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A QUICK REVIEW OF CHINA'S 'BIG TWO': THE NPC AND CPPCC SESSIONS, MARCH 2026

by JAYADEVA RANADE

China's 'Big Two', or the plenary sessions of the National People's Congress (NPC) and Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), were held over 8 days from March 4 to 12 in Beijing. This largest annual meeting of Chinese lawmakers and advisors carried forward Chinese President Xi Jinping's thrust on Science and Technology and High-Quality Development approved at the Fourth Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee (CC) Plenum in October 2025. It also visibly reinforced Xi Jinping's preeminent position in the CCP and appeared to pave the way for his continuing for a fourth term at the Party Congress next year.

2. The Fourth Session of the 14th NPC approved the 47-page, 19,000-character Government Work Report read out by Chinese Premier Li Qiang on the opening day of the NPC on March 5. As anticipated, the central government announced plans to considerably increase its direct science and technology budget to 426 billion yuan (nearly US\$ 59 billion) in 2026, a sizeable 10% increase from 2025. It said nationwide research and development spending would increase by at least 7 per cent annually in the five years leading up to 2030. Immediately thereafter and reinforcing this thrust on S&T, China pledged a 10 percent boost in science funding and renewed support for its flagship elite university programme, signalling an even stronger expectation that higher education institutions will drive the country's technological ambitions and innovation-led development to build technological self-reliance. Caixin (March 6) disclosed that while speaking on March 5 during the NPC meetings, China's Minister of Industry and Information Technology Li Lecheng said artificial intelligence has become a powerful driver of high-quality economic development. He said China's core artificial intelligence industry surpassed 1.2 trillion yuan (\$174 billion) in 2025 and expanded to more than 6,200 enterprises. The briefing marked Li Lecheng's first appearance at the event since he took over leadership of the Ministry in April 2025.

3. Li Qiang announced that China will increase military spending by 7 per cent this year, bringing the total to around 1.91 trillion yuan (US\$277 billion). The percentage rise is lower than last year's 7.2 per cent increase and is the slowest increase since 2021. Surprisingly and reflecting the many headwinds that China's economy faces, the NPC set an unusually modest economic growth target of between 4.5%-5%, "with efforts to achieve even better results in practice".

4. No new important personnel appointments were announced at the NPC session. The NPC also did not announce replacements for the nine PLA cadres removed from their positions as

NPC Deputies, leaving only 267 of the original 283 deputies from the PLA appointed to the NPC. Neither were replacements announced for He Weidong and Zhang Youxia, the two Vice Chairmen of the Central Military Commission, who were removed. Interestingly the names of PLA Generals Zhang Youxia and Liu Zhenli, both officially stated on January 24, to have been placed under investigation, continue to be listed on the NPC's official website. Their names will probably be deleted after the investigations are completed.

5. What the 'Big Two' did achieve in ample measure, though, was to further boldly enshrine Xi Jinping's position as the preeminent Chinese leader and visibly pave the way for Xi Jinping getting a fourth term at the 21st Party Congress due in 2027. The annual work reports submitted by Premier Li Qiang and Politburo Standing Committee members Zhao Leji and Wang Huning, Chairmen of the NPC and CPPCC respectively, contained numerous references to Xi Jinping, the 'Two Establishments' and Xi Jinping as the "core of the CCP Central Committee". The Government Work Report read out by Li Qiang, for instance, contained 17 references to Xi Jinping! The work reports of the various bodies like the Supreme People's Court and Supreme People's Procuratorate similarly all stressed Xi Jinping's leadership and called for 'further uniting around the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee with Xi Jinping at the core'.

6. A brief, yet more detailed, assessment is appended.

(The author is President of the Centre for China Analysis and Strategy)

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'A QUICK REVIEW OF CHINA'S 'BIG TWO': THE NPC AND CPPCC SESSIONS, MARCH 2026'

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The 'Big Two' opened in Beijing in the Great Hall of the People on March 4 with the opening session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), and on March 5 with the plenary session of the National People's Congress (NPC). Xinhua (March 5) disclosed that the opening session of the NPC was attended on March 5 by 2,765 attendees. There were 113 absentees. The Fourth Session of the 14th National People's Congress had 2,878 delegates.

