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* China Fortnightly, a segment of the CLAWS Newsletters, offers a concise overview of key developments in China, blending sharp analysis with expert insights.

The month from 24 May to 24 June 2026 underscored the continuity of governance under Xi Jinping even as questions briefly surfaced about his own visibility; state media did not report a May Politburo meeting, and Xi was absent from public view for several days in late May–early June before resurfacing on a state visit to North Korea (8–9 June). Across the political domain, the anti-corruption campaign maintained its high-pressure tempo, claiming a leading Chinese cartographic scientist (Zhou Chenghu, CCDI notice 1 June) and culminating in the expulsion of former Shenzhen CPPCC chief Dai Beifang (22 June), while the State Council pressed ahead with 15th Five-Year Plan implementation through executive meetings on employment, education and "Beautiful China." Society was jolted by China's deadliest mining disaster in over a decade, the Liushenyu coal-mine gas explosion in Shanxi (22 May, 82 dead). On the military front, the PLA combined visible power projection (the Liaoning carrier strike group's 40-day Western Pacific deployment, the Fujian's third Taiwan Strait transit) with active defence diplomacy (the China-Mongolia "Steppe Partner 2026" exercise and China's chairing of the SCO Defence

Ministers' Meeting). In science and technology, China sustained an intense launch cadence toward its Guowang and Qianfan mega-constellations, launched the Shenzhou-23 crew (including Hong Kong's first astronaut), announced mass production of ultra-pure silicon-28 for quantum chips, and installed the world's largest single-unit floating wind turbine. The cumulative picture is of a party-state projecting confidence and technological momentum while managing domestic safety, governance, and succession-related vulnerabilities.

Internal Politics and Society

Missing May Politburo Readout and Xi's Reappearance in Pyongyang (late May–9 June; Xinhua, foreign reporting). State media did not publish the customary monthly Politburo readout for May 2026, and Xi Jinping was not seen publicly for several days in late May and early June, prompting speculation among overseas China-watchers. Xi then made a state visit to North Korea on 8–9 June, holding talks with Kim Jong Un to mark the 65th anniversary of the China-DPRK friendship treaty. *Analysis:* The absence of a Politburo readout is unusual but not unprecedented; on past occasions, skipped readouts preceded

major personnel decisions. The Pyongyang trip, Xi's first overseas journey of 2026, reaffirmed the strategic value Beijing places on its socialist neighbour amid US-led pressure.

Liushenyu Coal-Mine Gas Explosion Kills 82 (22 May; Xinhua, CCTV). A gas explosion at the Liushenyu coal mine in Qinyuan County, Changzhi, Shanxi, killed 82 people, with 247 workers underground at the time; AP termed it "the country's deadliest mining accident in recent years," and the toll was initially reported by CCTV at 90 before revision to 82 (AP/PBS NewsHour, 23 May 2026). The mine, operated by Shanxi Tongzhou Group's Liushenyu Coal Industry with a 1.2-million-tonne annual capacity, had been listed as one of 1,128 facilities cited for "severe safety hazards" by China's National Mine Safety Administration in 2024 for "high gas content" (AP/CBS News, 23 May 2026). Executives were detained, and a State Council investigation team launched a "rigorous and uncompromising" probe. Xi called for all-out rescue and accountability. *Analysis:* The disaster punctured the official narrative of steadily improving mine safety and highlighted persistent enforcement

gaps as coal output runs at record highs to ensure energy security.

Investigation of Leading Cartographic Scientist Zhou Chenghu (CCDI notice 1 June; SCMP). The CCDI announced an investigation into Zhou Chenghu, a Chinese Academy of Sciences academician and the country's foremost cartographic scientist, for "suspected serious violations of duty." Zhou had built commercial interests in spatial data and the low-altitude economy. *Analysis:* The case reflects the campaign's continued reach into the science-and-technology establishment and the scrutiny of officials who blend academic position with business interests, a recurring "new corruption" theme.

