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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 period from 24 June to 24 July 2026 witnessed the Communist Party of China (CPC) mark the 105th anniversary of its founding, with General Secretary Xi Jinping addressing a commemorative gathering at the Great Hall of the People on 1 July and conferring the July 1 Medal, the Party's highest honour, on model members. The anti-corruption campaign accelerated at senior ranks, culminating in the expulsion of former Politburo member and ex-Xinjiang Party Secretary Ma Xingrui (announced 14 July), and the placement under investigation of former China Development Bank president Ouyang Weimin (19 July) and former China Securities Regulatory Commission (CSRC) vice-chairman Fang Xinghai (24 July). Society was jolted by the collapse of the Liulan Reservoir dam in Hengzhou, Guangxi, on 6 July after Tropical Storm Maysak dumped record rainfall on the region, with the disaster claiming at least 39 lives across Guangxi and prompting a nationwide flood-control response. On the military front, the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) test-fired a submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) into the Pacific on 6 July, the same day it launched the "Joint Sea-2026" exercise with the Russian Navy in Qingdao. In parallel, the Chinese Coast Guard confronted Philippine vessels at Second Thomas Shoal on 20 July and Scarborough Shoal on 23–24 July, injuring one Filipino sailor. In science and technology, the maiden flight of the reusable Long March-10B rocket on 10 July, followed by the first controlled sea-based recovery of its first stage, marked China's most significant reusable-launch milestone to date. The 2026 World Artificial Intelligence Conference (WAIC) in Shanghai (17–20 July), preceded by the signing of the agreement establishing the Shanghai-headquartered World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organization (WAICO) on 16 July, projected Beijing's ambition to shape global AI governance. The cumulative picture is of a party-state combining ideological

consolidation and technological assertion with the management of macroeconomic deceleration, natural disasters and delicate maritime and cross-strait frictions.

Internal Politics and Society

Commemoration of the CPC's 105th Founding Anniversary (1 July; Xinhua, People's Daily). Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the CPC Central Committee, State President and chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), addressed a gathering at the Great Hall of the People marking the 105th anniversary of the Party's founding and conferred the July 1 Medal on model members. Xi described the Party's 105-year history as the "most magnificent epic" of the Chinese nation and urged the Party to press ahead to build China into a modern socialist country on schedule. Attendees included Politburo Standing Committee members Li Qiang, Zhao Leji, Wang Huning, Cai Qi, Ding Xuexiang, Li Xi and former Vice President Han Zheng. **Analysis:** Successive study sessions on "Xi Jinping Thought on Party Building" convened by the NPC Standing Committee under Zhao Leji, the CPPCC under Wang Huning, and the CCDI under Li Xi on 3 July underline the mobilisation of the Party's ideological apparatus around the leader's doctrinal contribution ahead of the 21st Party Congress.

State Council Meetings on Party Anniversary and 15th Five-Year Plan (3 July, 20 July; Xinhua, gov.cn). Premier Li Qiang, in his capacity as secretary of the leading Party members group of the State Council, chaired a 3 July meeting to study Xi's 1 July speech and Xi Jinping Thought on Party Building. On 20 July, Li chaired a State Council executive meeting that heard a report on inspections concerning the expansion of the service sector's capacity and quality and the planning of the "six major networks," reviewed and approved the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026–

2030) on intellectual property protection and utilisation, studied the optimisation of the social-security system, and considered the rectification of problems identified in audits of the 2025 central budget. **Analysis:** The meeting's emphasis on producer services to "better support sci-tech innovation" and consumer services to expand supply signals continued policy attention to structural weaknesses in domestic demand identified in second-quarter growth data.