2. Chinese President Xi Jinping and Politburo Standing Committee members Wang Huning, Cai Qi, Ding Xuexiang and Li Xi as well as Vice President Han Zheng, and others were seated on the rostrum. Others on the rostrum were the Executive Chairmen of the Presidium of the Congress: Li Hongzhong, Wang Dongming, Xiao Jie, Zheng Jianbang, Ding Zhongli, Cai Dafeng, He Wei, Wu Weihua, Tie Ning, Peng Qinghua, Zhang Qingwei, Losang Jamcan, Shohrat Zakir, and Liu Qi. Other Party and state leaders also attended the session. Also seated on the dais were: Wang Yi, Yin Li, Shi Taifeng, Liu Guozhong, Li Ganjie, Li Shulei, He Lifeng, Zhang Guoqing, Chen Wenqing, Chen Jining, Chen Min'er, Yuan Jiajun, Huang Kunming, Liu Jinguo, Wang Xiaohong, Zhang Shengmin, Wu Zhenglong, Chen Yiqin, Zhang Jun, Ying Yong, Hu Chunhua, Shen Yueyue, Wang Yong, Zhou Qiang, Pagbalha Geleg Namgyal, Edmund Ho, Leung Chunying, Bater, Su Hui, Shao Hong, Gao Yunlong, Mu Hong, Xian Hui, Wang Dongfeng, Jiang Xinzhi, Jiang Zuojun, He Baoxiang, Wang Guangqian, Qin Boyong, Zhu Yongxin, Yang Zhen, and others. The Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region John Lee and Chief Executive of the Macao Special Administrative Region Sam Hou Fai attended the meeting and were seated on the dais.

3. Notable was the absence of Ma Xingrui, former Party Secretary of the Xinjiang-Uyghur Autonomous Region and Politburo member who has been missing from public view since the National Day celebration in 2025 and the CCP CC Fourth Plenum in October 2025. He was not present at either the opening or closing ceremonies and was not seen with the other members of the Politburo. When he was removed as Xinjiang Party Secretary in July 2025, it was announced that he would be moving to another position. No position for him has yet been announced, prompting speculation that he is either under investigation or unwell. Ma Xingrui is assessed to be affiliated with Xi Jinping's wife, Peng Liyuan.

4. Members of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) attended the meeting as observers. Officials from relevant departments of the central and state organs, relevant units of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and the People's Armed Police Force (PAPF), and relevant people's organizations attended or

observed the conference. Foreign diplomats stationed in China attended the conference as observers.

5. Chinese Premier Li Qiang delivered the Government Work Report on the opening day on March 5, and Politburo Standing Committee member NPC Chairman Zhao Leji presided over the meeting. Li Qiang took nearly an hour to read out the 47-page, 19,000-character Government Work Report. The Beijing Daily (March 5) reported that "reform" and "innovation" appeared 75 times in the Government Work Report and had become frequently used terms. Among the announcements made by Li Qiang were: that China's GDP grew by 5% in 2025, reaching a total of 140.19 trillion yuan; that the main goals and tasks for economic and social development throughout the year would be successfully completed; China's research and application of artificial intelligence and other technologies are at the forefront of the world; and China's modernization has taken a new and solid step forward.

6. Looking ahead at 2026, Li Qiang acknowledged the headwinds faced by China and moderated economic growth. He announced that the expected economic growth target for 2026 is 4.5%-5%, with the deficit ratio planned at around 4%. The overall requirements for economic and social development this year include the draft outline of the 15th Five-Year Plan, which proposes "20 major indicators, 6 aspects, and 109 major projects". The report also mentions raising the average life expectancy to 80 years and allocating 250 billion yuan in ultra-long-term special treasury bonds to support the trade-in program for old consumer goods. NPC Executive Vice Chairman Li Hongzhong gave explanations on the draft Ecological Environment Code, the draft Law on Promoting National Unity and Progress, and the draft National Development Planning Law.

7. The highlights of the main expected targets for development this year proposed by Chinese Premier Li Qiang and approved by the NPC on March 12 are: economic growth of 4.5%-5%, with efforts to achieve even better results in practice; an urban surveyed unemployment rate of around 5.5%, with more than 12 million new urban jobs created; a consumer price index increase of around 2%; income growth in line with economic growth; a basic balance of international payments; grain output of around 1.4 trillion *jin* (1 *jin* = 0.6 KG); and a reduction of around 3.8% in carbon dioxide emissions per unit of GDP. Li Qiang also elaborated on strengthening the government's own capacity building, ethnic, religious and overseas Chinese affairs, national defence and military modernization, the development of Hong Kong and Macao and cross-strait relations, as well as China's foreign policy.

