

Institute of Chinese Studies

WEDNESDAY SEMINAR

*Analysing China's
Policy Priorities
through the Lens of the
2026 'Two Sessions'*

REPORT

Speaker:
Bhavna Singh

15 April 2026

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Speaker: Dr. Bhavna Singh, Fellow, Chintan Research Foundation (CRF), New Delhi

Chair: Dr. Bhim B. Subba, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, School of Social Sciences, University of Hyderabad; Adjunct Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS), New Delhi

Venue: Zoom Webinar

- The seminar examined China’s key policy priorities as revealed through the 2026 “Two Sessions”. Dr. Singh’s presentation covered five broad areas including the 15th Five-Year Plan targets, newly codified laws, foreign investment and market consolidation, ecological commitments, and China’s shifting foreign policy posture towards India.
- The 15th Five-Year Plan (2026–2030) set an annual GDP growth target of 4.5–5%, a Consumer Price Index increase of around 2%, a fiscal deficit of 4% of GDP, the addition of 12 million new urban jobs, a 7% rise in the defence budget, and R&D spending growth of around 10%.
- Official Chinese commentary described this period as playing a “pivotal connecting role” in the country’s path towards socialist modernisation by 2035 and 2049. Singh emphasised that the shift to maintaining growth “within a reasonable range” was a deliberate recalibration in response to global economic realities, not a sign of weakness.
- The institutionalisation of the National Development Planning Law was described as the most important development to emerge from the Two Sessions. Dr. Singh traced its historical weight by contrasting it with Deng Xiaoping’s tradition of “fragmented authority”, in which five-year plans functioned as directional guides rather than legally binding instruments.

- Under Xi Jinping, development planning has been brought within a constitutional and legal framework. Singh argued that this shift gives external observers, and India in particular, a clearer framework through which to study China's development model.
- The Ethnic Unity and Progress Law was codified after a decade of contentious assimilation policies across Xinjiang, Tibet, Inner Mongolia, Hong Kong, and Macau. The law mandates Mandarin instruction, replaces indigenous-language content in schools, and allows for the prosecution of guardians found to be instilling views deemed harmful to ethnic harmony.
- A dedicated Ethnic Unity Promotion Week has been set for the fourth week of September every year. Dr. Singh connected this directly to China's AI-plus development model, arguing that mass Mandarin proficiency is being treated as a prerequisite for deploying frontier technologies at scale.
- On foreign investment and market policy, Dr. Singh noted that China reduced the negative list for foreign investment to 29 items, added 200 sectors eligible for investment incentives, and pledged to treat foreign and domestic firms equally. China also extended zero-tariff treatment to all least-developed countries with which it has diplomatic relations.
- The Five-Year Plan set out ambitions for China to become a financial superpower. The plan's focus on a unified national market aimed to eliminate fragmented procurement, reduce intermediaries, and use AI-driven platforms to connect production sources directly to consumers.
- Dr. Singh pointed to India's mention in the Two Sessions as a meaningful signal of change in China's foreign policy. China, which had long held a dismissive attitude towards India's rise, is now taking note of India's strategic autonomy and its emergence as a credible peer in the global order. Dr. Singh argued that India should engage with China's institutionalised development model not only as a competitive challenge, but as a framework worthy of scholarly analysis and selective learning.

- Dr. Bhim B. Subba, in his remarks as the Chair, underscored the importance of over 104 laws being amended alongside the government work report, including laws on arbitration, foreign trade, private enterprises, atomic energy, and cybersecurity.
- He raised the question of how these legislative developments might be more systematically linked with national policy objectives, noting that the existing literature on China had largely focused on the government work report and paid insufficient attention to the legislative side. He also noted the significance of the Ecological and Environmental Code in the context of China's positioning as a global climate actor, particularly in contrast to the United States' withdrawal from the Paris Agreement.

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