Expulsion of Former Politburo Member Ma Xingrui (14 July; Xinhua, CCDI). Ma Xingrui, aged 66, former party secretary of Xinjiang (2021–2025) and a former member of the 20th Central Committee Politburo, was expelled from the CPC and removed from public office following an investigation opened in April. According to the CCDI, Ma was found to have abused his position to benefit family members in property purchases at below-market prices, engaged in "power-for-sex and money-for-sex transactions," accepted illicit gifts and permitted relatives to exploit his influence. His case has been referred for criminal prosecution. **Analysis:** Ma is the third sitting or former 20th Politburo member to be purged since 2025, after generals Miao Hua and Zhang Youxia's investigation earlier in 2026. His downfall — the ouster of a technocrat once identified with the aerospace sector and Shenzhen's innovation drive — signals that seniority and technical credentials confer no immunity, and reinforces the leadership's message ahead of the 21st Party Congress in 2027.

Investigation of Former China Development Bank President Ouyang Weimin (19 July; CCDI, Xinhua, Caixin). The CCDI and National Supervisory Commission announced an investigation into Ouyang Weimin, aged 63, former president and deputy party secretary of the China Development Bank (CDB), for suspected "serious violations of Party

discipline and the law." Ouyang joined the People's Bank of China in 1986, served as vice-governor of Guangdong, and led the CDB from 2019 until his retirement in 2023; Caixin reported that he is the seventh senior CDB leader to fall in recent years. **Analysis:** The case sustains the focus on policy-bank and financial-sector graft flagged at the January 2026 CCDI plenum and links directly to concerns about credit misallocation during years of high leverage in the CDB's infrastructure and Belt and Road portfolios.

Investigation of Former CSRC Vice-Chairman Fang Xinghai (24 July; CCTV, Xinhua). Xinhua reported on 24 July that Fang Xinghai, aged 62 and vice-chairman of the CSRC from October 2015 to July 2024, is under investigation by the CCDI and National Supervisory Commission for suspected severe violations of discipline and law. Fang, formerly a senior official at the Shanghai Stock Exchange and Shanghai's financial-work office, was among the CSRC's principal liaisons with foreign investors. **Analysis:** Coming shortly after the sentencing of former CSRC chairman Yi Huiman (2019–2024) earlier in 2026, Fang's case tightens the post-hoc scrutiny of the securities regulator during a period marked by heavy state-led intervention to stabilise onshore equity markets and by the drafting of the Financial Stability Law.

Xi's Shanghai Inspection on Urban Renewal (15 July; Xinhua, People's Daily). Xi Jinping conducted an inspection tour of Shanghai on 15 July, visiting a residential community in Huangpu District where four buildings from the 1950s had been renovated. He called for advancing high-quality urban renewal in a "people-centred" manner and enhancing residents' "sense of fulfilment, happiness and security." The Shanghai leg preceded his attendance at the WAIC opening ceremony on 17 July. **Analysis:** The visit anchors urban

renewal as an ideological and welfare priority for the 15th Five-Year Plan period, while leveraging Shanghai as a showcase for the model amid a prolonged downturn in the wider property sector.

Politburo Meeting on Flood Control and Drought Relief (30 June; Xinhua). The Politburo of the CPC Central Committee, chaired by Xi Jinping, convened on 30 June to study and arrange work on flood control, drought relief, emergency response and disaster mitigation. It warned that China was expected to face more extreme weather events during the main flood season and stressed the need for unified management of water sources and preparation for co-existing droughts and floods. **Analysis:** The pre-emptive Politburo focus signalled the leadership's political sensitivity to climate-driven disruption and was validated within a week by the Guangxi disaster.

