

Well-known avatars



Canadian-American director James Cameron (center) chats with renowned Chinese actress Zhang Ziyi (second from left), who voices a key role in the Mandarin edition of *Avatar: Fire and Ash*, at the film's China premiere event in Sanya, Hainan province, on Monday. The movie is set to open across the Chinese mainland on Dec 19. WANG CHENGLONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Guangdong blueprint aims to drive GBA’s integrated growth

Province plans to work with Hong Kong, Macao to turn area into innovation hub

By ZHOU MO in Shenzhen  
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The government of Guangdong province plans to spearhead the integrated development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, according to a strategy outlined in its recommendations for drafting the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30).

According to the blueprint released on Monday, the southern province aims to serve as the “main force” and “driver” of Greater Bay Area development and will work with the Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions to turn the 11-city cluster into an innovation and industrial hub.

The document says efforts will focus on advancing integrated development by improving infrastructure connectivity, aligning rules and mechanisms, and strengthening people-to-people exchanges. Guangdong will work

with the two SARs to refine consultation and cooperation mechanisms and build a multilevel, comprehensive framework for collaboration.

The plan also underscores the importance of leveraging key cooperation platforms — including Qianhai, Hengqin and Nansha — to drive regional integration. Their pilot and demonstration roles are expected to be strengthened so they can better implement major policies, pursue reforms and push forward significant projects.

In Hengqin, authorities will accelerate integration with Macao. The second phase of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone will be advanced, with an optimized “separate line management” system and faster development of the zone’s “four new industries.” These include: sci-tech research and high-end manufacturing; traditional Chinese medicine; cultural tourism, conventions and exhibitions; and modern finance. The goal is to support

Macao’s economic diversification.

Under the “separate line management” policy, two lines operate in Hengqin. The first separates Macao and Hengqin, while the second divides Hengqin from other Chinese customs territories. Each line operates under distinct personnel and tax management rules.

Nansha, meanwhile, will receive support to develop high-tech and port-adjacent industries. Guangzhou’s free trade zone is slated to become a comprehensive services hub for Chinese companies expanding overseas.

Zheng Yongnian, director of the School of Public Policy at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (Shenzhen), said the Greater Bay Area is positioned to become the world’s largest economic hub and a global leader in science and technology innovation by 2035, once deeper integration among the 11 cities is achieved.

Globally, tech and production capacity are highly concentrated in China and the United States, with several key regions holding dominant roles. China’s strengths lie in

three areas — the Greater Bay Area, the Yangtze River Delta and the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region — Zheng said.

While acknowledging Guangdong’s remaining gaps in science and technology, Zheng said the province should build a large-scale sci-tech system to nurture new quality productive forces and accelerate commercialization of applied technologies to strengthen manufacturing and create new industrial clusters.

Dai Zhipeng, an assistant professor at Shenzhen MSU-BIT University’s Faculty of Economics, said hurdles remain in the cross-boundary flow of key factors in the Greater Bay Area, including mutual recognition of professional qualifications, cross-boundary financing and settlement, and cross-boundary data transfer.

“Cross-boundary integration not only involves regulatory frameworks and service standards, but also social and administrative systems. At the heart of breaking down development barriers lies the alignment of systems and rules,” he said.

National games for the disabled boost regional ties

By ZHENG CAIXIONG in Guangzhou  
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The 12th National Games for Persons with Disabilities and the 9th National Special Olympic Games officially kicked off in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area on Monday, highlighting regional cooperation and steady advances in support of people with disabilities.

It is the first time that the two week-long events have been jointly hosted by Guangdong province and the Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions, reflecting the significant and far-reaching importance of demonstrating the strengths of the “one country, two systems” policy, according to Yong Zhijun, executive deputy-general of the organizing committee of the two events.

“It will further showcase the new achievements in China’s disability cause during the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-25), promoting the development of sports for persons with disabilities and advancing the coordinated growth of GBA,” he said at a news conference in Guangzhou, Guangdong’s provincial capital, on Monday.

The program features 46 major sporting events and 1,876 sub-events. These include 11 mass participation sports and nine Paralympic disciplines. A total of 7,824 athletes from 34 delegations across the country have registered.