8. The South China Morning Post (March 5) said China aims to keep annual GDP growth within "an appropriate range" in the 2026-2030 period under the 15th five-year plan. The key to this will be increasing nationwide research and development spending by at least 7 per cent annually in the five years leading up to 2030. It added that this reflects Beijing's priority on building "high-level technological self-reliance" at a time when China is seeking to reduce dependence on overseas advanced technologies. China will increase military spending by 7 per cent this year, bringing the total to around 1.91 trillion yuan (US\$277 billion). The percentage rise is lower than last year's 7.2 per cent increase and is the slowest increase since 2021. Li Qiang also, in an inescapable reference to the purges in the PLA, reaffirmed the Communist Party's "absolute leadership" over the military, and said that "political rectification" of the military would "continue to deepen". This was reasserted by Chinese

President Xi Jinping when he later met the PLA/PAPF delegation. The South China Morning Post added that in his report Li Qiang called for vigilance amid deepening geopolitical risks, and noted the weak economic momentum abroad and strains on multilateralism and free trade.

9. Commenting on the military budget, the state-owned Global Times (March 5) reported that China's defense budget growth is expected to slow to 7 percent in 2026, according to the draft report submitted to the NPC for review on March 5, with approximately 1.9 trillion yuan (about \$275 billion) being allocated to national defense. Xinhua observed this marks the 11th consecutive year of single-digit growth for China's defense budget. The figure stayed at 7.2 percent for 2023, 2024 and 2025. Song Zhongping, a military affairs analyst and former officer of PLA Second Artillery, noted that part of the budget will support personnel benefits and daily operations, while training and equipment upgrades also require substantial funding. Wang Yunfei, a retired PLA Navy officer and now a specialist military commentator, emphasized that advanced weaponry demands higher investment in research, production, and maintenance. China has recently showcased progress in defense modernization, commissioning its third aircraft carrier, Fujian, and unveiling new hypersonic missiles and drones during the 2025 V-Day parade. It said analysts argue that stable spending is essential amid regional tensions in the South China Sea, Taiwan Strait, and Japan's military revival, as well as global conflicts from Ukraine to the Middle East.

10. Expressing support for "patriots" governing Hong Kong and Macau, Li Qiang pledged to ensure that the two special administrative regions would be "more effectively governed in accordance with law". He warned too that Beijing would "resolutely" crack down against separatist forces aimed at "Taiwan independence", and stand firm in opposing external interference.

11. China's Economic Daily (March 6) disclosed that reports on the Implementation of the 2025 National Economic and Social Development Plan and the Draft 2026 National Economic and Social Development Plan (Summary); on the Implementation of the Central and Local Budgets in 2025 and the Draft Central and Local Budgets for 2026 (Summary); Explanation of the Draft Ecological and Environmental Law of the People's Republic of China (Summary); Explanation of the Draft Law of the People's Republic of China on Promoting National Unity and Progress (Summary) Explanation of the Draft Law of the People's Republic of China on National Development Planning (Summary); Explanation of the Draft Ecological and Environmental Law of the People's Republic of China (Summary); Explanation of the Draft Law of the People's Republic of China on National Development Planning (Summary); Excerpt from the Draft Outline of the 15th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China; Report on the Implementation of the 2025 National Economic and Social Development Plan and the Draft 2026 National Economic and Social Development Plan (Summary); Report on the Implementation of the Central and Local Budgets in 2025; and the Draft Central and Local Budgets for 2026 (Summary) were also presented to the NPC on March 5.

12. On March 5, Chinese President Xi Jinping participated in the deliberations of the Jiangsu delegation. The news was highlighted in the Yangtze Evening Post and Jiangsu Ribao (March 5). According to the Singapore-based pro-Beijing Lianhe Zaobao (March 5), Xi Jinping said

Jiangsu is a major economic province supporting the national economy, and it must strengthen its internal capabilities and become more robust. He said 'Jiangsu should fully integrate into the unified national market to help smooth the domestic economic cycle; at the same time, it should expand high-level opening up to the outside world, broadly explore the global market, better connect with the international economic cycle, and guard against various risks with a bottom-line mentality'.

