



# TWO SESSIONS

## Going from strength to strength

Progress achieved in past five years under Xi's leadership brings country closer to Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation

By XINHUA

The imposing Great Hall of the People, in the center of Beijing, bears witness to China's democratic politics.

In 2013, inside its magnificent auditorium, Xi Jinping was elected president of the People's Republic of China by nearly 3,000 deputies to the National People's Congress (NPC). With the convening of the congress this month, deputies are expected to once again elect a president.

Xi took over the presidency at a time when public concerns were common about corruption, the wealth gap and pollution.

After being elected, Xi said: "In face of the mighty trend of the times and earnest expectations of the people for a better life, we cannot have the slightest complacency, or get the slightest bit slack at work."

He expounded his vision of a Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation to be made true by and for the people.

Five years on, China has made historic achievements. The Chinese are much more optimistic.

Zheng Changzhong, a political science professor with Fudan University, said he would give the leadership a high approval rating.

"Not only did China achieve steady development, we have also created a model to advance human civilization," Zheng said. "Behind these achievements, Xi Jinping played his vital leading role as a *lingxiu* (charismatic leader)."

Re-elected general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee last October, Xi said the Chinese nation, which since modern times had endured so much for so long, achieved a tremendous transformation: It has stood up, grown rich and is becoming strong.

There is no better way for the ordinary people to feel that strength than having a fuller pocket.

Under Xi's leadership, the Chinese economy kept growing steadily over the past five years. The year 2017 ended on a strong footing, with an annual 6.9 percent growth rate.

The size of the economy expanded to more than 82 trillion yuan (\$13 trillion) from 54 trillion yuan, retaining its place as the second largest in the world.

China's per capita disposable income stood at 25,974 yuan last year, up 7.3 percent year-on-year in real terms. Residents saw their salaries rising steadily over the past five years.



President Xi Jinping, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, in February visits the homes of impoverished villagers of the Yi ethnic group who live deep in the Daliang Mountains of Zhaojue county, in Southwest China's Sichuan province. JU PENG / XINHUA

Liu He, a prominent figure in Xi's economic team, revealed at the 2018 World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, that China's middle-income population had reached 400 million and was still growing.

The poor are getting rich much faster.

Experts expect the country's 282-million-strong migrant workers to become a major force and make it into the middle-income group.

Zou Bin, 23, is one of the young migrants who have witnessed the change over the past five years.

Zou started out young, laying bricks at a construction site in Central China's Hunan province upon leaving high school. He took his job seriously and worked hard.

In 2015, Zou was already top of his trade and represented China in a global vocational skills championship. He also earned himself a place in the Fortune 500 firm China Construction Group, receiving higher pay and leading a team of his own.

This year, Zou even made it to the Great Hall of the People as an NPC deputy.

To give hard-working people like Zou what they deserve, Xi took bold reforms to grow the economy and let wealth be distributed more fairly. These were not achieved by cranking up money printers but through

a series of reforms.

Xi took the helm of the Central Leading Group for Deepening Overall Reform. More than 1,500 reform measures have been introduced by the central authorities: Supply-side structural reform to balance the economy, cutting government red tape and bureaucracy to encourage medium and small businesses, and the opening of free trade zones across the country.

### Poverty reduction

Over the past five years, 66 million urban jobs — a number comparable to the British population — were created.

To balance income, China cut perks and benefits for officials and limited State firm bosses' pay. On the other hand, workers and professionals received higher salaries, while old-age and healthcare pensions improved.

Xi made a solemn promise on poverty reduction, with an ambition to eliminate poverty in all poor counties and regions by 2020.

And the country is getting there. More than 68.5 million people had been lifted out of poverty over the past five years. That means 37,000 people escaped poverty every single day.

Xi vowed that "no one should be left behind".

To fulfill this mission, Party and government officials took turns to stay in poor villages. They helped craft out individualized poverty reduction plans for every family and worked with them to achieve their goal.

Jiang Fu'an was one such cadre. In 2015, Jiang, then a prefecture government auditor, arrived at a remote mountainous village in Liangshan Yi autonomous prefecture in Southwest China's Sichuan province. He walked door to door to visit each of the more than 100 poor households.

With his help, dozens of poor children got education near their home. But in 2016, before finishing his stint, Jiang collapsed on the job and died. He was just 26 years old.

The village was in grief. Jiang was remembered for sacrificing his life for a great cause.

Liangshan, with its stubborn poverty, is a concern for Xi. Ahead of the 2018 lunar new year, he chose to come here for his inspection tour, visiting homes of the poor Yi ethnic villagers and pledging to "banish" the ghost of poverty.

"Our socialist system is to let people of all ethnic groups live a great life," Xi said.

William Jones, Washington bureau chief of the *Executive Intelligence Review* news magazine, said ending poverty had long been

regarded a major task for humanity, but until recently was seen as a "utopian dream".

"With China, that dream is now becoming a reality," he said.

### Cleaner China

Xi also waged a war on pollution.

When he began the presidency, ecological degradation had become a major challenge facing humanity.

Xi attended the Paris climate summit and a few months later China signed the Paris Agreement.

Beijing, plagued by persistent smog, has been at the center of the struggle since the State Council, China's cabinet, launched a national air pollution control campaign in 2013.

Last year, Beijingers shelved their face masks as the number of "severely polluted" days dropped to just 23, compared with 58 in 2013.

The municipal authorities said that for nine months in 2017, the levels of PM2.5 (fine hazardous particulate matter) lingered around the lowest point in five years.

Across the country, the average density of PM2.5 in 338 cities was 43 micrograms per cubic meters, falling 6.5 percent year-on-year.

Progress was also made in the protection of water and soil resources.

China also began to set up nation-