



'China's Third Central Xinjiang Work Conference'

by JAYADEVA RANADE

On the eve of the 65th anniversary of the establishment of the Xinjiang-Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) and after an interval of six years, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) held its Third Central Xinjiang Work Symposium in Beijing on September 25-26, 2020. The conference was held in the midst of negative international media attention, which highlighted the instances of discrimination and reported incarceration of millions of Uyghurs in 're-education' or 'vocational' centres constructed across the Autonomous Region. Earlier, in a bid to address international concerns, China's State Council had issued a White Paper on Xinjiang on September 16.

2. As per past practice, the entire CCP Central Committee (CC) Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC), Politburo, Secretary of the CCP CC Secretariat, leading comrades of the National People's Congress (NPC) Standing Committee, State Councillors, President of the Supreme People's Court, Chief Prosecutor of the Supreme People's Procuratorate and leading comrades of the CPPCC attended the conference. Chinese Premier Li Keqiang presided and CPPCC Chairman Wang Yang summed up the proceedings. Chinese President Xi Jinping made an "important" speech which set out the long-term policies for Xinjiang. Prominent were the emphasis on "unity" and "stability", the change in tasks for the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC or *Bingtuan*) the sharp increase in Xinjiang's security budget.

3. Xi Jinping's speech was reported by Xinhua on September 26. In his speech Xi Jinping observed that there had been steady improvement in Xinjiang's economic development between 2014 to 2019, with a sound economic momentum and an average annual GDP growth rate of 7.2 percent. The people's living standards had improved significantly with an average annual 9.1 percent growth in residential per capita disposable income, and more than 2.92 million out of 3.09 million people had been lifted out of poverty. More than 10 million people moved to new homes and the social security system and basic public services in urban, rural and pastoral areas have become better with free health check-ups for all people. The 'standardization' rate of township hospitals and village clinics has reached 100%, and 99.7% of the residents are covered by basic medical insurance.

4. Stating that support from the central government and assistance from other provinces to Xinjiang were continuously increasing, Xi Jinping disclosed that from 2014 to 2019, the central government's transfer payments to the Xinjiang-Uyghur Autonomous Region and the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC or 'Bingtuan') increased from 263.69 billion Yuan (US\$ 38.64 billion) to 422.48 billion Yuan (US\$ 61.90 billion), an average annual increase of

10.4%. In other words during these six years, a sum of more than 2 trillion Yuan (US\$ 0.29 trillion) in total were channelled in to Xinjiang. Xi Jinping said that the 19 'Aid-Xinjiang' provinces and cities have strengthened all-round counterpart support, invested a total of 96.4 billion Yuan (US\$ 14.12 billion) in aid to Xinjiang (including the XPCC), implemented more than 10,000 aid projects in Xinjiang, given over 1.684 billion Yuan (US\$ 0.25 billion) as aid to Xinjiang enterprises and that central enterprises had invested an additional over 700 billion Yuan (US\$ 102.56 billion).

5. Xi Jinping expressed satisfaction that "On the whole, Xinjiang social stability is good and people living are working in peace and contentment, laying a solid foundation for long-term stability". He attributed this to the "Party's policies on Xinjiang in the new era", which were developed by the 18th CCP CC and "must be adhered to on a long-term basis". He stressed the need to heighten a sense of identity of the Chinese nation to constantly strengthen ethnic unity and suggested that "education on the sense of Chinese identity should be incorporated into the education of officials and the younger generation in Xinjiang" to let the "sense of Chinese identity take root in people".

6. Noting that development is important for lasting peace and stability in Xinjiang, Xi Jinping stressed that the region's geographical advantages be leveraged to develop Xinjiang as the centre of the 'Silk Road Economic Belt' and a hub of opening-up for the inland and border areas. In this context he called for efforts to increase the efficiency of the industrial sector and boost urbanization in Xinjiang while protecting the environment. Xi Jinping stressed the "six stability" (employment, financial sector, foreign trade, foreign investment, domestic investment, and expectations) and the "six guarantees" (job security, basic living needs, operations of market entities, food and energy, stable industrial and supply chains, and the normal functioning of primary-level governments). He called for unremitting efforts to eradicate poverty and promote employment.