13. The state-owned CCTV (March 6) reported that Chinese President Xi Jinping visited members of the China National Democratic Construction Association, the Jiusan Society, the medical and health sector, and the social welfare and social security sector attending the Fourth Session of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) on the afternoon of March 6. He also participated in a joint group meeting to listen to their opinions and suggestions. He emphasized that building a healthy China by 2035 is a strategic decision made by the CCP Central Committee, and the 15th Five-Year Plan period is a crucial period for achieving this goal. It is imperative to make overall plans, accelerate progress, and strive for decisive advancement. On the eve of International Women's Day, Xi Jinping, on behalf of the CPC Central Committee, also extended festive greetings and best wishes to female delegates, members, and staff attending the National People's Congress and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, to women of all ethnic groups and sectors across the country, to female compatriots in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, the Macao Special Administrative Region, and Taiwan, and to overseas Chinese women. Politburo Standing Committee member and CPPCC Chairman Wang Huning and Politburo Standing Committee member and Director of the CCP CC General Office Cai Qi accompanied him and participated in the discussions. Politburo member Shi Taifeng and others including CPPCC Vice Chairmen He Wei, Wu Weihua, Shao Hong, Wang Dongfeng, Yang Zhen participated in the joint group meeting.

14. On March 7 afternoon, according to the Central Party School's 'Study Times' (March 7), Chinese President Xi Jinping attended the plenary meeting of the PLA and PAPF delegations attending the Fourth Session of the 14th National People's Congress. Reporting the meeting, People's Daily (March 8) said six representatives, including Sun Lei, Zhou Fen, Tang Wuxiang, Hao Jingwen, Jiang Xiaodong, and Zhu Yuemeng, spoke in turn, offering opinions and suggestions on cross-military-civilian law enforcement cooperation, Party organization leadership in scientific research, training of military personnel, generation and application of new equipment and new forces, promotion of fine traditions, and cultivation, publicity, and learning of exemplary models.

15. After carefully listening to the representatives' speeches, Xi Jinping delivered an important speech. He said that since the 18th Party Congress the CCP CC "has led the People's Liberation Army in deepening political rectification and advancing political building of the military with unprecedented determination and strength, achieving significant results. The military wields the gun; there must be no one in the military who harbours disloyalty to the Party, and there must be no hiding place for corrupt elements. The fight against corruption must be resolutely advanced". He emphasised that at the outset of the 15th Five-Year Plan, strict supervision and hard rules must be established, closely monitoring key aspects such as the flow of funds, the exercise of power, and quality control" and said "achieving the goals and tasks of modernizing national defense and the armed forces during the 15th Five-Year Plan period

depends on the leadership and advancement of Party organizations at all levels". He emphasised that "It is essential to comprehensively strengthen the Party's leadership and Party building within the military, select and appoint competent and capable high-level Party committees, enhance the capacity of grassroots Party organizations to independently manage and build themselves, and make Party organizations at all levels stronger and more effective. It is crucial to adhere to the Party's leadership over military affairs, cadres, and industries, improve scientific decision-making capabilities, and play a key role in tackling major tasks, resolving prominent contradictions, and solving development problems, thereby transforming the Party's leadership advantages into development advantages". CMC Vice Chairman Zhang Shengmin attended the meeting. All major Chinese national newspapers like Worker's Daily, Economic Daily, Beijing Daily, China Youth Daily and China Daily reported Xi Jinping's meeting with the PLA/PAPF delegation.

16. Worth note and with inherent implications for the PLA's wider role in the CCP and NPC is that the NPC did not announce replacements for the nine PLA cadres removed from their positions as NPC Deputies, leaving only 267 of the original 283 deputies from the PLA appointed to the NPC. This leaves open the question of the PLA's representation in the NPC and whether Xi Jinping will diminish its role.

17. Earlier on March 6, Chinese Defence Minister Admiral Dong Jun had a group discussion with the PLA/PAPF delegation to the NPC. The South China Morning Post (March 10) reported Chinese Defence Minister Dong Jun as signalling strategic caution with his call for the country to "shape" a stable environment for Beijing's broader political and diplomatic agenda. It said Dong Jun made the call on March 6 during his group discussion. According to the minutes of the meeting released to the media, Dong Jun stressed four times in his fewer than 400-word remarks that the military's tasks were to "stabilise" the situation – more mentions than building military capabilities and maintaining combat readiness. He said "Efforts should be made to shape a secure and stable internal and external environment and safeguard the period of strategic opportunity. [The military] should stabilise the situation and shape the momentum ... serve the broader political and diplomatic agenda, conduct resolute and effective struggle, stabilise and manage the situation effectively, and firmly grasp the strategic initiative".

