

China is 'determined' to open up to world in 2025

AFP, Beijing

China is "determined" to continue opening up its economy to the world in 2025, a top economic planning official said Friday, as Beijing steels itself for potential trade turmoil when US President-elect Donald Trump takes office.

The world's second-largest economy has struggled to revive growth following the Covid-19 pandemic and remains beset by a debt crisis in the crucial housing sector, chronically low consumption and high youth unemployment.

Prospects may darken further after Trump's inauguration on January 20 - the mercurial US leader hiked tariffs on Chinese imports during a wide-ranging trade war in his first term in office, and has promised more of the same.

But on Friday officials from China's top planning

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body, the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), said that "no matter how the external environment changes, full of uncertainty, China's determination and actions to open up to the outside world will remain unchanged".

"In the new year we will certainly take many new measures... to steadily expand systemic openness and further build a business environment that is marketised, under rule of law, and internationalised," NDRC deputy director Zhao Chenxin said at a press conference on Friday.

He said China plans to encourage greater foreign investment in "advanced manufacturing, modern services, high-tech, energy saving and environmental protection".

Authorities have been clear they want to reorientate the economy around such areas of high-tech innovation, for example in the green energy sector -- leaving behind the double digit "growth at all costs" of the past.

The country's installed capacity of wind and solar power reached a combined 1.31 billion kilowatts, accounting for 40.5 percent of total power generation capacity last year -- up from 36 percent in 2023, Zhao said Friday.



Established in the 1980s on the banks of Baral river, Baghabari river port currently offers a draft of only 7-8 feet during the dry season, which allows vessels with roughly 300 tonnes of cargo.

PHOTO: AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU

Baghabari port fading from inland water map as river silts up

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU

Once a key supply hub for agricultural inputs and fuel to the greater northern region, Baghabari river port in Shahzadpur upazila of Sirajganj is now seeing more and more cargo vessels avoiding it due to years of neglect in navigability management and inadequate port facilities.

Fertiliser-laden vessels arriving from Chattogram now offload their consignments at Nawapara port in the southwestern district Jashore, from where the agricultural inputs are then transported to northern districts.

"I travelled to Baghabari port around one and a half years ago carrying imported fertiliser, but I was unable to reach the port directly due to navigability problems," said Md Eusuf Mollah, master of an inland water vessel.

"Now we use Nawapara port regularly instead of Baghabari to unload fertiliser," Mollah added.

He said that Nawapara port can accommodate vessels carrying 1,000-1,200 tonnes of cargo, a capacity that Baghabari cannot match.

Established in the 1980s on the banks of Baral river, Baghabari currently offers a draft of only 7-8 feet during the dry season, which allows vessels with roughly 300 tonnes of cargo.

Although minor dredging of



the nearby Jamuna channel was carried out in recent years, there has been no visible improvement in navigability in the Baral as water levels have been declining rapidly.

"Fertiliser vessels usually have a draft of 10-12 feet, but the current water level in the river is only 9 to 9.5 feet. Therefore, only ships with a draft of 7-8 feet can navigate this channel in winter," Md Asaduzzaman, in-charge of Baghabari port, told The Daily Star.

He said that during the monsoon, heavier vessels with drafts more than 10-12 feet can easily access the port.

Asaduzzaman said that over the years, both the size and the load capacity of inland vessels have increased, but the port's

facilities have failed to keep pace. These decades-old port facilities are inadequate for handling larger vessels, leaving the port yard largely empty during the dry season.

Port officials said some small cargo vessels carrying cement still arrive at the port, but fertiliser and coal-laden ships are less regular.

For hundreds of port workers, this decline in activity has put pressure on them to find alternative livelihoods.

"Around 400-500 workers had sufficient income at the port even a few years ago, now even 100-150 workers struggle to make their ends meet with the income here," said Md Jahangir Sardar, a local labour leader.

"Fuel-laden vessels can load a minimum of 10 to 12 lakh litres, but now each fuel-laden vessel carries a maximum of 8 to 9 lakh litres of fuel to reach the port," said Md Abdul Fazal, in-charge of the Jamuna oil depot at Baghabari.

