

Belt and Road Initiative makes steady progress: spokesman

The Belt and Road Initiative is advancing steadily, bringing investment and jobs to participating countries, a spokesman for the annual session of China's top political advisory body said Thursday.

More than 100 countries and international organizations have joined the initiative and over 40 of them have cooperation agreements with China, said Wang Guoqing, spokesman for the fifth session of the 12th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC).

Chinese businesses have helped build 56 economic and trade cooperation zones in 20 countries along the Belt and Road, with total investment exceeding 18 billion U.S. dollars, helping generate over 1 billion U.S. dollars in tax revenue and more than 160,000 jobs, Wang told a press conference on Thursday.

He said the CPPCC National Committee will do more work in 2017 to promote cultural and people-to-people exchanges with countries along the Belt and Road.

The Belt and Road Initiative was proposed by China in 2013 and aims to become a trade and infrastructure network connecting Asia with Europe and Africa along ancient trade routes.

In the spirit of regional connectivity, China is working in aviation, power, rail, road and telecommunications projects with participating countries.

China to launch space station core module in 2018

China will launch a space station core module in 2018 as the first step in completing the country's first space outpost, according to a senior engineer with China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp. (CASC) on Thursday.

The core module of the space station, named "Tianhe-1" according to previous reports, will be launched on board a new-generation Long March-5 heavyweight carrier rocket, said Bao Weimin, director with CASC and a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC).

It will be followed by a series of launches for other components of the space station, including two space labs, which will dock with the core module while

in space, in the next four years or so, he said, adding that the space station will be completed around 2022.

Assembly of the core module has already been completed and tests are currently under way, said Bao, who is in Beijing for the annual session of China's top political advisory body.

Earlier reports said the new Chinese space station will initially be much smaller than the current International Space Station (ISS), which weighs 420 tonnes, but could be expanded for future scientific research and international cooperation.

With the ISS set to retire in 2024, the Chinese space station will offer a promising alternative, and China will be the only country with a permanent space station.

Bao said the Chinese outpost will function in orbit for "dozens of years," and that it had been specially designed to be able to handle space debris.

"For the big pieces (of space debris), we could conduct evasive maneuvers, and for those measuring less than 10 cm in size, we just take the hit," Bao said, adding that all key parts of the space station will be serviceable and replaceable.

He went on to say that the next five years will see some exciting advances in China's space program.

In particular, the Long March-5 launch missions have been scheduled this year, including one that will take the Chang'e-5 lunar probe to the Moon in November and return with lunar samples.

Long March-5 is a large, two-stage rocket with a payload capacity of 25 tonnes to low-Earth orbit and 14 tonnes to geostationary transfer orbit, the largest of China's carrier rockets. Its carrying capacity is about 2.5 times that of the current main model Long March carrier rockets.

The rocket will also be used in China's planned Mars probes, and possibly future missions to Jupiter and other planets within the solar system, Bao said. Endi

[China's two sessions to highlight Xi's thoughts](#)

Having made headlines at the Davos World Economic Forum with his vigorous defense of globalization, Chinese President Xi Jinping is expected to take the spotlight in another gathering with global influence: the "two sessions"

in Beijing.

The fifth session of the 12th National People's Congress (NPC), and the fifth session of the 12th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, will open on March 5 and March 3, respectively.

The annual sessions of the top legislature and top political advisory body are among the most important political events for the world's second largest economy.

The NPC is the highest body of state power, enabling the Chinese people to exercise their power as "the master of state." New state leaders will be elected at the NPC session in March 2018 after the 19th Communist Party of China (CPC) National Congress elects a new Party leadership later this year.

It was at the first session of the 12th NPC in March 2013 that Xi was elected president. He had been elected general secretary of the CPC Central Committee in November the previous year at the 18th CPC National Congress.

This year's two sessions are the first since Xi was endorsed as the core of the CPC Central Committee last October.

"Through the meetings, greater consensus will be gathered to build a moderately prosperous society and Xi's thoughts on state governance will be more clear-cut," said Xin Ming, a professor with the Party School of the CPC Central Committee.

Over the past four years, Xi's governance thoughts have been guiding China's development. The book "Xi Jinping: The Governance of China," a collection of his speeches, provides insight into his concepts, resolve and wisdom of governance. More than six million copies have been distributed worldwide.

Officials at all levels should align their thinking with Xi's strategic blueprint, the "four comprehensives," which is a four-pronged strategy to achieve a moderately prosperous society, deepen reform, advance rule of law and govern the Party strictly.

For China, the strategy creates routes to build a socialist modern country.

For observers, Xi's speeches and policy initiatives at the "two sessions" will send important signals about how China will march toward what Xi called, the "great dream of revitalizing the Chinese nation."

STRONG LEADERSHIP

Xi's governance thoughts, ranging from economic and social reform to foreign affairs and military transformation, have been greatly influencing the country's course.