18. The South China Morning Post interpreted Dong Jun's remarks as appearing to signal that in the backdrop of the US war against Iran, China would exercise strategic caution. According to data compiled by the South China Morning Post, for the first time in at least three years, Beijing sent no warplanes near Taiwan for seven consecutive days, from February 27 to March 5. PLA sorties began falling in the second half of 2025, with Taiwan detecting fewer aircraft than numbers recorded during the same period a year earlier. Taiwan's Defence Ministry, however, said that flights by Chinese Air Force aircraft had recommenced from March 12.

19. Following traditional practice, members of the Politburo Standing Committee and Politburo met the various delegations and participated in their deliberations. Chinese Premier Li Qiang joined the Yunnan delegation on the afternoon of March 5 to review the government work report with the delegates. The People's Daily (March 6) reported that Politburo Standing Committee members Zhao Leji, Wang Huning, Ding Xuexiang, Li Xi, and Vice President Han Zheng participated in the deliberations of their respective delegations on March 5. Politburo

Standing Committee member and NPC Chairman Zhao Leji participated in the deliberations of the Sichuan delegation on the morning of March 5. Politburo Standing Committee member and Vice Premier Ding Xuexiang participated in the deliberations of the delegation from Hongkong and Macao on March 7. The state-owned CCTV (March 8) reported that Politburo Standing Committee member and CPPCC Chairman Wang Huning participated in the deliberations of the Taiwan delegation to the NPC on the morning of March 7.

20. People's Daily (March 8) reported that Politburo Standing Committee member and Director of CCP CC General Office Cai Qi attended the deliberations of the Qinghai delegation on March 7. In his speech, Cai Qi pointed out that this year marks the 105th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China and the first year of the 15th Five-Year Plan. Fully affirming the new progress and achievements made in various undertakings in Qinghai, Cai Qi "called for maintaining strong ethnic unity, forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation, and promoting exchanges and integration among all ethnic groups". He stressed that "We will deepen and expand Party building in emerging fields, continuously promote the Party's organizational and operational coverage, strengthen ideological and political guidance and service management, effectively prevent and resolve conflicts and risks, and strive to improve the level of social governance. We will take the Party's political construction as the guiding principle for all aspects of Party building, and persistently advance the comprehensive and strict governance of the Party. Conducting education on establishing and practicing a correct view of performance is an important task of Party building this year".

21. Leaders from the CCP Central Committee, the NPC Standing Committee, the State Council, and other relevant departments participated in group deliberations of delegations to the Fourth Session of the 14th National People's Congress on March 5. The Politburo members included: Wang Yi (Guangxi); Beijing Party Secretary and Politburo member Yin Li (Beijing); Shi Taifeng (Hunan); Liu Guozhong (Henan); Li Ganjie (Shaanxi); Li Shulei (Jiangxi); Li Hongzhong (Gansu); He Lifeng (Inner Mongolia); Zhang Guoqing (Tibet); Chen Wenqing (Heilongjiang); Chen Jining (Shanghai); Chen Min'er (Tianjin); Yuan Jiajun (Chongqing); Huang Kunming (Guangdong); Liu Jinguo (Ningxia); State Councilor Wang Xiaohong (Hebei); NPC Vice Chairman Wang Dongming, former Finance Minister and currently NPC Vice Chairman Xiao Jie; NPC Vice Chairman Zheng Jianbang; Chairman of the China Democratic League and a NPC Vice Chairman Ding Zhongli; Chairman of the Central Committee of the China Association for Promoting Democracy (CAPD) and NPC Vice Chairman Cai Dafeng; Chairman of the Chinese Peasants' and Workers' Democratic Party and NPC Vice Chairman He Wei; Chairman of the Jiusan Society and NPC Vice Chairman Wu Weihua; former President of the China Writers Association (till 2025) and NPC Vice Chairman Tie Ning (f); Chairman of the Standing Committee of the People's Congress of the Tibet Autonomous Region and NPC Vice Chairman Losang Jamcan (ethnic Tibetan); NPC Vice Chairman Shohrat Zakir (ethnic Uyghur); Secretary General of State Council Wu Zhenglong; State Councilor Chen Yiqin; President of the Supreme People's Court Zhang Jun; and Procurator-General of the Supreme People's Procuratorate Ying Yong. Zhang Shengmin, Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission, attended the group discussions of the delegations from the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and the People's Armed Police Force (PAPF) to review the Government Work Report on March 5.