Expulsion of Former Shenzhen CPPCC Chairman Dai Beifang (22 June; CCDI/National Supervisory Commission). Dai Beifang, former chairman of the Shenzhen Municipal CPPCC and a 13th National CPPCC member, was expelled from the Party for "serious violations of discipline and laws," nearly seven months after being placed under investigation in December 2025. *Analysis:* Dai's case fits the established pattern of retired provincial-level "tigers" being pursued after

leaving office, reinforcing the message that retirement confers no immunity.

Financial-Sector and SOE Anti-Graft Actions (early–mid June; CCDI/state media). The window saw a cluster of financial and state-enterprise cases, including the sentencing of former CNOOC deputy general manager Yuan Guangyu to death with a two-year reprieve for bribery (22 June), and reported investigations of executives at the Bank of China, PICC and CITIC-linked entities. *Analysis:* These actions confirm the 2026 prioritisation of finance, SOEs and energy flagged at January's CCDI plenum, integrating discipline enforcement with 15th Five-Year Plan economic objectives.

State Council Executive Meetings Advance 15th Five-Year Plan Sectoral Blueprints (5 June and 11 June; Xinhua, gov.cn). Premier Li Qiang chaired a 5 June meeting that approved the 15th Five-Year Plan for the employment-first strategy and a draft regulation on employment and entrepreneurship for ex-servicemen, and discussed new-type industrialisation and future industries. A subsequent meeting approved the 15th Five-Year Plans for education and for "Beautiful China," and approved in principle a draft revision of the Road

Traffic Safety Law for submission to the NPC Standing Committee. *Analysis:* The cadence of sectoral five-year sub-plans shows the government operationalising the 2026–2030 blueprint, with employment stability and ecological goals to the fore amid soft consumer confidence.

NPC Standing Committee 23rd session (23–26 June; NPC Observer, NPC.gov.cn). The 14th NPCSC convened its 23rd session from 23 June, considering ten legislative bills and four oversight reports, including the draft Financial Stability Law, a revision to the Bid Invitation and Bidding Law, a revision to the Law on the People's Bank of China, and a decision authorising Hong Kong to exercise jurisdiction over the Hong Kong side of Huanggang Port. *Analysis:* The financial-legislation agenda dovetails with the anti-corruption focus on the financial sector and signals institutional reinforcement of financial-risk management during the plan period.

Security & Defence

Liaoning Carrier Strike Group Concludes 40-day Western Pacific Deployment (returned 22 June; Xinhua, PLA Navy). The Liaoning carrier strike group, comprising carrier Liaoning (16), Type 055 cruiser Wuxi

(104), Type 052D destroyer Kaifeng (124) and Type 054B frigate Luohe (545), the Jiangkai III-class's first confirmed carrier-group deployment beyond the first island chain, plus Type 901 support ship Hulunhu (901) (Naval News, May 2026) returned to Qingdao on 22 June after a roughly 40-day deployment to the South China Sea and Philippine Sea that began 19 May. During the deployment, the carrier group conducted joint "system integration" exercises with the Type 075 amphibious assault ship CNS Anhui (33), confirmed by Chinese state media on 22 June; the Liaoning flew approximately 170 aircraft launches and recoveries over 26–28 May per Japan's Joint Staff Office (USNI News, 22 June 2026). MND spokesperson Snr. Col. Zhang Xiaogang confirmed the training on 9 June. *Analysis:* The deployment continues the normalisation of blue-water carrier operations beyond the first island chain and the integration of carrier and amphibious forces capabilities directly relevant to Taiwan and South China Sea contingencies.

Fujian Carrier Transits the Taiwan Strait (23 June; Taiwan MND, AP). China's newest and most capable carrier, the Type 003 Fujian

(commissioned November 2025), sailed through the Taiwan Strait on 23 June, its third transit and second as a commissioned vessel, a day after Taiwan began a five-day defensive exercise. *Analysis:* The timing, coinciding with Taiwan's drills, fits a pattern of calibrated signalling; the EMALS-equipped Fujian's progress toward full operational capability will materially expand PLAN sortie-generation and air-wing options.