Liulan Reservoir Dam Collapse and Guangxi Floods (6–9 July; Xinhua, CCTV, State Flood Control and Drought Relief Headquarters). Two sections of the Liulan Reservoir dam in Hengzhou, under the jurisdiction of Nanning City, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, breached at around 11 a.m. on 6 July after Tropical Storm Maysak dumped between 100 and 890 millimetres of rain on the region. The Nanning municipal government reported on 9 July that 39 people had died and nine remained missing across Guangxi, with 26 of the deaths in Hengzhou; approximately 130,000 residents were evacuated, and cumulative flooding affected roughly 375,000 people. Flood peaks exceeding warning levels by more than six metres were recorded at the Wuzhou hydrological station. **Analysis:** The disaster laid bare persistent weaknesses in the operation of medium-sized reservoirs that store more than 90 million cubic metres of water. Xi Jinping's follow-up instructions on 7 July calling for "all-out efforts" in rescue, injury treatment and

secondary-disaster prevention are consistent with the pattern of centralised political messaging on major natural disasters.

Heavy Rains and Flooding in Northeast China (13–14 July; Shenyang Meteorological Bureau, U.S. Consulate advisory). Authorities in Shenyang, Liaoning Province, issued flood-related warnings on 13 and 14 July for heavy to torrential rain, closed schools, cancelled southbound train services and recorded floodwaters of about 30 centimetres at major intersections. **Analysis:** The concurrent inundation of a southern coastal province and a north-eastern industrial city underscored the diffuse geographical footprint of the season's precipitation anomalies and the demand it places on emergency-management capacity.

GDP Growth Cools to 4.3 per cent in Q2 (15 July; National Bureau of Statistics). The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) reported gross domestic product growth of 4.3 per cent year-on-year in the second quarter of 2026, easing from 5.0 per cent in the first quarter and marking the slowest expansion since the fourth quarter of 2022. First-half growth of 4.7 per cent kept the economy within the 4.5–5.0 per cent annual target band. The surveyed urban unemployment rate stood at 5.0 per cent in June and per capita disposable income rose 5.2 per cent in the first half; property investment fell sharply. **Analysis:** The moderating headline, amplified by weak private investment and residual effects of the West Asia oil shock, framed public expectations for a substantive late-July Politburo statement on the second-half macroeconomic policy stance.

Security & Defence

PLAN Submarine Test-Fires Ballistic Missile Into the Pacific (6 July; Xinhua, MND). According to Xinhua, a PLAN nuclear-powered submarine test-launched a ballistic missile carrying a training warhead into international

waters in the Pacific at 12:01 p.m. local time on 6 July, with the missile said to have landed “precisely within the designated waters.” Beijing described the test as a “routine arrangement” in annual military training and stated that “relevant countries” had been notified in advance. New Zealand, Japan and Papua New Guinea publicly confirmed receipt of such notification. **Analysis:** The launch is China’s first publicly acknowledged SLBM test into open ocean since 1988 and follows the September 2024 land-based DF-31 launch. In demonstrating a sea-based leg of the strategic deterrent from a submerged platform, it signalled the maturation of China’s nuclear modernisation while stoking regional concerns about notification norms.

China-Russia “Joint Sea-2026” Naval Exercise (6–13 July; MND, Xinhua). The twelfth iteration of the “Joint Sea” exercise, held at a Qingdao military port between 6 and 13 July, assembled ten surface, underwater, aerial and support units under a joint command. The Chinese task group comprised the Type 052D destroyer Kaifeng (Hull 124), the Type 055 destroyer Anshan (Hull 103), the Type 054A frigate Wuhu (Hull 539), the Type 903A replenishment ship Kekexilihu (Hull 903), the Type 926 submarine support ship Yangchenghu (Hull 847) and one submarine; the Russian task group, led by the Pacific Fleet flagship Varyag (Hull 011), included the frigate Rezkiy, the submarine Ufa and the rescue ship Igor Belousov. Live-force and live-fire drills covered joint reconnaissance, air- and missile-defence, anti-surface strike and joint submarine rescue; participating forces subsequently commenced a joint Pacific patrol. **Analysis:** Coinciding with the PLAN SLBM test and the U.S.-led RIMPAC exercise around Hawaii, “Joint Sea-2026” projected a message of strategic solidarity with Moscow and highlighted continued Russo-Chinese interoperability in submarine rescue and anti-submarine warfare.

