
China Briefs

China Launches the Core Module of Its Space Station

With the successful launch on April 28 of the Tianhe core module of its Tiangong space station, China begins to carry out the third phase of its manned space program. That series of missions has been a 30-year program, culminating in the operation of an Earth-orbiting space station in 2021, a bit later than the target year of 2020.

The first phase had the goal of demonstrating that manned space flight was safe. That was accomplished in 2003. The second phase, which lasted from then until now, demonstrated many of the technologies needed for long duration spaceflight, such as extravehicular activity and refueling, using Chinese equipment.

The station, Tiangong-2 (Heavenly Palace), is scheduled to be finished in 2022. There will be a total of eleven launches this year for station construction. The next launch in May will be a cargo ship, followed by a launch with three astronauts who will live in the module and deal with the construction of the station. Then the other modules, Tianmeng (Heavenly Dream) and Wentian (Questions of Heaven) will be sent and mounted on the core module. The station is scheduled to last at least 10 years, but it may continue much longer. While not as large as the ISS, it is similar in size to the Russia Mir station. Astronauts from other countries are also invited to participate in the program.

Tiangong-2 will be utilized for conducting experiments in micro-gravity. The space station will carry out nine experiments submitted by 17 countries. China has worked very closely with the United Nations to provide experiments which are for the benefit of developing countries. The station will also be used for gaining experience for future travel to the Moon and to Mars.

CRS Calls on U.S., Japan, and EU to Stop Sales of Semiconductors to China

A report by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) urges Congress to place increasing restrictions on the export of semiconductors and the capital equipment needed for semiconductor manufacture. China, whose domestically produced semiconductors are still behind the standard required for the most advanced uses, is working overtime to develop its own capabilities, because of the possible loss of access to the semiconductor markets in the U.S., Japan, and European Union. Ironically, the report frantically warns that if China succeeds in become a major player in semiconductors, it could control the market.

China is increasing its purchase of semiconductors from Taiwan, which is also a major producer of advanced semiconductors. While Taiwan could conceivably be pressured to stop these sales, it is at the moment largely dependent on the Chinese market, and any retaliatory measures would have serious effects on the Taiwan economy. China is

said to be two or more years behind Taiwan and the U.S. in semiconductor technology, but it could quickly catch up with a major effort. High-end semiconductor development is writ large in China's latest Five-Year Plan.

Xi Sends Condolences to Modi, Promises More Aid for Combating COVID

President Xi Jinping sent condolences to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the latest outbreak of COVID-19 in India and promised that China stood by to help in combating the pandemic. "The Chinese side stands ready to strengthen cooperation with the Indian side in fighting the pandemic and provide support and help in this regard," Xi's statement said. "I believe that under the leadership of the Indian Government, the Indian people will surely prevail over the pandemic."

China has already sent aid to India, according to Foreign Ministry Spokesman Wang Wenbin, who said that according to incomplete statistics, since April, China had already exported more than 26,000 ventilators and oxygen concentrators, more than 15,000 monitors, and nearly 3,800 tons of medicinal materials and drugs to India.

China's Ambassador to India, Sun Weidong, told *Global Times* on May 1 that "Chinese companies have been accelerating production of at least 40,000 oxygen generators—orders placed by the Indian side, and they are working around the clock to

deliver them as soon as possible. Many Chinese firms and private organizations are also using their own channels to provide various [forms of] help to India.”

Foreign Minister Wang Yi also had a phone conversation with his Indian counterpart, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, on April 30 and promised to increase Chinese production of medical supplies and send them to India. He also proposed to set up a phone hook-up between Indian and Chinese medical personnel to assist in fighting the epidemic. Jaishankar expressed great appreciation for the Chinese offer, which comes at a time of political tensions between the two major powers in Asia.

Foreign Minister: U.S. Has Still to Find Right Pathway to Engage China

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi addressed the U.S. Council on Foreign Relations on the subject of U.S.-China relations via Zoom on April 23, at the invitation of its President, Richard Haas.

The increasingly shrill discussion of China among U.S. political layers and the attempts by Congress to pass totally unacceptable resolutions which threaten China’s development have undoubtedly created great concern in Beijing that the U.S.-China relationship can quickly “go off the rails” and lead to military conflict.

Wang Yi began by warning that the United States has not yet found the “right way” to engage with China. He reiterated what China has continually said, that it is not interested in achieving some sort of “hegemony.” Wang also explained that such a view was not consistent with the way China sees itself and the world, based on the fundamental

Confucian ideal that motivates most of what China does. “The wisdom from China’s millennia of history teaches that countries going after hegemony are bound to fail, and that not all countries fight for hegemony when they grow stronger. China pursues development and rejuvenation through its own hard work, instead of aggression or expansion. In everything we do here in China, we do it for a better life for the Chinese people, rather than replace or out-compete anyone.”

The right approach, he said, is to step up dialogue, deepen cooperation, narrow differences and avoid confrontation. He noted that the fundamental issue was whether the United States was prepared to recognize a major power with a different system like China’s. And that question remains unresolved.

Wang Yi also presented a strong defense against the many different accusations that have been drummed up in the West, with regard to Hong Kong, Xinjiang, and human rights. He invited his interlocutors (there were 500 people on this call) to come to Xinjiang and see for themselves what was happening there. But he also made clear that there was a limit to what China was willing to bear, and that was particularly the case with regard to Taiwan, agreements about which were fundamental to establishing the U.S.-China relationship, but which are now being called into question in the context of the heated anti-China atmosphere in Washington. Any attempt to play the Taiwan card, Wang Yi warned, is “like playing with fire.” The Q&A was off the record so that the questioners could speak freely, but given the large turnout, there is no doubt great concern among some political layers in the U.S. that the U.S.-China relationship is heading in the wrong direction.

CCP Political Bureau Discusses Post-COVID Situation

The 25-man Political Bureau chaired by President Xi Jinping discussed the economic situation in the country on April 28, now that COVID is largely under control. While there may be a sense of optimism, there is also concern that many problems still remain, and it is an open question what effect the various restrictions on China that are coming out of Washington will have on the country’s economy.

The *South China Morning Post* reports that while there will continue to be funding for infrastructure, there will also be a closer monitoring of the financial situation, particularly with regard to the outstanding debt of the local governments.

In a statement released after the meeting, the Politbureau said, “Currently, the economic recovery is uneven and its foundation is still not solid.... Efforts should be made to guard against and defuse economic and financial risks, strengthen and improve the supervision of the platform economy, and promote fair competition.” There are ongoing investigations of Tencent and the ride-sharing company Didi Chuxin to see if they have created a monopoly situation, while Jack Ma’s giant Ant conglomerate was forced to end its lending practice. There was also a significant discussion of the problem of housing speculation, which in many places has become something of a bubble, particularly in areas which are deemed to have good school systems.

To better deal with the financial risks, the government is planning to set up a bad-debt disposal mechanism that will be operated by the local Communist party organizations and the local governments.