China-Mongolia "Steppe Partner 2026" Joint Army Training (27 May–early June; Ministry of National Defense, Xinhua). China and Mongolia launched "Steppe Partner 2026" on 30 May at a training base in Inner Mongolia, with over 600 troops and the Chinese contingent drawn from an armoured brigade of the PLA 79th Group Army. Themed "Joint Strike Against Illegal Armed Groups," it was the second iteration and the first held on Chinese territory. *Analysis:* Though modest in scale, the exercise extends China's military-diplomacy footprint with a strategically located neighbour that balances ties between Beijing and Moscow.

China Chairs SCO Defence Ministers' Meeting in Qingdao (June;

MND, Global Times). As 2026 rotating chair, China hosted the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Defence Ministers' Meeting in Qingdao, with Defence Minister Admiral Dong Jun presiding. Dong called on the SCO to act as a "stabilising anchor" amid global turbulence and criticised unilateralism and "hegemonic" behaviour, holding bilateral meetings with counterparts including Russia, Pakistan, Iran and Belarus. *Analysis*: Convened against the backdrop of West Asia tensions and a NATO summit, the meeting advanced China's effort to position the SCO as a non-aligned alternative security architecture and amplify its Global Security Initiative.

PNS Hangor Arrives in Karachi (11 June; Dawn, Arab News). The first Hangor-class submarine, PNS Hangor, commissioned in Sanya, China, on 30 April, arrived at Karachi, welcomed by Pakistan Fleet commander Vice Admiral Abdul Munib. The Hangor-class (eight ordered, an export derivative of the Type 039A/Yuan-class with Stirling AIP) represents one of China's largest arms-export deals; the first four are built in China and the latter four at Karachi Shipyard under technology transfer. *Analysis*: The delivery deepens the China-Pakistan

defence relationship and bolsters Pakistan's undersea capability in the Arabian Sea, with implications India will watch closely.

MND Press Conferences Address Regional Frictions (28 May and June; MND). At the 28 May regular press conference, spokesperson Snr. Col. Jiang Bin protested the planned US deployment of the Typhon medium-range missile system in Japan as "an offensive weapon" that would heighten arms-race risks, and elaborated on China-Russia and China-Serbia military cooperation. *Analysis*: The messaging tracks Beijing's consistent opposition to US theatre-missile deployments in the first island chain and its cultivation of partners in Europe and Eurasia.

Chinese Peacekeeping Rotations and Overseas Deployments (June; MND). The third Chinese Peacekeeping Quick Reaction Force to Abyei passed UN equipment inspection (23 June), reflecting continued PLA participation in UN operations. *Analysis*: Such routine peacekeeping activity supports China's narrative of being a responsible major power contributing global security public goods.

Science and Technology

Shenzhou-23 Crewed Launch with Hong Kong's First Astronaut (24 May; Xinhua, CMSA). China launched Shenzhou-23 from Jiuquan on a Long March-2F, crewed by commander Zhu Yangzhu, pilot Zhang Zhiyuan and payload specialist Li Jiaying, the first astronaut from Hong Kong to fly to space. The crew docked with the Tiangong station and began handover with the Shenzhou-21 crew. *Analysis:* Beyond technical routine, the inclusion of a Hong Kong payload specialist carries political symbolism for national integration; one crew member is slated for an extended 1-year stay to study human adaptation.

Mass Production of Ultra-Pure Silicon-28 for Quantum Chips (15 June; Xinhua, Science and Technology Daily, Global Times). China National Nuclear Corporation announced that its Research Institute of Physical and Chemical Engineering of Nuclear Industry in Tianjin achieved China's first independent mass production of silicon-28 isotope at an abundance exceeding 99.99%, a critical material for silicon-based quantum chips that reduces qubit noise; supply had previously been concentrated among a few foreign producers. *Analysis:* The

breakthrough addresses a materials-supply chokepoint in quantum computing and exemplifies the 15th Five-Year Plan's emphasis on self-reliance in frontier-technology inputs.