PLA Live-Fire Drills in the Taiwan Strait and Aviation Incursions (20–24 July; Fujian Maritime Safety Administration, Taiwan MND). Beijing’s Maritime Safety Administration issued a navigation warning for live-fire drills in the Taiwan Strait from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. on 23 and 24 July, near the Fujian coast. On 20 July, Taiwan’s Ministry of National Defense reported the first recorded traversal by a PLA helicopter of the median line’s narrower section, operating alongside unmanned aerial vehicles in the military-designated R9 restricted zone east of the line between 10:20 a.m. and 7:40 p.m. Assessments by the Institute for National Defense and Security Research suggested the activity may have formed part of a coordinated helicopter-drone reconnaissance-and-strike exercise. **Analysis:** The combination of new aerial tactics with announced maritime live-fire activity sustains the trajectory of “grey-zone” normalisation and expands the operational envelope of PLA cross-Strait training beyond what had been observed prior to August 2022.

Confrontations in the South China Sea: Second Thomas Shoal and Huangyan Dao/Scarborough Shoal (20–24 July; China Coast Guard, MND, Armed Forces of the Philippines). On 20 July, a rigid-hull inflatable boat carrying eight China Coast Guard (CCG) personnel from vessel CCGV 21560 approached the BRP Sierra Madre at Second Thomas Shoal (Ren’ai Jiao/Ayungin) at 9:15 a.m., leading to a physical confrontation in which the AFP reported one Philippine marine sustaining a head injury after being struck with a wooden baton. On 23 July, CCG spokesperson Jiang Lue announced that CCG vessels had “tracked, monitored, blocked and controlled” Philippine ships near Huangyan Dao (Scarborough Shoal), using water cannon in a subsequent encounter on 24 July. Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Philippine Foreign Secretary Theresa Lazaro exchanged protests

on the sidelines of the China-ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Manila on 22 July. **Analysis:** The clustering of these encounters during the ASEAN ministerial week — the very diplomatic setting Beijing has framed as a preferred forum for regional management — indicates that the CCG and PLA regard sustained enforcement pressure as compatible with, rather than subordinate to, conciliatory rhetoric.

Wang Yi at the China-ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting and SCO Council of Ministers (21–25 July; MFA, Xinhua). Politburo member and Foreign Minister Wang Yi attended the China-ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Manila on 22 July, met ASEAN Secretary-General Kao Kim Hourn on 21 July, and travelled to Cholpon-Ata, Kyrgyzstan (23–25 July) to attend the SCO Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs and undertake a bilateral visit. Wang described ASEAN as a “friendly close neighbour” and marked the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia. **Analysis:** The dual itinerary reflects the enduring dual-track effort to institutionalise China's ties with Southeast Asia while strengthening its Eurasian security architecture ahead of the 2026 SCO summit under the Kyrgyz chair.

China-Russia Air Force Joint Strategic Patrol and Ream Cooperation (27 June, 15 July; MND). The Chinese and Russian air forces conducted their eleventh joint strategic patrol on 27 June. On 15 July, the China-Cambodia Joint Logistics and Training Center at Ream Naval Base, Cambodia, conducted a public-welfare education support activity, the first such publicised engagement since the facility's launch. **Analysis:** The activities reinforce the two poles of Chinese defence-diplomatic outreach: strategic-level coordination with Russia in northeast Asian airspace and

functional consolidation of the emerging PLAN presence on the Gulf of Thailand.

PLAN Hospital Ship Auspicious Ark Launches Harmonious Mission 2026 and Sino-Vietnamese Naval Exchanges (10–23 July; MND, PLA Daily). The PLAN hospital ship Auspicious Ark set sail on 21 July to carry out “Harmonious Mission 2026” in Africa and South Asia, following the 10 July conclusion of a Chinese Naval Task Group goodwill visit to Vietnam and the 21–23 July visit to Guangzhou by a Vietnamese frigate. **Analysis:** The synchronisation of medical-humanitarian outreach with regularised naval-to-naval exchanges is consistent with China's Global Security Initiative narrative and its effort to buffer Southeast Asian friction with confidence-building activity.

