC's fixed investment department, said at a press briefing last month.