Athletes compete during a blind soccer match of the 12th National Games for Persons with Disabilities and the 9th National Special Olympic Games in Guangzhou on Monday. CHEN HAOMING / XINHUA

During the main competition period, more than 11,000 people, including athletes, referees, classifiers, coaches and support staff members, will take part, an increase of about 30 percent compared with the previous edition, Yong said.

Eleven cities across the Greater Bay Area are involved in hosting events. Yong added that competitions for six winter sports were completed in Beijing, Hebei and Jilin provinces, as well as the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region ahead of the official opening ceremony.

Chen Xuejun, deputy director of the executive committee for the Guangdong division, said the games demonstrate the Greater Bay Area’s capacity to host complex, large-scale

sporting events while advancing high-quality development for people with disabilities.

Guangdong is using 36 competition venues, including 22 utilized during last month’s 15th National Games, while 14 are dedicated specifically for the two games, maximizing the efficient use of existing venue resources.

Chen said all venues meet national accessibility standards and have been fitted with facilities such as ramps, accessible lifts, tactile paving, adapted toilets, wheelchair seating, sign language interpretation systems and smart information services. “Thus the venues ensure that individuals with accessibility needs can fully participate in and enjoy the

competitions, demonstrating a commitment to humanistic care,” he said.

Yeung Tak-keung, head of the Hong Kong event coordination office, said the event goes beyond sport by promoting wider social inclusion. He added that closer cooperation between Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao is helping to break down physical and administrative barriers through resource sharing.

“This lays a solid foundation for jointly hosting more large-scale sports events for persons with disabilities in the future,” said Yeung.

Pun Weng-kun, coordinator of Macao’s preparatory office, said Macao has established green channels at four designated entry and exit ports to provide convenient customs clearance services for games participants and technical officials.

Around 1,500 volunteers will be sent to various service positions, Pun said, adding that they have completed specialized training for the events, covering skills such as sign language communication and assistance for amputees. “During the games, they will provide a wide range of services, including competition support, venue logistics, on-site guidance, as well as reception and hospitality,” he said.

Hong Kong will host four events, including three Paralympic events — boccia, wheelchair fencing and table tennis (Class TT11) — as well as one Special Olympics table tennis round, while Macao hosts the badminton contests.

Court awards MH370 victims 2.9m yuan each

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A court in Beijing delivered the first-instance judgment on Monday on the compensation claims lawsuits filed by some families of the missing passengers of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370 — awarding eight families 2.9 million yuan (\$409,813) each in damages.

The disappearance of MH370 occurred on March 8, 2014, when the Boeing 777 carrying 227 passengers and 12 crew vanished en route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing Capital International Airport in one of aviation’s biggest mysteries. About two-thirds of the passengers on the flight were Chinese. There were also Malaysian, French, Australian, Indonesian, Indian, American, Ukrainian and Canadian nationals, among others, aboard the plane.

On Jan 19, 2015, the Malaysian government issued a statement officially declaring the crash of Flight MH370 an accident and presumed all 239 people on board deceased.

In 2016, the families of 75 missing passengers filed lawsuits against Malaysia Airlines and Malaysia Airlines Berhad among other defendants, seeking compensation for losses, the establishment of a search and rescue fund, and other claims, resulting in a total of 78 cases.

During the trial, with multiple rounds of mediation hosted by the

court, the families of passengers in 47 cases reached settlements with the defendants and withdrew their lawsuits. The current judgment pertains to eight cases involving eight passengers, all of whom have been legally declared dead.

In accordance with the Montreal Convention and relevant Chinese laws, the court ordered Malaysia Airlines and Malaysia Airlines Berhad to compensate each passenger’s family for death compensation, funeral expenses, mental anguish damages, and other losses and related costs, totaling over 2.9 million yuan per case.