Baghabari fuel depot is one of the largest fuel depots in the northern districts, with a fuel reserve capacity of more than 7.5 crore litres.

"We have the capacity to unload three fuel ships daily at the three fuel jetties in the port, but they all arrive with reduced loads," he said, adding that if the Baral river channel is improved, fully loaded ships could be accommodated without any issue.

Many port workers have left the port in search of new jobs, Jahangir added.

The empty port yards have also impacted the buffer fertiliser warehouse at the port area, leaving it with insufficient stocks.

"We have a demand for 10,281 tonnes of fertiliser for Sirajganj district in January, but we currently have a reserve of 7,734 tonnes," said Md Abdullah Al Ansari, in-charge of the warehouse at the port.

Run under the Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC), Ansari said the warehouse is receiving truckloads from Nawapara, but they do not arrive on time.

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RMG accessories expo to begin in Dhaka from Jan 8

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The 14th edition of the International Garment Accessories and Packaging Expo (GAPEXPO) 2025 will be held in Dhaka from January 8 to 11.

The four-day exhibition will showcase garment accessories such as buttons, packaging products, hangers, zippers, machinery, yarn and fabrics at the International Convention City Bashundhara (ICCB) in Dhaka.

Commerce Adviser to the interim government Sk Bashir Uddin is scheduled to inaugurate the event.

Around 250 exhibitors from 18 countries will present their products, machinery and technologies at the event, said Md Shahriar, president of the Bangladesh Garments Accessories and Packaging Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGAPMEA), during a press conference at the La Vinci Hotel in Dhaka yesterday.

In addition to participants from Bangladesh, exhibitors from countries, including India, Japan, Vietnam, China, South Korea, and Germany, will join the expo, he added.

At present, over 2,200 companies are operating in Bangladesh's garment accessories sector, with a total investment of Tk 40,000 crore and employment of more than 7 lakh workers, Shahriar said.

The amount of deemed exports from the sector is \$8 billion and the direct export is \$1.5 billion to more than 21 countries, and the local manufacturers make 60 kinds of garment accessories.

With a strong footing in the sector, the local manufacturers can now meet nearly the entire demand for the export-oriented garment sector, reflecting a shift from the dependence of imports from mainly China, Hong Kong and other countries.

A few seminars on the garment accessories sector and sustainable fashion will also be held on the sidelines of the exhibition, Shahriar added.

Dollar on track for best week in a month

REUTERS, New York

The dollar dipped on Friday but was on track for its strongest weekly performance in a month on expectations that the US economy will continue to outperform its peers globally this year and that US interest rates will stay relatively higher.

A still solid labor market and stubbornly high inflation have lifted Treasury yields in recent weeks and boosted demand for the US currency.

New policies under the incoming Donald Trump administration, including business deregulation, tax cuts, curbs on illegal immigration and tariffs, are also expected to boost growth and add to price pressures.

The dollar index was last down 0.28 percent on the day at 108.91, after hitting a two-year high of 109.54 on Thursday. It is on track for a weekly gain of 0.85 percent.

Despite recent dollar gains there remains considerable uncertainty over when policies will be introduced by the new US government, and what their ultimate impact will be. That could pause the dollar rally in the near-term.

"We're likely to see a bit of a dollar pullback as the administration comes in because all these proposed tariffs - they're going to take some time to implement and we don't actually know if all of these proposals are going to be implemented or not," said Helen Given, FX trader at Monex USA in Washington.

"As we move through the second half of this calendar year I think we're going to see some more dollar strength," Given said.

EV sales hit record in UK

AFP, London

The UK car industry sold a record number of all-electric vehicles in 2024 but still fell short of the government's mandated targets, an industry trade body said Saturday.

Battery electric vehicles made up 19.6 percent of new cars sold last year, said the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, which was below the government's 22 percent target for carmakers.

The SMMT reported a "record annual volume" of 382,000 battery electric vehicles sold in the UK last year.

The automobile trade body had already warned in October that carmakers were at risk of missing government targets, with manufacturers facing government penalties of £15,000 (\$18,625) per polluting vehicle sold above the limits.