In the economic sphere, Xi has led the country to achieve a remarkable growth. The country remains the top engine of global growth, with the International Monetary Fund predicting China's contribution would account for 39 percent of the world's economic expansion in 2016.

China reported 6.7 percent GDP growth in 2016, outpacing most major economies in the world.

Xi has called the current phase of growth the “new normal,” as China shifts to a more sustainable development and distributes the benefits more evenly.

To ensure this crucial rebalancing is successful, Xi is advocating “a new political economy,” which draws on and develops Marxist thought.

Supply-side structural reform is key to understanding the new political economy and China’s future development. Fundamentally different from the “supply-side economics” in the West that focuses on tax cuts, China’s supply-side structural reform involves a set of measures including dissolving overcapacity and developing the real economy.

Xi has led the country as it rolls out reforms across all sectors that advance state governance, such as consultative democracy and rule of law.

The reform-minded president also heads leading groups and commissions covering key areas including finance and economic affairs, national security, Internet security and informatization, as well as military and civilian integration. The mechanism is believed to help strengthen centralized and unified leadership of the Party in state governance.

Xi stresses placing power into an institutional cage. The decision to establish the national supervision commission to place the use of power under close supervision exemplifies this model.

To build a clean and advanced ruling party, Xi has carried out a sweeping campaign against corruption, which he warned could lead to the collapse of the Party and the downfall of the state. Since Xi took the helm of the Party, the anti-corruption fight has gained “crushing momentum” and earned popular support by netting at least 240 centrally administered officials and more than 1 million low level officials for violating CPC and government rules.

Safeguarding Xi’s core status is “a political issue of the utmost importance,” said senior local officials at the recently concluded sessions of legislative and political advisory bodies in China’s 31 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities.

GATHER NEW MOMENTUM

Xi and his comrades must take steps to ensure China escapes the “middle-income trap,” which few developing countries have managed to avoid, and continues to open up to fuel global growth.

In his New Year speech, Xi called on the nation to “roll up our sleeves and work harder.”

Prior to the two sessions, Xi visited Hebei Province and said that poverty alleviation was fundamental to building a moderately prosperous society.

During the 2013-2016 period, 55 million people have shaken off poverty – more

than the population of South Korea. China plans to eliminate poverty by 2020.

During an inspection of Beijing, Xi stressed building a people-oriented city by addressing problems of overpopulation, traffic congestion, soaring house prices and air pollution.

He also highlighted coordinated development of Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei, an ambitious project to link more than 100 million people to become an important engine for the country's economic growth. Huge progress has been made in transportation, industry and the environment in the past three years.

At a February workshop attended by officials at the provincial and ministerial levels, Xi urged them to "choose the heaviest burden and crack the hardest nuts" when pursuing economic and social development.

"Xi's speech at the workshop was grounded in Marxism and it will provide the ideological basis for the 19th CPC National Congress," said Zhu Lingjun with the Party School of the CPC Central Committee.

Xi is also striving to establish a global landscape featuring win-win results, common development and equality, highlighting the country's image as a responsible and active player in global governance.

He attended the World Economic Forum annual meeting in January, inspiring the world by advocating free trade and warning against protectionism.

Xi told the forum that China is not only the beneficiary of economic globalization, but also a contributor to it. To this end, he has repeatedly called for building "a community of shared future for mankind."

In early February, Xi and his U.S. counterpart Donald Trump held a phone conversation on bilateral ties, a good first step in consolidating relations between the world's two largest economies.

"They are the [world's] two leading nations and it is crucial that there are open communications so there are no misunderstandings," said Darrell West, director of Governance Studies at the Brookings Institution.

China will host a Belt and Road forum for international cooperation in May to make globalization more inclusive and beneficial, followed by a summit of the emerging-market bloc of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) in September.

CONFORMITY

The two sessions are expected to drum up support for the country's next round of reforms. Thousands of deputies and political advisors will speak on various issues including economic globalization, national defense and diplomacy.

The whole Party and nation will closely unite around the CPC Central Committee with Xi as the core. "It is a necessity," said Zhang Zhao'an, deputy director of Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences. "While we are

handling a complex situation at home and abroad, we can not afford to lose direction.”

It is unique that an 88-million strong political party gather around its leadership and then unites and leads over 1.3 billion people toward a common destination that delivers benefits not only to themselves but also to people around the world.

“Behind all the above is the Chinese philosophy of governance, including two concepts: ‘minyi,’ or public opinion, and ‘minxin,’ the hearts and minds of the people,” said Wen Yang, a researcher with the Institute of China Studies at Fudan University.

“New ideas, thoughts and strategies of state governance under the leadership of the CPC Central Committee with Xi as the core have solid foundation of public opinion. Proven successful by experience, they have won the people’s support,” he said. “They will become an important theme of the ‘two sessions’ and the CPC’s 19th National Congress.”

