

ECONOMY

# PROVINCES MAP OUT PLANS FOR GROWTH

**Premier urges quick results in tackling problems as officials in economic heartlands hold meetings to find ways to spur investment and development**

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Top officials in the nation's economic heartlands got back to work yesterday with a series of tech and investment-centred conferences across the country, signalling Beijing's focus this year is firmly on the economy.

In a State Council meeting attended by vice-premiers, state councillors and ministry chiefs, Premier Li Qiang called for "quick results" in tackling domestic economic problems.

"All departments must ... quickly enter into work mode and pay close attention to implementation," state news agency Xinhua quoted him as saying. "[We must] take pragmatic and powerful action to boost the confidence of the whole society."

In Guangdong, the country's biggest regional economy, major provincial leaders and municipal heads met on the first day after the Lunar New Year holiday to find ways to foster innovation and industrial development.



"As a pacesetter, Guangdong should take the lead in reaching the level of a moderately developed economy and an innovative economy by 2035, but there are still large gaps and deficiencies," Guangdong Communist Party chief Huang Kunming said.

"The key to achieving these goals is technological innovation, industrial development, and the continuous liberation and development of productive forces."

Similar meetings were held in Shandong, Anhui and Liaoning provinces. They follow central government orders for the country's economic powerhouses to do more to raise economic growth.

The economy has had a bumpy recovery since the country's zero-Covid policy was abandoned in December 2022, with the private sector and wage earners particularly hard hit in the past year.

National GDP came in at a higher-than-expected 5.2 per cent in 2023 but it failed to lift market sentiment and reassure investors amid job and income uncertainties, the property crisis, US tech curbs and deflation concerns.

Many provinces are already aiming for higher growth this year, including Guangdong, which is targeting 5 per cent growth after 4.8 per cent real expansion last year.

Speaking at the conference yesterday, Huang said the province would focus on industrial science and technological innovation, improving cooperation with Hong Kong and luring more talent. "We need to help businesses adopt new technology, new equipment, new materials, and new processes to improve product quality and production efficiency," he said.

He said the province would launch a number of major scientific research projects this year, as well as help 9,000 industrial enterprises undergo tech overhauls. It would also promote the "digital transformation" of 9,200 industrial enterprises.

In addition, Guangdong authorities had earmarked 1 trillion yuan for more than 1,500 investment projects in 2024, including information technology, high-end manufacturing and new materials, Ai Xuefeng, director of the Guangdong Development and Reform Commission, told the conference.

The pledges reflect the national push for "high-quality development" to help advance the country through the quality of economic growth instead of rapid expansion.

To do so, it is turning to technology, advanced manufacturing, and green industries rather than old drivers like real estate and financial speculation.

In Shandong province, the third-biggest in economic size, cadres addressed the theme of "high-level opening up, high-quality investment promotion".

In Anhui and Liaoning provinces, officials concentrated on how they could improve the business environment and promote high-quality development of the private economy.

Shanghai, the nation's economic hub, also released an action plan yesterday to create a "first-class business environment".

Peng said Guangdong's underperformance in recent years was "somewhat a microcosm of the difficulties faced by the national economy".

"Guangdong must make breakthroughs, and 'high-quality development' is a flag into which all solutions can fit," he said.

Beijing is widely estimated to set "around 5 per cent" growth target for this year, a harder-to-achieve target given the diminishing base effect.