However, the government has since assured that it expects all manufacturers to avoid the penalties in 2024 by taking advantage of flexibility mechanisms that will take into account, among other things, emissions reductions across the whole fleet.

The group's chief executive, Mike Hawes, said that while the market share of electric vehicles grew, this came at a "huge cost" to the industry.

He referred to the "billions invested in new models" supplemented by "unsustainable" incentives provided by the industry.

Hawes urged the government to review the mandate and to do more to stimulate private demand, including improving charging infrastructure.

Helped by hybrids, US new car sales rose to 5-year high in 2024

REUTERS, Detroit

US new car sales in 2024 continued to rise from their pandemic lows, bolstered by replenished inventories, higher incentives and surging demand for hybrid vehicles, automakers reported on Friday.

Sales of new vehicles finished at 15.9 million last year, according to Wards Intelligence, up 2.2 percent from the prior year, and the highest since 2019. Automakers are projecting strong sales will continue into 2025, although President-elect Donald Trump's proposed automotive policies, such as removing tax credits for EVs, present a wild card.

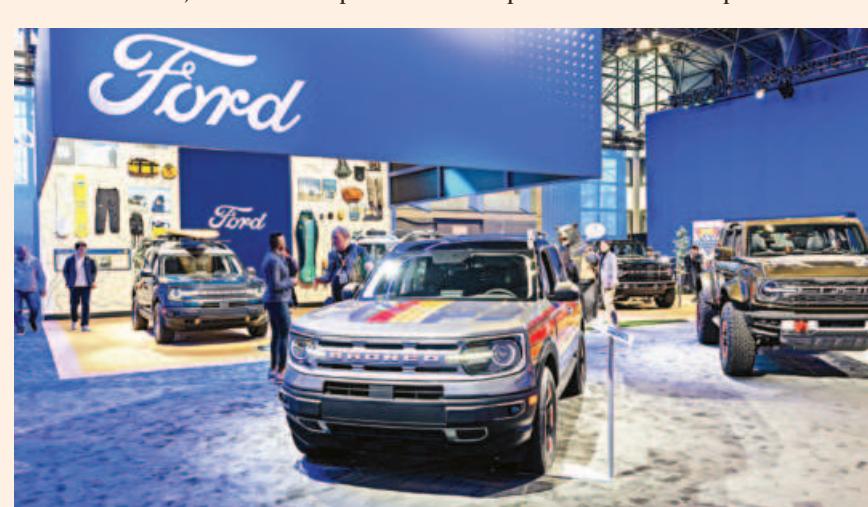
"We're carrying significant momentum into 2025," Rory Harvey, GM's head of global markets, said in a release. The Detroit automaker defended its 2023 crown as the biggest US carmaker by sales, selling 2.7 million vehicles last year, the company said on Friday, up 4.3 percent from 2023.

Most automakers recorded solid

sales results last year, as they adjusted to slowing demand for EVs and relied on their core business of gasoline-powered trucks and SUVs, while some capitalized

on soaring consumer interest in hybrid vehicles.

Sales of traditional hybrids increased 36.7 percent in 2024 compared with the



People visit a pavilion of Ford Motor at the New York International Auto Show in New York City. US automakers are projecting that strong sales will continue into 2025.

previous year, Wards reported.

Toyota notched a 3.7 percent sales gain year-over-year in the US, boosted by steady increases of reliable smaller vehicles such as the Camry and RAV4 SUV, as well as significant gains for hybrid vehicles. Reuters reported last year that the automaker is potentially converting all of its lineup into hybrid-only models.

"For hybrids, we're sold out - customers want them, we can't get enough of them," said David Christ, head of sales and marketing for Toyota in North America. "Battery electric vehicles, even with the huge incentives we're spending and the federal government's incentives, are just not as in demand."

Ford Motor also benefited from an increase in hybrid sales, which helped the automaker's total vehicle sales rise 4.2 percent in 2024. The Dearborn, Michigan, company sold roughly double the number of hybrids compared with its EVs, with 187,426 hybrids sold and 97,865 EVs.