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**‘A BRIEF ASSESSMENT OF CHINA’S 3rd SESSION OF THE 13th CPPCC -- MAY
2020’**

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As usual China’s top political advisory body, the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), held its annual plenary session in Beijing along with the National People’s Congress (NPC). The plenum was delayed this year and held two months later from May 21 to May 27, 2020, because of the Coronavirus pandemic. The pandemic cast a shadow over the plenary meetings, which were shortened to a week instead of the usual ten days and restrictions curtailed the number of press conferences and correspondents allowed to attend. For the first time, provision for video conferencing was made for those not physically attending the CPPCC and NPC Plenums.

2. Han Fangming, Vice Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the CPPCC National Committee, said prior to start of the sessions, that "Due to the COVID-19 epidemic and the shortened session, the accommodation and meeting venues for CPPCC members and NPC delegates are simpler, stricter and more efficient." Hotels and meeting rooms for the sessions accordingly provided reduced services with fewer newspapers and no banners, red carpets, flowers, bars or cafes. CPPCC members and NPC delegates were asked to bring their own pens or notepads and at the venue they were provided only a single bottle of water, a teacup, and a pack of antiseptic wipes. Full-page reminders on how to avoid catching or block spreading the virus were handed out to each invitee. ‘Social distancing’ was enforced and attendees were encouraged not to shake hands, congregate outside the meeting rooms or linger in confined places, as well as not to leave their hotels or the convention areas without permission from the organizers.

3. To burnish the credibility of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which was dented by unprecedented public criticism particularly during the Coronavirus pandemic, the state-owned CCTV on the eve of the 'Big Two' sessions reported (May 21), that CCP members had donated 8.36 billion RMB (US\$ 1.18 billion) for the fight against the coronavirus in the past three months. It said all the money was sent to the 'Party Central' for redistribution. Chinese President Xi Jinping also sought to further tighten his grip over the Party and PLA and shore his position, with the sudden announcement on May 21 that seventeen Deputies to the NPC had been asked to resign. Four of them were senior PLA officers, with a Lt. General and one Major General, having outstanding records.

4. Some developments timed to coincide with the opening of the 'Big Two' on May 21, did, however, occur to embarrass China's leadership. At least three critics of Chinese President Xi Jinping and the CCP succeeded in publicising their criticisms. These included: Shanghai-based Chinese Constitutional lawyer 43-year old Zhang Xuezhong posting an 'open' letter on WeChat on May 9, addressed to all NPC Deputies; retired senior Central Party School Professor Cai Xia whose scathing criticism of Xi Jinping and the CCP on a 20-minute recording circulated for almost a month on the Chinese web; and the publication on May 21, in Hongkong's 'Mainland China' of an over 2000-character essay penned by Xu Zhangrun, former Professor of Law at Beijing's prestigious Tsinghua University who has near iconic status among China's academics and intellectuals. Separately, the White House released a toughly worded 16-page document titled 'The United States Strategic Approach to China' on May 20, which put the spotlight on the strained US-China relationship that has adversely impacted China's economy and realisation of its 'Two Centenary' goals. Quite interestingly the document comments: "Our approach is not premised on determining a particular end state for China", possibly to assure the CCP that the American objective is not to destroy it!

5. Preparatory to the CPPCC and NPC plenums, Xinhua (May 15) reported that the Politburo met on May 15 to discuss the draft of the State Council's Government Work Report that Chinese Premier Li Keqiang would present to the third meeting of the 13th NPC. Xinhua said the meeting believed that in the past year "China's development has faced many difficult challenges", but "the Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at the core" united all the people to overcome difficulties and complete the main goals and tasks of the year. It said the Party Central Committee has made epidemic prevention and control a top priority. The meeting, it said, "emphasised that the current global epidemic situation and the world economic

situation are still grim and complex, and the challenges facing China's development are unprecedented". It said "to do a good job in the government this year" the "strong leadership of the Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at the core, and under the guidance of Xi Jinping's socialist ideology with Chinese characteristics in the new era" was necessary. It emphasised the importance of expanding domestic demand, achieving the goal of tackling poverty, and promoting the agricultural harvest and increasing farmers' incomes.

6. 2,158 CPPCC delegates and 2,878 Deputies to the NPC, which included the 290 Deputies representing the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and People's Armed Police (PAP), assembled in Beijing's Great Hall of the People from May 21 for the week-long plenary sessions. As per practice, CPPCC Delegates were permitted to sit-in on NPC meetings though not vote.

7. On May 21, the opening day of the third session of the 13th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), Wang Yang, CPPCC Chairman and PBSC member, in his Report announced: "We will ensure the long-term stability of 'one country, two systems.' We will continue to support the improvement of the implementation of the systems and mechanisms of the constitution and Basic Law." The Global Times (May 21) said the CPPCC would also organise people from minority ethnic groups and religious fields to hold coordination meetings; strengthen members from Hong Kong and Macao on their political responsibilities in carrying out their missions centered on the "one China, two systems" principle; firmly support the implementations of the Constitution and the basic law in the SARs; and deepen exchanges between the Chinese mainland and people from Taiwan island. The CPPCC would deepen work on building consensus. Guided by patriotism and socialism, the CPPCC would seek common ground while shelving differences and building consensus among all domestic and overseas Chinese in realising the Chinese people's rejuvenation.

