

Plan to enhance digital construction

Measures aim to bolster China's high-quality development

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The newly unveiled plan to promote digital socioeconomic transformation will bolster national infrastructure, enhance self-reliance in science and technology and provide fresh impetus to development efforts, analysts said.

The plan, rolled out by the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council, China's Cabinet, last month, laid out a host of measures to improve the connectivity of digital infrastructure and strengthen the innovation and application of digital technologies.

Key targets include developing efficient and interconnected digital infrastructure, improving the scale and quality of data resources and enhancing the quality and efficiency of the digital economy by 2025.

By 2035, China aims to be at the global forefront in terms of digital development, and should have attained a sufficient level of digitalization in the economic, political, cultural, social and ecological realms.

The policy document was released weeks before the first session of the 14th National People's Congress, which concluded on March 13. The NPC adopted an institutional reform plan for the State Council that proposed the creation of a new regulator for data governance.

The new national data bureau, which will be administered by the National Development and Reform Commission, will be responsible for advancing the development of fundamental data-related institutions and pushing forward the planning and creation of a digital China, a digital economy and a digital society.

Zhu Keli, the founding director of the China Institute of New Economy, said the plan has mapped out goals and pathways for creating a digital China and prioritized the integration between digital technology and socioeconomic development.

"It (the plan) will give fresh impetus to national development efforts and the common prosperity drive. It will also provide new guarantees for shoring up China's competitive edge and preserving national security," he said.

Key measures

He said one of the major highlights of the plan is that it has put forward measures to build up the digital infrastructure and data resources to serve as a pillar for the growth of the digital economy.

Other key measures include enabling across-the-board development of the internet of things, the large-scale application of the Beidou Navigation Satellite System and better regional distribution of supercomputing capacity.

China will accelerate the smart, digital transformation of existing infrastructure, establish a national data governance system, promote the integrated use of public data and establish national databases in key sectors such as public health, science and technology and education, the plan said.

It also called for heightened measures to unleash the potential value of commercial data.

China's digital economy was valued at 45.5 trillion yuan (\$6.6 trillion) in 2021, accounting for 39.8 percent of GDP, according to a white paper released by the State Council Information Office last year.

By June 2022, there were 1.05 billion internet users in China, and 1.85 million 5G cell towers had been built



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

for 455 million 5G cellphone users.

Online retail sales reached 13.78 trillion yuan last year, up 4 percent year-on-year and accounting for 27.2 percent of total consumer retail sales, according to the National Bureau of Statistics.

Wu Yanjing, an analyst of the digital economy at China Galaxy Securities, said a reliable, independent and interconnected digital infrastructure is the bedrock for the growth of the digital economy.

Even though China now has the largest number of internet users and one of the most convenient logistics infrastructure networks in the world, a higher degree of digital infrastructure is still needed as the application of artificial intelligence and other digital technologies is set to empower thousands of sectors, she said.

Another highlight of the policy is that it has pledged to establish a funding system to encourage the participation of society and guide

financial resources toward supporting digital development.

Wu highlighted the significance of better top-level design and fundamental systems to prevent risk, the occurrence of monopoly and infringement of personal privacy.

The latest plan also put forward measures to make the digital economy bigger and stronger, pledging to deepen integration between digital technology and the real economy in sectors such as agriculture, industry, finance, education, healthcare, transport and energy.

It also reiterated the need to support the growth of companies in the digital sector, including the healthy growth of platform companies.

Huge potential

Zhu said there is huge potential for China's digital economy to empower other sectors.

He explained that the digital transformation of the manufacturing sector, through the use of cloud

computing, big data and artificial intelligence, can lead to better efficiency, quality and lower costs, as well as a reduction in the consumption of resources.

According to a white paper released last year, 55.3 percent of the key processes of large industrial enterprises had become digitally controlled, with 74.7 percent of them using digital R&D tools by February last year.

Zhu noted that the application of digital technology can also make the agricultural sector greener and smarter and enable the services sector to better meet consumer demand.

The plan reaffirmed Beijing's commitment to the development of an open, win-win mechanism for international cooperation in the digital sector, as well as the country's participation in cooperation platforms under the United Nations, the World Trade Organization and the G20.

To bolster self-reliance in science

and technology, the plan's measures include creating an independent innovation system for digital technologies and strengthening the principal role of businesses in innovation.

It also stressed the imperative of ensuring online security and bolstering data security.

Liang Si, a researcher at the Bank of China's research institute, said the growth of the digital economy can play a leading role in sci-tech innovation and help China attain new breakthroughs in innovation.