7. There was considerable emphasis on the need for ensuring the loyalty of cadres and the Party's role. While Xi Jinping did say that "cadres of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang are trustworthy and capable of fighting", he also said that "they should be politically motivated" and that "it is necessary to promote the national spirit" and "firmly establish a national ideology" which encourages "cadres at all levels to take root in the border and contribute to the border in the new era". He described doing a good job in Xinjiang as a major achievement for the whole party and the country.

8. The leadership of the Party was highlighted and the Central Xinjiang Work Coordination Group was instructed to strengthen its work at the grass roots and "put forward work opinions on major issues" under the leadership of the Party Central Committee. The Xinjiang Autonomous Region Party Committee, Xi Jinping said, "is on the front line and must fulfil its main responsibilities and implement its work well". He also called on all provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities in the interior of China to do a good job in Xinjiang-related work, strengthen coordination and cooperation and support Xinjiang's stability and development. Importantly, he called for "the building of stability maintenance capabilities" - an euphemism for the state security apparatus -- and enhancement of the organisational advantages and mobilization capabilities of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps so that it could "better play its special role".

9. In his speech Chinese Premier Li Keqiang said that Xi Jinping's "important speech comprehensively summarized the major achievements of Xinjiang work" and clarifies the policies and strategic measures for promoting social stability and long-term stability in Xinjiang. He said it has a strong political, ideological and theoretical nature and that Xinjiang's work must be "guided by Xi Jinping's thoughts on socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era, strengthen the "four consciousnesses", strengthen the "four confidences", and achieve the "two safeguards".

10. Concluding the symposium, CPPCC Chairman Wang Yang described Xi Jinping's "important speech" as "profound in thought, and rich in content" and a "programmatically guiding Xinjiang work in the new era and a powerful ideological weapon". He too stressed the need to "focus on deep-seated issues related to long-term stability" and the necessity of strengthening organizational leadership and coordination, carrying out a variety of publicity activities and penetrating the grassroots to get deeply rooted in the hearts of the people.

11. The US-based China-owned Duowei news outlet gave an interesting insight into the sharp rise in China's expenditure on security in the Xinjiang-Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR). Saying that it had been tracking security expenditure for some years, it said the expenditure on public security in Xinjiang increased significantly after 2014, from 22.22 billion Yuan in 2014 to 57.95 billion Yuan in 2017, a cumulative increase of 161%, especially in 2017 compared to 2016. Stating that an increase of 92.6% is surprising it suggested that a considerable part may perhaps be used for operation of the re-education conversion training centres.

12. A People's Daily article (September 30) on the Xinjiang conference publicised that Xi Jinping's speech had been widely welcomed throughout Xinjiang. Interesting were the remarks by Qi Xinping, Secretary of the Party Committee of the 6th Division of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC) in Wujiaqu city of Xinjiang, which confirmed that the XPCC had been assigned an additional new role, which explains Xi Jinping's reference in his speech to the need for enhancing the organisational and mobilization capabilities of the XPCC. Qi Xinping said the XPCC needs to strengthen its "capacity for maintaining stability and continuously improve its organizational advantages and ability to mobilize Xinjiang residents". He called for forging the XPCC into a "top militia force in defense of the border line of China", improving its capabilities related to stability maintenance and contingency response, and establishing a "strong force that helps maintain the security along the border".

13. The sharp rise in XUAR's security budget, pronounced emphasis on stability maintenance and call to firmly establish a national ideology clearly indicate that the CCP will intensify 'de-radicalisation' measures and 're-education' to more effectively absorb Uyghurs into the Han culture. The expanded role of the XPCC will see its greater involvement in security functions and its presence along Xinjiang's borders with the Central Asian Republics and Russia. Xi Jinping's acknowledgement of the good work done between 2014 and 2019 is also implicit recognition of XUAR Party Secretary Chen Quanguo's efforts. Chen Quanguo, who was handpicked for appointment as Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) Party Secretary at then Vice President Xi Jinping's instance, was moved to Xinjiang on promotion as Politburo member in

recognition of the good work done in TAR. Born in 1955, Chen Quanguo will be just 65 years old at the 20th Party Congress in 2021 and will be in the running for elevation to the PBSC.

(The author is a former Additional Secretary, Cabinet Secretariat, Government of India and is presently President of the Centre for China Analysis and Strategy.)