CPPCC holds press conference ahead of annual session

[unable to retrieve full-text content]The National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) held a press conference on Thursday afternoon, one day ahead of the top political advisory body’s annual session.

Riding an asteroid: China’s next space goal

After sending a probe to Mars in 2020, China plans to explore three asteroids and land on one of them to conduct scientific research, according to a Chinese asteroid research expert.

The “China’s Space Activities in 2016” white paper, issued by the Information Office of the State Council recently, also mentioned asteroid exploration in outlining the major tasks of the country’s space industry in the next five years.

Ji Jianghui, a researcher at the Purple Mountain Observatory of the Chinese

Academy of Sciences and a member of the expert committee for scientific goal argumentation of deep space exploration in China, took part in expert discussions on the main scientific goals of China's deep space exploration in the next two decades.

The committee basically decided to conduct expeditions to asteroids and then Jupiter and its moon system after the Mars expedition.

"The experts' plan is to fly a probe by an asteroid, to fly side by side with an asteroid for a period, and to land on a third one to conduct in situ sampling analysis on the surface," said Ji.

So far, only the United States and Japan had landed probes on asteroids. Japanese probe Hayabusa 1 landed on the asteroid Itokawa, and brought samples back to Earth.

"China will send the Chang'e-5 lunar probe to the moon and bring samples back in 2017. If that mission succeeds, it would mean China, like Japan, would be able to bring back samples from asteroids to study in labs on Earth in the future," said Ji.

Scientists would give priority to detecting near-Earth asteroids to analyze their probability of colliding with Earth.

At the same time, they are eager to study the formation and evolution of asteroids, which might shed light on the origins of the solar system, as well as the origins of life and water on Earth.

Chinese scientists plan to fly a probe side by side with an asteroid called Apophis for a period to conduct close observation, and land on the asteroid 1996 FG3. The probe is also expected to conduct a fly-by of an asteroid to be selected according to the launch time. The whole mission would last around six years, said Ji.

THREATS FROM SPACE

Discovered in 2004, Apophis is about the size of two football fields, with its longest diameter at about 394 meters. Analysis shows it will come very close to Earth in 2029, missing our planet by some 30,000 kilometers. The distance, a hair's breadth in astronomical terms, is within the orbit of the moon, and even closer than some man-made satellites. It will be the closest asteroid of its size in recorded history. The asteroid is supposed to come around Earth again in 2036.

Apophis was believed to pose a big threat to Earth when it was first discovered. More than 100 scientific groups around the globe are studying it. Further study has shown it has only a 1-in-a-million chance of hitting the Earth in 2029.

Although we don't have to worry about Apophis for the time being, scientists estimate there are about 300,000 near-Earth objects with a diameter over 40 meters, and only 3 percent of them have been discovered. An international asteroid warning network was set up in December 2013 to monitor potential

threats.

As a member of the warning network, China's Purple Mountain Observatory, discovered three new near-Earth asteroids – 2017 BK3, 2017 BM3 and 2017 BL3 – in January this year, and 2017 BL3 poses a potential threat to Earth, said Ji.

“In order to cope with the potential threat of the near-Earth objects, we need not only ground-based telescopes to form a monitoring and warning system, but also space probes to conduct close investigations of the asteroids to study their physical characteristics, interior structure and content,” Ji said.

China's asteroid exploration will help scientists better understand the basic features of the near-Earth objects, and seek effective measures to deal with the possibility of a collision, said Ji.

ORIGINS OF LIFE?

Some scientists believe asteroid 1996 FG3 might hide the secret of the origins of life on Earth.

At present, there are two main theories about the origins of life. One is that life was conceived on Earth itself, and the other is that life originated in outer space. Scientists have discovered many meteorites containing organic compounds, which are believed to be related to the origins of life.

Many asteroids also contain water. And some scientists believe the water on Earth might have been brought by asteroids or comets.

“Scientists have conducted many ground-based astronomical observations on asteroid 1996 FG3. Spectral analysis shows that it is a carbonaceous asteroid, and it's very likely that it contains organic components which are needed for the origins of life,” Ji said.

China has already conducted a fly-by observation of an asteroid named Toutatis.

On Dec. 13, 2012, China's second lunar probe, Chang'e-2, after successfully completing its mission, rendezvoused with Toutatis at a distance of 770 meters, as the space rock, bigger than a city block, swept by Earth at a distance of around 7 million kilometers.

It was the world's first close fly-by observation of Toutatis. The probe took high-resolution images providing a number of discoveries.

Ji and his collaborators conducted intensive research, finding the ginger-root-shaped asteroid is about 4,750 meters long and 1,950 meters wide. They studied how it rotated in space.

The research also revealed new insights into the geological features and formation of the asteroid, showing it was essentially rubble and that the

impact craters on its surface could be 1.6 billion years old.