Zhejiang University Reports Quantum-Memory Advance (5 June; SCMP). A Zhejiang University-led team reported a fast quantum random-access memory (QRAM) addressing a data-reading bottleneck in quantum computing. *Analysis:* The work reflects the breadth of China's quantum research ecosystem flagged as a strategic priority in the new five-year plan.

Tencent Tests WeChat AI Agent "Xiaowei" (2 and 22 June; Bloomberg, FT, Caixin). Tencent began testing an AI assistant, Xiaowei, for WeChat's user base; Tencent reported 1.414 billion combined Weixin/WeChat monthly active users as of end-Q3 2025 (results reported 13 November 2025). Capable of completing tasks via mini-programs (messaging, food orders, ride-hailing, image generation) using its in-house model and tapping DeepSeek for some queries; full rollout is targeted for the third quarter. News of the prototype drove a 10.46% jump in Tencent shares

on 2 June to close at HK\$481.60, adding roughly HK\$415.8 billion (US\$53 billion) in market capitalisation, Tencent's biggest single-day gain in over three years, per Caixin Global (4 June 2026). *Analysis:* Embedding agentic AI into China's dominant super-app could accelerate consumer AI adoption at scale and intensify competition among domestic model developers.

Sustained Launch Cadence Toward Mega-Constellations (June; CASC, China-in-Space, SpaceNews). China maintained a high launch tempo, with a Long March 12 placing the 22nd Guowang group (9 satellites) on 17 June, the 6th Long March 12 flight and the 42nd Chinese launch of 2026, bringing the constellation to 177 satellites in orbit out of a planned 13,000, with Guowang targeting 310 satellites in 2026 and 900 in 2027 (China-in-Space, 17 June 2026). A Long March 12B reusable-rocket flight (1 June) carried Qianfan "Thousand Sails" satellites, and China is aiming to surpass 100 launches in 2026. *Analysis:* The pace reflects China's drive to field competitive LEO broadband constellations and reusable launchers, narrowing the gap with

SpaceX while raising orbital-debris and spectrum-competition concerns.

World's Largest Single-Unit Floating Wind Turbine Installed (Early May–Reported June; CGTN, China Three Gorges). China Three Gorges installed the 16-MW "Three Gorges Pilot" floating offshore wind turbine off Yangjiang, Guangdong, described as the world's largest single-unit floating platform in waters over 50 metres deep and more than 70 km offshore, with a 252-metre rotor, 24,100-tonne semi-submersible platform, novel mooring and active-ballast systems, and a 66-kV dynamic subsea cable, expected to generate about 44.65 GWh annually (roughly 24,000 households). *Analysis:* The project pushes Chinese offshore wind into deep water using largely localised technology, with the developer claiming a more than 50% cut in cost per kilowatt versus its predecessor.

Sinopec Confirms Ultra-Deep Shale Gas Field Reserves (Mid-May; World Oil, Xinhua). Sinopec secured official approval for 235.687 billion cubic metres of proven geological reserves at the Ziyang Dongfeng shale gas field in the Sichuan Basin, China's first ultra-deep shale gas field with reserves

exceeding 100 bcm, targeting the 540-million-year-old Cambrian Qiongzhusi Formation at depths of 4,500–5,200 metres. *Analysis:* The certification advances China's "deep earth" energy-security strategy and unconventional-gas self-sufficiency, though ultra-deep extraction remains technically demanding and costly.

Marine Liquid-Hydrogen Storage Milestone (12 June; SMM/Industry Reporting). The Beijing Institute of Aerospace Testing Technology (CASC Sixth Academy) obtained an Approval in Principle from the China Classification Society for a 6,000-cubic-metre marine liquid-hydrogen spherical tank, the first of this scale in China to win such certification. *Analysis:* The certification removes a key qualification barrier for long-distance liquid-hydrogen shipping, supporting the build-out of a hydrogen-energy supply chain prioritised in the new five-year plan.

About the Author

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