

**CHINA'S PARLIAMENTARY SESSIONS 2017:
AGENDA-SETTING IN THE RUN-UP TO
THE 19TH PARTY CONGRESS**

CHEN Gang

EAI Background Brief No. 1230

Executive Summary

1. Chinese Premier Li Keqiang announced an economic growth target of around 6.5% for 2017, the country's lowest growth target since 1991, at the annual session of China's National People's Congress (NPC) held from 5 to 15 March 2017.
2. The defence budget growth was also brought down to 7%, indicating a cautious leadership in dealing with domestic and foreign affairs in the run-up to the 19th Party Congress.
3. Amidst the economic slowdown, containing the negative impacts arising from years of debt-fuelled stimulus and heavy spending was the major focus of the annual parliamentary meeting.
4. Chinese central banker Zhou Xiaochuan said observers had "overreacted" to China's dwindling foreign reserves, saying the present level of about US\$3 trillion was "sufficient" and still the world's biggest stockpile.
5. On China-US relations, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said the phone call between Xi Jinping and Donald Trump in February has paved the way for stable ties. Fu Ying, NPC spokeswoman, dismissed concerns that China aims to challenge the US-led international order.
6. On China-ASEAN relations, Premier Li said China does not want to see Southeast Asian countries compelled to "pick a side" between Beijing and Washington and that it will continue to support ASEAN's leadership role in regional affairs.
7. The NPC passed the General Provisions of the Civil Law, the opening chapter of a civil code scheduled to be enacted in 2020. Since its establishment in 1949, the People's Republic of China has made several attempts to draft a civil law, all of which had been halted for various reasons including political turmoil.

8. In 2017, a politically sensitive year as the Communist Party of China will be convening its 19th Party Congress, the top leadership has to push through reforms cautiously to maintain political and economic stability.
9. With the ruling party's tightening of media control and emphasis on ideological correctness, NPC delegates in recent years appeared more cautious than before in voicing their views on such sensitive issues as financial reform, property development, pollution, corruption and foreign policy.