

MAKING HISTORY:

Blueprint includes broader opening-up and full development of human potential

By KARL WILSON and XINHUA

As ceremonial music echoed throughout the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, Xi Jinping took his place on the podium.

The music stopped when he reached toward a large copy of China's red-bound Constitution.

Dressed in a dark suit, Xi, 64, placed his left hand on the Constitution, raised his right hand to his temple and made a fist of solidarity.

"I pledge my allegiance to the Constitution," Xi began.

"(To) safeguard the Constitution's authority, fulfill my legal obligations, be loyal to the country and the people, be committed and honest in my duty, accept the people's supervision and work hard for a great modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious and beautiful."

He bowed, and the nearly 3,000 National People's Congress (NPC) deputies broke spontaneously into thunderous applause.

Watched by tens of millions on their televisions or smartphones, it was the first time a Chinese president had ever taken such an oath upon assuming office.

Xi has been in the spotlight this month at the annual sessions of the NPC and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, commonly known as the two sessions.

On March 17, he was unanimously elected president of the People's Republic of China and chairman of the Central Military Commission of the PRC.

Xi first took over the presidency five years ago, pledging to push forward the great cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics and to strive for rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

In his closing address to the country's top legislative session on March 20, Xi said: "China has continuously striven for its dream of realizing great national rejuvenation for over 170 years. Turning the grand blueprint for China into reality is the new Long March."

Much work, however, still needs to be done before the dream can be realized.

Xi said: "We need to deepen reform more comprehensively and broaden opening-up with intensified efforts and with more concrete measures."

"We should guide our country towards a future full of hope," he said, adding that the new era "belongs to everyone."

"Nothing can stop us fulfilling our dream," he said.

Nearly five months ago, Xi was



President Xi Jinping meets with villagers from quake-ravaged Ludian county, in Southwest China's Yunnan province, at a temporary shelter in January 2015. The area was hit by a magnitude 6.5 earthquake in August 2014, leaving at least 617 people dead and 112 missing. JU PENG / XINHUA

re-elected general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee. The Party's 19th National Congress enshrined in the CPC Constitution Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era.

This month, at the 13th NPC session, Xi Jinping Thought was added into the country's Constitution as a guiding principle of the State.

Led by Xi, China is becoming strong.

The size of the economy has expanded to more than 82 trillion yuan (\$12.9 trillion) from 54 trillion yuan over the past five years, growing by 7.1 percent a year on average. More than 66 million new urban jobs have been created.

Consumption has become a major growth driver, contributing to 58.8 percent of economic growth last year, up from 54.9 percent five years ago. The share of the services sector has climbed to 51.6 percent from 45.3 percent.

More than 68 million people escaped poverty. Personal income increased by 7.4 percent annually on average. Life expectancy reached 76.7 years, leading developing countries.

The environment is improving as strict rules on water, soil and air pollution control have been enforced. Notably, over the five years, the num-

ber of heavily polluted days in major cities was halved.

The new ministry for ecological environment will absorb the duties formerly held separately by land, water and agriculture ministries.

Xi made this happen through reform. He is regarded as the chief architect. Over the last five years more than 1,500 reform measures were issued, affecting economic, political, social, cultural and environmental fields, national defense and Party-building. Government red tape was cut. Foreign investment was made easier.

A week after the 19th Party Congress, Xi took leading officials to the Party's birthplace in Shanghai and East China's Zhejiang province, a "roots-tracing" trip to remind cadres of the Party's original aspirations.

"The CPC seeks happiness for the Chinese people," Xi said in an NPC panel discussion. "Whatever issues the people are unhappy about or dissatisfied with, we must work hard to solve them."

In his closing address, Xi reiterated the point that it is the people "who have created the history". And he urged all civil servants to "always put people at the highest place, wholeheartedly serve the people and work for the people's interests and happiness".

Professor James Laurenceson,

deputy director of the Australia-China Relations Institute at the University of Technology Sydney, said this year's two sessions was "probably more significant than previous ones".

He told *China Daily Asia Weekly* that changes to the Constitution, the Party and government are significant, but "we won't know the full implications for some time".

He said Xi's standing among the Chinese people is high.

"He is popular and seen as doing a good job," Laurenceson said, adding that Xi's anti-corruption campaign was welcomed by the people.

"Five years ago, corruption was a serious problem. True, corruption has not been totally eradicated, but it is much better today than it was five years ago. This is a fact ... it's not made up."

The creation of a new anti-corruption super agency with massively expanded powers will enable it to question, interrogate, freeze assets and put individuals into detention during its investigations.

For the first time in history, a billion-plus people are crossing the threshold of modernization together. Challenges like material shortages and the wealth gap will be overcome. People will feel much more fulfilled, happier and safer.

Shen Jilan, 89, is a witness to the profound changes over time.

A farmer in North China's Shanxi province, Shen was first elected to the NPC in 1954 and was re-elected 12 times in a row.

The octogenarian likes to describe the changes in her annual commute to the Great Hall of the People. In 1954, she spent four days on the back of a donkey, a truck bed and then a train to reach Beijing. Today, the capital is just three hours away by high-speed train.

China is indeed on a high-speed train, one that is moving toward the full development of human potential, as envisioned by Karl Marx.

This explains China's growing relevance to the world. After all, it is exploring a path to advance humanity.

This year marks the 200th birthday of Marx and the 170th anniversary of the issuance of *The Communist Manifesto*.

Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era is considered the latest adaptation of Marxism to the Chinese context.

Today, China's annual contribution to world economic growth is bigger than that of the United States, Japan and the eurozone combined. It accounts for more than 70 percent of poverty reduction worldwide.

Rajiv Biswas, Asia-Pacific chief

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