22. The Fourth Session of the 14th National People's Congress concluded in Beijing on March 12. It approved the Government Work Report, the Outline of the 15th Five-Year Plan, and the

Work Report of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, the Ecological and Environmental Code, the Law on Promoting Ethnic Unity and Progress, the National Development Planning Law, and the Decision on Approving the Report of the NPC Standing Committee on the Work of Legal Review and the Handling of Relevant Laws and Decisions. The Worker's Daily (March 12) added that it also approved the 2026 National Economic and Social Development Plan, the 2026 Central Budget. and the resolutions on the work reports of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, the Supreme People's Procuratorate, and the Supreme People's Court, and the report on the progress of legal review and the handling of relevant laws and decisions. President Xi Jinping signed Presidential Decrees No. 70, 71, 72, and 73 regarding the enactment of laws such as the Ecological and Environmental Protection Code, the Law on Promoting Ethnic Unity and Progress, and the National Development Planning Law.

23. Chinese President Xi Jinping attended the closing session and was seated on the rostrum along with Politburo Standing Committee members Li Qiang, Wang Huning, Cai Qi, Ding Xuexiang, Li Xi and Vice President Han Zheng, and others. Politburo Standing Committee member and NPC Chairman Zhao Leji presided over the session and delivered a speech.

24. In his speech Zhao Leji said, inter alia, "that we must base ourselves on the functions and responsibilities of the National People's Congress, uphold the organic unity of the Party's leadership, the people's status as masters of the country, and the rule of law, practice whole-process people's democracy, uphold, improve, and operate the system of people's congresses well, give full play to the advantages of the country's fundamental political system, earnestly fulfill the duties entrusted to us by the Constitution and laws, and provide legal guarantees for achieving the goals and tasks of the "15th Five-Year Plan"; people's congress deputies should faithfully represent the interests and will of the people, perform their duties in accordance with the law, maintain close ties with the masses, and make contributions in their respective positions". Zhao Leji pointed out that "we must unite more closely around the Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core, adhere to using Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era to arm our minds, guide our practice, and promote our work, further strengthen our "Four Consciousnesses," firm up our "Four Confidences," and achieve the "Two Upholds," work together with one heart and one mind, forge ahead with determination, seek truth from facts, strive to achieve political achievements for the people and achieve political achievements through hard work, and continuously create a new situation in China's modernization". Also seated on the dais were: Wang Yi, Yin Li, Shi Taifeng, Liu Guozhong, Li Ganjie, Li Shulei, He Lifeng, Zhang Guoqing, Chen Wenqing, Chen Jining, Chen Min'er, Yuan Jiajun, Huang Kunming, Liu Jinguo, Wang Xiaohong, Zhang Shengmin, Wu Zhenglong, Chen Yiqin, Zhang Jun, Ying Yong, Hu Chunhua, Shen Yueyue, Wang Yong, Zhou Qiang, Edmund Ho, Leung Chun-ying, Bater, Su Hui, Shao Hong, Gao Yunlong, Mu Hong, Xian Hui, Wang Dongfeng, Jiang Xinzhi, Jiang Zuojun, He Baoxiang, Wang Guangqian, Qin Boyong, Zhu Yongxin, Yang Zhen, and others. Officials from relevant departments of the central and state organs, relevant units of the People's Liberation Army and the People's Armed Police Force, and relevant people's organizations attended or observed the conference. Foreign diplomats stationed in China attended the conference as observers.

25. The meeting was attended by 2,762 out of 2,878 delegates, with 116 absent.

26. Chinese President Xi Jinping also attended the closing ceremony of the CPPCC on the morning of March 11 at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. The Fourth Session of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) reported it had successfully concluded all its agenda items. It called upon all participating units and members of the CPPCC to unite more closely around the CCP Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core, work together with one heart and one mind, forge ahead with courage and determination, unswervingly follow the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and make new and greater contributions to comprehensively advancing the building of a strong nation and the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation through Chinese-style modernization.