8. Later on May 21, representatives from Beijing's Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office (HKMAO) met Hong Kong Deputies to the NPC to explain details of the National Security Law. Xia Baolong, a close, old associate of Chinese President Xi Jinping and Vice Chairman of the CPPCC National Committee who was recently appointed Director of the HKMAO, was present. According to Ta Kung Pao (May 28), meeting 200 CPPCC delegates on the final day of the plenary sessions on May 28 in Beijing, Xia Baolong said it is "Hong Kong

independence", tyranny and external hostile forces that cause harm to Hong Kong. These forces, especially the United States, attempt to turn Hong Kong into an independent or semi-independent region. They want to undermine the central government's overall governance of Hong Kong or even seize Hong Kong's governance and turn Hong Kong into their colony. He warned "we must not underestimate the determination of the central authorities ... to implement the 'one country, two systems' policy". Xia Baolong also quoted President Xi Jinping's three "unchanging" positions on the central government's stance on Hong Kong last year, including his unwavering determination to safeguard national sovereignty, security and development interests, his unwavering determination to implement the "one country, two systems" policy, and his opposition to any naysayers. He asserted that the determination of external forces to interfere in Hong Kong affairs is unwavering.

9. A Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) delegation led by TAR Party Secretary Wu Yingjie and which included China's Minister of Public Security Zhao Kezhi participated in the deliberations. State Councillor and Minister of Public Security Zhao Kezhi said "We must do our best on the anti-separatism campaign and the implementation of various measures to maintain stability, strengthen infrastructure construction of stability, make preparations for long-term struggle."

10. There were some CPPCC Delegates whose suggestions attracted the notice of China's official media. Mutanlip Khasem, a member of the CPPCC and Deputy Head of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region People's Congress Standing Committee, said on the side-lines of the 'Big Two' meetings that the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region has recorded no terror-related incidents in the past three and half years. He said after the 18th Party Congress, the region struck hard and maintained high pressure on the three forces of separatism, extremism and terrorism, and effectively contained the spread of terrorism in Xinjiang. Criticising the so-called Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2019 passed by the US House of Representatives, he said its purpose is to sow dissension among various ethnic groups in China and that the anti-China forces deliberately smear, vilify and demonise China.

11. Gonjo Chozin, a CPPCC member from Zhari Township in Tibet said "The poverty alleviation work in Tibet has achieved a decisive victory. Our poverty alleviation measures are systematic. At the grassroots level, actions speaks louder than words. Our work matters for the last mile of ending extreme poverty in Tibet. Only by doing all the poverty reduction work

wholeheartedly can we really help the ones who are in need." She said "During the poverty eradication process, we met a lot of challenges, as we focused on meeting such demands as a proper arrangement to help them settle down. We encouraged them to join in our efforts to get off from poverty." The state-owned CGTN added that by the end of 2019, all 19 counties and county-level prefectures in the Tibet Autonomous Region, which was known as among the Regions with the highest poverty rate in China, were lifted out of poverty.

12. Zhao Xiaojin, Party Chief of the China Academy of Space Technology (CAST) and a member of the 13th CPPCC National Committee, said (May 23) that Chinese space industry insiders are considering using the country's upcoming space station as a facility for large-scale space-borne biology experiments in order to constantly increase China's ability to safeguard its biosecurity. He disclosed that China plans to send two more advanced Earth observation satellites from the Gaofen satellite family in 2020 and will conduct a Mars sample return mission by around 2030, as well as a Jovian System probe mission.

13. Wu Changde, CPPCC member and former Deputy Director of the CMC Political Work Department suggested arrangements for the employment of veterans. He said job security for veterans is critical for maintaining social stability and keeping employment stable. It is also important for stabilising and boosting the military's will and morale and strengthening national defense and military development. Wu Changde suggested: (i) education and guidance should be strengthened, and former ideological concepts should be changed. As veterans are valuable for economic and social development, Chinese military and localities should make joint efforts to ensure their employment. At the same time, veterans should also take the initiative to adapt to the needs of local economic and social development and take bold steps to start their career at the forefront of the market economy after demobilization or retirement. (ii) The key to achieving high-quality and full employment for veterans is to rely on secondary vocational institutions to conduct employment skills training, formulate qualification certification standards, step up support and strengthen supervision and management to ensure the quality of training. Vocational and technical colleges and enterprises could cooperate so that veterans can sign work contracts upon entering the school and accept targeted training in correspondence with their respective positions. They could get relevant training on grassroots organisation work and leadership management and be assigned to the municipal or county party committee schools, or relevant colleges and universities, for special short-term training courses.

14. Wang Lianying, CPPCC member and Deputy Director of the Military Sports Training Center under the CMC Training and Administration Department, made three proposals: (a) scientific research on military sports shall be intensified to better guide military training and the Military Sports Training Center shall provide good services for the troops in that area; (b) training of military sports talents in grassroot military units shall be improved to make them more capable in organising training; (c) new ways and methods shall be explored to better serve the service members, such as inviting military sports experts and stars to answer their questions online.

15. President Xi Jinping met CPPCC Delegates from the economic sector attending a joint group meeting on May 23. He joined them in the discussion and heard their comments and suggestions.

16. Chinese Premier Li Keqiang, speaking to the CPPCC, dropped the word 'peaceful' whilst talking about the unification of Taiwan. Meanwhile, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts, published some images simulating the take-over of Taiwan by the PLA. This was corrected in the final Government Work Report approved by the NPC.

17. All seven Politburo Standing Committee members, including Vice President Wang Qishan and the Vice Chairmen of the CPPCC, attended the opening session of the CPPCC. None of them were wearing masks while everyone else was!

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