"Undoubtedly, the growth of the digital economy has become a strategic option for China to grasp the new opportunities presented in the latest round of the sci-tech revolution and industrial transformation," he said.

"The healthy development of the digital economy will help promote the development of a modern economic system and give China an edge in international competition."

Policy Digest

Opinions sought on child care home regulations

A National Health Commission department is soliciting the public's opinion on regulations drafted for the operation of family child care homes, where caregivers look after children in private homes.

According to the rules drafted by the Department of Population Surveillance and Family Development, homes should take in no more than five children, all of whom should be under 3.

Service providers should be physically and mentally healthy. Those who suffer or used to suffer from mental health disorders or who have criminal records are not qualified to run or work at the homes, according to the draft.

Each caregiver should have charge of no more than three children, so a home with more than three children would require at least two caregivers.

Homes should be well ventilated, have a comfortable temperature and appropriate lighting, and people are forbidden from running the homes in basements or partial basement locations. In addition, homes should have security cameras that cover everywhere children go, and footage should be stored for at least 90 days. The department said it is open to public feedback on the draft via mail, fax or e-mail before April 14.

Ministry looks to better utilize heritage sites

The Ministry of Industry and Information Technology has revised regulations on managing national industrial heritage sites and is encouraging authorities to give them new roles, such as by turning sites into movie or television studios.

The ministry also encouraged cities along the Grand Canal and the Yellow and Yangtze rivers to participate in protecting and using the sites by transforming them into parks.

The ministry first issued regulations in 2018. It is responsible for certifying national industrial heritage sites, which were built during "China's long process of industrial development and which have significant historical, technological, social or artistic value".

The ministry has supported the creation of industrial museums on sites as well as turning them into tourist destinations, cultural industry parks and centers for innovation and startups.

Regions urged to remain vigilant on COVID-19

All provincial-level regions are required to keep a lookout for cases of COVID-19.

In a notice issued recently, the National Development and Reform Commission and seven other organizations tasked local authorities with strengthening monitoring of the epidemic's development and with implementing strict response measures previously the country has adopted since it downgraded the management of the epidemic in January.

Authorities should improve early detection, warning and intervention in cases, as well as their ability to trace variants both at home and abroad.

They should also strengthen weak links in disease prevention and control by enhancing health services for seniors and children and authorities must encourage the elderly to get vaccinated.

In addition, the notice tasked authorities with improving hygiene in cities and rural areas and with strengthening waste management practices.

WANG QINGYUN

Policy to improve domestic production of soybeans

By XU WEI

China has rolled out a slew of policy measures to expand the growing of soybeans and protect the interests of farmers as part of broader efforts to ensure food security.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs said in a statement on Friday that the country will adopt a host of incentives in support of farmers who grow soybeans to bolster the production of edible oil.

The central government will offer more subsidies to farmers who grow corn and soybeans and encourage provincial authorities in Northeast China, one of the country's main grain growing areas, to do the same.

More credit will be extended to soybean farmers, who will also be offered insurance to cover costs and guarantee incomes, the statement said.

More farmers in the north, the southeast and the lower and middle reaches of the Yangtze River will be

encouraged to take part in a pilot program under which corn and soybeans are grown alongside one another. Local authorities will also encourage farmers to grow soybeans alongside fruit saplings and sorghum.

To bolster technological services, the ministry said it plans to come up with tailored solutions for each of the 906 soybean-growing counties, including steps to promote the use of better varieties, cultivation methods and machinery.

Family farms, rural cooperatives and agribusinesses will also be encouraged to grow soybeans, and the government will encourage the development of professional service providers to offer low-cost, convenient and all-around services to soybean growers.

The ministry said that the China Grain Reserves Group Co, the country's largest grain storage and transportation company, will step up efforts to purchase soybeans from

growers in Heilongjiang province and the Inner Mongolia autonomous region, which grow the most soybeans in China.

As the world's largest importer of soybeans, China began bolstering efforts to expand cultivation last year, as its leadership called for heightened efforts toward food security and self-sufficiency.

The country imported 91.08 million metric tons of soybeans in 2022, valued at \$40.84 billion, both figures down by 5.6 percent year-on-year, according to the General Administration of Customs.

Yin Ruifeng, a soybean researcher

at the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, said China had relied on the international market for over 85 percent of its soybeans before 2022, and there was much room to improve the level of self-sufficiency.

However, after many farmers switched to growing soybeans last year, the rise in domestic production led to a downturn in prices, which dimmed enthusiasm, she said.

"It is a time-consuming process to raise the level of soybean self-sufficiency, and more work must be done to improve domestic varieties and build up domestic supply chains," she said.