27. The meeting was chaired by Politburo Standing Committee member and CPPCC Chairman Wang Huning. Seated on the front row of the rostrum were: CPPCC Vice Chairmen Shi Taifeng, Hu Chunhua, Shen Yueyue, Wang Yong, Zhou Qiang, Pagbalha Geleg Namgyal, Edmund Ho Hau Wah, Leung Chun-ying, Bateer, Su Hui, Shao Hong, Gao Yunlong, Mu Hong, Xian Hui, Wang Dongfeng, Jiang Xinzhi, Jiang Zuojun, He Baoxiang, Wang Guangqian, Qin Boyong, Zhu Yongxin, and Yang Zhen. Chinese President Xi Jinping and PBSC members Li Qiang, Zhao Leji, Cai Qi, Ding Xuexiang, Li Xi and Vice President Han Zheng and others were seated on the rostrum.

28. Wang Huning announced that of the 2,125 members who should have attended the Fourth Session of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), 2,059 were present, meeting the required quorum. In his speech Wang Huning stated that "we should unite more closely around the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core, work together with one heart and one mind, and strive tirelessly to comprehensively advance the building of a modern socialist country".

29. The Worker's Daily (March 12) published the full text of the Political Resolution adopted at the session which stated, among other things, that "The meeting concluded that the fundamental reason why my country has been able to achieve extraordinary success amidst an extremely complex domestic and international situation lies in the leadership of the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core, and in the scientific guidance of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era. The people of all ethnic groups across the country have further strengthened their resolve, backbone, and confidence through overcoming difficulties and forging ahead, and have become even more determined to write a new chapter in the two miracles of rapid economic development and long-term social stability, and to strive to create a new situation in China's modernization drive". It also said "front, and consultative democracy; adhere to the nature and positioning of the CPPCC; uphold the two major themes of unity and democracy; and focus on serving the overall interests of the country. It should give full play to its role as a specialized consultative body, offering advice and suggestions closely related to the implementation of the 15th Five-Year Plan, strengthening consultation and deliberation, conducting special research, carrying out democratic supervision, and reflecting public opinion truthfully, so as to broadly unite people's hearts, build consensus, gather wisdom, and pool strength for promoting Chinese-style modernization". The meeting emphasized that "unity is strength, and hard work creates the future. Turning the grand blueprint of the 15th Five-Year Plan into a beautiful reality requires the broad-based cohesion and continuous united struggle of

Chinese sons and daughters at home and abroad". In conclusion the "meeting called on all participating units and members of the CPPCC to unite more closely around the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core, work together with one heart and one mind, forge ahead with courage and determination, unswervingly follow the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and make new and greater contributions to comprehensively advancing the building of a strong country and the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation through Chinese-style modernization!"

30. Other leaders attending the closing ceremony included: Wang Yi, Yin Li, Liu Guozhong, Li Ganjie, Li Shulei, Li Hongzhong, He Lifeng, Chen Wenqing, Chen Jining, Chen Min'er, Yuan Jiajun, Huang Kunming, Liu Jinguo, Wang Xiaohong, Zhang Shengmin, Wang Dongming, Xiao Jie, Zheng Jianbang, Ding Zhongli, Cai Dafeng, He Wei, Wu Weihua, Tie Ning, Peng Qinghua, Zhang Qingwei, Losang Jamcan, Shohrat Zakir, Wu Zhenglong, Chen Yiqin, Zhang Jun, and Ying Yong. Officials from relevant departments of the CPC Central Committee, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, and the State Council attended the closing ceremony. Foreign diplomats in China and overseas Chinese were also invited to participate.

31. The NPC session made clear that China will be a serious rival to the US in the global race for being the leader in AI and advanced S&T. It guaranteed that state funding will back Chinese tech companies and entrepreneurs. The NPC confirmed that Xi Jinping will continue political rectification of the PLA and weeding out officers. The defence budget approved by the NPC too assures adequate funding for the PLA, though there were indications that China is unlikely to undertake a military adventure over the next year or two and will probably utilise the interregnum to develop new, advanced weaponry and modernise. Finally, the NPC and CPPCC sessions clearly projected Xi Jinping as the preeminent CCP leader and as probably continuing for the fourth term at the upcoming 21st Party Congress.

(The author is President of the Centre for China Analysis and Strategy.)