Chinese Peacekeeping Rotations in Abyei and South Sudan (20–22 July; MND, UNMISS). On 20 July, the third Chinese peacekeeping quick-reaction force to Abyei conducted an aviation emergency-response drill; on 22 July, Chinese peacekeepers to South Sudan (Wau) completed the reinforcement of security facilities at the Kuajok detachment point. **Analysis:** The activities underline the continuing operational tempo of PLA peacekeeping deployments and their instrumentalisation in Beijing's messaging as a “responsible major country.”

Science and Technology

Maiden Flight and Sea-Based Recovery of the Long March-10B (10 July; CASC, Xinhua, CGTN). The Long March-10B reusable liquid-fuelled carrier rocket, developed by the China Academy of Launch Vehicle Technology under the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC), lifted off from the Hainan Commercial Spacecraft Launch Site at Wenchang at approximately 12:15 p.m. local time on 10 July and delivered a China Satellite

Network Group experimental satellite (CX-26) to an approximately 800-kilometre low Earth orbit. About eleven minutes after launch, the first-stage booster was successfully captured on a seaborne platform via a net-and-cable recovery system, the world's first successful net-capture of a carrier-rocket first stage and China's first controlled at-sea recovery. The 63-metre, five-metre-diameter, 760-tonne vehicle has a low Earth orbit payload of 16 tonnes in reusable mode; CASC announced its intention to reuse the recovered first stage before year-end. **Analysis:** The recovery makes China the second country to bring back an orbital-class booster intact and validates a distinctive net-based approach that shifts recovery mass burden to shipborne infrastructure. It represents a substantive step towards the launch cadence and cost profile required for the country's mega-constellation build-out and its 2030 crewed lunar landing ambition.

Qianfan Constellation Adds Two Launch Batches in a Single Week (4–5 July; CASC, Xinhua, CGTN). A Long March-6A lifted off from Launch Complex 9A at the Taiyuan Satellite Launch Center at 17:30 local time on 4 July with 18 Qianfan ("Thousand Sails") satellites manufactured by Genesat, bringing the constellation to 218 satellites in orbit — the 13th group launched — and constituting the 25th flight of the Long March-6A. On 5 July, an upgraded Long March-8A Y9 lifted off at 21:43 local time from the Wenchang Commercial Space Launch Site with 20 satellites built by the Innovation Academy for Microsatellites of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, raising the total to 238. **Analysis:** The back-to-back launches underscore the acceleration of Qianfan's low Earth orbit deployment, which continues to trail declared targets but has accelerated through the second quarter as Shanghai Spacecom Satellite Technology prepares to open commercial services in Brazil, Malaysia, Kazakhstan and Türkiye later in 2026.

2026 World Artificial Intelligence Conference and the Establishment of the World AI Cooperation Organization (16–20 July; MFA, Xinhua). On 16 July, on the eve of the WAIC opening, twenty-nine founding-member states signed the agreement establishing the World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organization (WAICO), an intergovernmental body headquartered in Shanghai; signatories included Kazakhstan, Laos, Pakistan, Russia and Indonesia, and United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres attended the ceremony. Foreign Minister Wang Yi signed on behalf of the Chinese government. On 17 July, Xi Jinping delivered the keynote at the WAIC opening ceremony, titled "Joining Hands to Build a Just and Equitable System for Global AI Governance," pledging 5,000 training places for developing countries over five years and the establishment of cooperation centres. WAIC 2026 ran from 17 to 20 July under the theme "Intelligent Partners, Co-create the Future," with participants from over 100 countries. **Analysis:** WAICO gives institutional form to Beijing's 2025 proposal for a global AI cooperation body headquartered in China, and its founding roster — heavily weighted towards the Global South and Eurasian partners — reveals a governance coalition designed to counter what Chinese officials characterise as Western "technological monopoly." The convergence of the summit with Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul of Thailand's state visit (16–20 July) and the presence of the UN Secretary-General extends its diplomatic weight.

