
China Briefs

President Xi Jinping Visits Tibet

Chinese President Xi Jinping paid an unexpected visit to Tibet on July 23, on the occasion of the return of Tibet to China in 1951, after the chaos of World War II and the civil war in China. He first visited the village of Nyingchi, where he inspected the Nyang River bridge project on ecological preservation, reiterating his belief that “lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets.” He also visited Nyingchi Railway Station to see the operation of the Lhasa-Nyingchi Railway. Officially put into operation last month, the Lhasa-Nyingchi Railway is Tibet’s first electrified railway. President Xi called for the acceleration of the construction of railways, highways, and other major infrastructure in Tibet.

China Mobilizes the Nation in Major Science Drive

China is moving rapidly to anchor its “innovation economy” in science and technology with a major push to bring science to the center of life of the Chinese people. In the same way that the “Sputnik surprise” inspired the world, and particularly young people, to expand the study of science and mathematics, China is doing likewise for its population of 1.4 billion people. On July 19th, Premier Li Keqiang visited the National Natural Science Foundation of China to hear reports on progress in basic scientific research from the Department of

Mathematical and Physical Sciences, the Information Management Platform of the Science Foundations, and the Department of Interdisciplinary Sciences.

Li underlined the fact that basic research was key to long-term scientific development, but was still not well enough developed in China: “Basic research is the cornerstone of promoting original innovation and building a ‘high-rise’ for technological and industrial development. Our country has reached a critical period when we must vigorously strengthen basic research. Based on reality, we must not miss this opportunity.”

At the same time, the State Council also issued a statement with regard to the campaign to popularize science: in literature, schools, on television and in the cinema. Enhanced science education will begin at an early stage, in elementary schools. On July 18, China opened to the public the largest Astronomy museum in the world, the Shanghai Astronomy Museum, a part of the Shanghai Science and Technology Museum, for precisely this purpose.

In June, the State Council issued the National Action Plan for Scientific Literacy 2021-2025. It concluded that by the end of last year, at the close of the last national plan of 2006, the level of scientific literacy in the population had reached 10.56%. The study found that the level of scientific literacy is highest in Beijing, 24.07%, and in Shanghai, 24.3%, but in the western provinces it is only 8.44%, and rural regions only 6.45%. Female scientific literacy, at 8.82%, is noticeably lower than the national average. The State Council defines “scientific literacy” as the understanding of sci-

entific concepts and processes, as well as the ability to apply them in analyzing and solving real-life, practical issues.

Flooding Continues in Central China as Major Mobilization Is Underway

The major flooding in Henan province in central China has taken a heavy toll, affecting an area of 3 million people, but has been met by the type of major mobilization we had seen in similar flooding along the Yangtze, before the construction of the Three Gorges Dam.

While the Western media are predicting that this will seriously affect “China’s rise” and do more damage to supply chains based in China, the country has a tremendous ability to recuperate from even the worst crises, as was witnessed in the mobilization following the outbreak of COVID-19 in Wuhan. Both the PLA and the People’s Armed Police have been fully mobilized to save people who are stranded, and to build temporary dikes to control the flooding. Three thousand military personnel have been deployed in ten different danger zones around the provincial capital of Zhengzhou. At least one dam has been breached and the electricity supply has gone down in many neighborhoods, and the water supply has been affected. The floods have had some effect on the regional food supply, Henan being a major agricultural province. Zhengzhou, which was heavily hit by the flood, is a major hub for the Belt and Road Initiative, with major air and rail con-

nections to Europe. Other cities in the province, like Anyang and Kaifeng, are important heritage sites, and are still under a major flood warning as of this writing.

Unlike the response to the floods in Germany, where the media and the political leadership falsely blame only “climate change,” the lead editorial in the *Global Times* noted: “Human beings cannot build a completely safe city. The most fundamental guarantee on disaster resistance lies in human beings’ wisdom and measures to fight nature based on the increasingly solid infrastructure.” President Xi has called for a national mobilization to deal with the crisis, underlining the importance of saving lives.

Visit to the Middle East Underlines China’s Greater Presence There

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Syria on July 19 for the first time since war began in that country in 2011, meeting with both his Syrian counterpart, Foreign Minister Faysal Mikdad, and President Bashar al-Assad. It was his first stop on a four-day trip to Southwest Asia that also included Egypt and Algeria.

High on the agenda were economic agreements on reconstruction and Syria’s participation in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Wang assured Syria that China will explore ways in which to strengthen Chinese cooperation with Syria in agriculture, trade, infrastructure, and connectivity, as well as medical and vaccine aid, the Chinese Foreign Ministry reported.

In all of his meetings, Minister Wang spoke of securing Syria as a partner in the BRI. No specifics were cited, but the Chairman of Syria’s

Planning and International Cooperation Authority, Imad Sabouni, reported that the two countries are preparing for the Sino-Syrian joint committee to meet soon. An agreement on economic and technical cooperation (not further described) was signed, and a document for delivery of the first batch of food aid to Syria was signed by the head of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent while Wang was there.

In Egypt, where Wang met with President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi and Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry, the Belt and Road was also discussed. Wang assured his Egyptian hosts of China’s “firm support for Egypt’s continued exploration for a development path in keeping with its national realities, as well as China’s readiness to further dovetail the BRI with Egypt Vision 2030.” An agreement was signed to establish a China-Egypt intergovernmental cooperation committee, and the officials discussed how to “expand cooperation in the fields of industrial capacity, infrastructure, new energy, space and aviation, and cutting-edge technology. Wang said China looks forward to elevating relations with Egypt, “and building this relationship into a prototype of China-Arab and China-Africa community with a shared future.”

Important on this leg of the trip was the discussion of China’s support for the Palestinian Authority and for a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestinian dispute. Wang Yi was also intent on getting vaccines to the Palestinians on the Gaza Strip and will expand joint production of vaccines with Egypt.

While in Egypt, Wang Yi also met with Ahmed Aboul Gheit, the Secretary-General of the Arab League, discussing arrangements for the first summit of China and the Arab states, to be organized in 2022 in Saudi Arabia.

China National Nuclear Begins Construction of a Small Modular Reactor

China National Nuclear Corporation (CNNC) now has a small modular reactor (SMR) “in the construction phase.” The reactor, Linglong One, is a multi-purpose pressurized water reactor (PWR) design developed by CNNC following more than ten years of independent research and development. It is another significant achievement of independent innovation after Hualong One, CNNC’s third-generation nuclear power technology. In 2016, the Linglong One design became the first SMR in the world to pass a safety review by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in 2016, but Chinese regulatory issues held up construction until this year.

Unlike traditional nuclear power technologies, SMR technology has such features as being small, modular, integrated, and passive. Safer, quicker to build, and more flexible in deployment, SMRs can be used as clean distributed energy. In addition to generating electricity, they can also be used for sea-water desalination, and heating or cooling, and can serve as self-contained energy sources for parks, islands, mining areas, and high energy-consuming enterprises. Each Linglong One unit has a power generating capacity of 125,000 kilowatt (kW). After being completed, it will have an annual power generation capacity of 1 billion kilowatt hours (kWh), meeting the energy demands of 526,000 households. This is of great significance in terms of furthering the safe development and independent innovation of nuclear power, as well as providing an energy guarantee for the construction of the Hainan Free Trade Port.