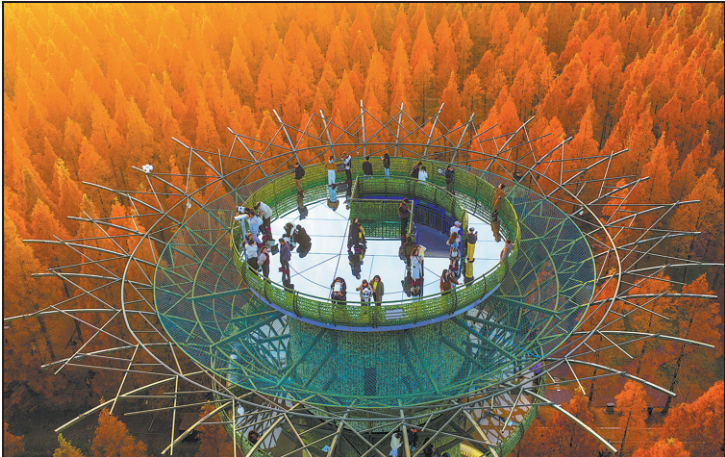
The remaining 23 cases involve families who have not yet applied for or completed the legal procedure to declare the passengers deceased, and these cases remain under judicial review.

The search for Flight MH370 will resume on Dec 30, Malaysia’s transport ministry said on Wednesday.

Marine robotics company Ocean Infinity will resume seabed search operations intermittently for a total of 55 days, the ministry said in a statement.

“The search will be carried out in the targeted area assessed to have the highest probability of locating the aircraft, in accordance with the service agreement entered between the government of Malaysia and Ocean Infinity on March 25, 2025,” it said, adding that the Malaysian government remains committed to providing closure to the affected families.

Nature watch



Visitors take in the view from an observation platform at Dongtai Huanghai National Forest Park in Yancheng, Jiangsu province, on Sunday, as the park’s expansive dawn redwood grove reaches its peak viewing season. JI HAIXIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Key mechanism on crop improvement unlocked

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Chinese scientists have identified a key mechanism that governs the function of plant stem cells — cells that enable plants to continuously generate new leaves, stems and flowers — a finding that could enable the improvement of crop yields, quality and resilience.

The researchers found that the mechanical properties of the plant cell wall play a pivotal role in stem cell regulation. They said that in the future, precise control of cell wall features may allow scientists to “program” stem cell activity to shape ideal plant architectures. Potential benefits, they added, could include larger grains, more tillers and bigger fruits.

Plants maintain an extraordinary ability to produce new organs thanks to stem cells located in growth centers such as the shoot apical meristem and root tips. These cells divide and differentiate to build the plant’s structure.

The study, led by a team from the Chinese Academy of Sciences Center for Excellence in Molecular Plant Sciences, shows that the cell wall — long viewed as a static scaffold — is in fact dynamically involved in this developmental process.

The researchers found that in the stem cell regions at the tips of plant shoots, pectin, the main component of the cell wall, displays a bimodal distribution. Mature cell walls are stiff, acting like load-bearing beams, while each new wall formed during cell division is initially soft and flexible. The difference is controlled by a simple

chemical modification to pectin: stiff walls contain highly methyl-esterified pectin, while new, soft walls contain de-methylesterified pectin.

To determine how plants ensure that the softening enzyme acts only on new walls, the team identified a key enzyme, PME5, as the central regulator that softens pectin.

“We found a clever trick. The cell keeps the instruction manual for this enzyme — the PME5 messenger RNA — under lock and key inside the nucleus. It is like having a powerful tool stored safely in a toolbox,” said Yang Weibing, a researcher at the CAS center.

“Only when a cell is actively dividing does the toolbox open. As the nucleus temporarily disassembles, the PME5 mRNA is released. It is immediately translated into the PME5 enzyme, which is delivered right to the site of the new, forming wall, softening it precisely where and when it is needed. This ensures the mature walls remain stiff and structural, while new walls are flexible enough to be positioned correctly,” he said.

The findings, resulting from a decade of work, were published on Friday in the journal Science.

The researchers said the nuclear sequestration mechanism represents a sophisticated form of gene regulation that is not unique to PME5 but shared by several related enzymes. They also found that the bimodal wall pattern occurs across diverse crops, suggesting it is a fundamental feature of plant growth.

The team said the work offers a theoretical foundation and technological pathway for improving crop production and supporting global food security.