Nuclear Fusion — Superconducting Magnets Complete Full-Load Testing (June–July; CCTV, CAS Institute of Plasma Physics). China Central Television reported that two 582-tonne toroidal-field superconducting magnets, described as the largest superconducting magnets built for a fusion device, developed by the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Institute of

Plasma Physics in Hefei, Anhui Province, passed technical acceptance and full-load testing in July. The magnets are core components of the compact fusion experimental device scheduled for completion by the end of 2027, with the objective of demonstrating China's first fusion-generated electricity around 2030. **Analysis:** The milestone marks the full localisation of core fusion-magnet technology and buttresses the parallel EAST tokamak programme, whose record of sustaining 100-million-degree plasma for 1,066 seconds anchors China's claim to leadership in the field.

Shenzhou-23 Crew Continues One-Year Mission Aboard Tiangong (June–July; China Manned Space Agency). The Shenzhou-23 crew of Commander Zhu Yangzhu, pilot Zhang Zhiyuan and payload specialist Lai Ka-ying (Li Jiaying) — the first astronaut from Hong Kong to fly to space — continued their mission aboard the Tiangong space station. The China Manned Space Agency published the orbital parameters of the station on 20 July, showing continued nominal operations at approximately 386.4–391.8 kilometres altitude and 41.47-degree inclination. One crew member is to remain on board for a year-long stay to study human adaptability. **Analysis:** Continued in-orbit science tempo prepares the human-factors and life-support baseline required for the announced 2030 crewed lunar landing and the planned expansion of the station to a “double-T” configuration.

Chang'e-7 Preparations for Lunar South Pole Mission (July; CNSA, Xinhua). Preparations continued for the planned launch of Chang'e-7 aboard a Long March-5 rocket from Wenchang in August 2026, targeting a landing near the southeast ridge of Shackleton Crater at the lunar south pole. The mission comprises an orbiter, a lander, a mini-hopping probe and a rover, and is a core building block of the International Lunar Research Station's “basic

model” targeted for completion by 2035. **Analysis:** Chang'e-7 will attempt permanently-shadowed-region science of direct relevance to the water-ice question and lay operational groundwork for Chang'e-8 (2028) and the crewed lunar programme.

Huawei to Showcase Ascend Atlas 950 SuperPoD at WAIC (17–20 July; Huawei, Global Times). Huawei used its WAIC 2026 exhibition to unveil new Ascend AI chip solutions, including the Atlas 950 SuperPoD, an air-cooled supernode cluster, open-source AI foundational software, and industry deployment case studies. Under a three-year strategy announced at the September 2025 Huawei Connect, Ascend 950PR and 950DT chips are being introduced in 2026, with 960 and 970 to follow. **Analysis:** The Atlas 950 SuperPoD is presented as the largest supernode configuration by computing capacity, aimed at supporting trillion-parameter model training and inference and reducing dependence on foreign accelerators subject to United States export controls.

APEC Digital Ministers' “Chengdu Statement” on AI (23 July; MIIT). Minister of Industry and Information Technology Li Lecheng participated in an APEC digital ministers' meeting in Chengdu on 23 July, at which twenty-one APEC member economies — including China and the United States — issued a “Chengdu statement” on artificial intelligence emphasising respect for security, data protection and intellectual property rights while supporting open-source development. **Analysis:** The statement offers a modest but symbolically important point of convergence at a moment when U.S. and Chinese AI ecosystems have visibly bifurcated, and reinforces Beijing's positioning as a leading exponent of open-weight models such as DeepSeek V4-Pro and GLM 5.2.

About the Author

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