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Analysis: PRC Premier's Web Chats Promote Beijing's Cyberspace Media Agenda

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Authoritative PRC media reports of Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao's live online appearances illustrate authorities' expanding use of the Internet to set and control policy discourse in Chinese-language virtual space. They also suggest ongoing efforts to manage leaders' images and portray them as accessible and soliciting online public opinion. While some apparent missteps suggest a cautious, evolving approach to interactive Internet media in relation to top leaders, reported leadership statements indicate sustained attention to the goal of incorporating new technologies into the propaganda system.



Wen Jiabao's 27 February web chat (www.gov.cn)

Recent online appearances by Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao on authoritative PRC media platforms indicate that Beijing continues to expand its use of Internet media to broadcast unique programs communicating the government's view and signaling its policy preferences as part of its overall media strategy.

- On Saturday 27 February, in the run-up to the annual meeting of China's National People's Congress (NPC), Wen appeared in a live "web chat" -- his second -- jointly hosted by *Xinhua Wang*, the internet portal of PRC official news agency Xinhua, and by *Zhongguo Zhengfu Wang* (www.gov.cn), the PRC central government website. The two sites also posted feature pages with reports, video, and transcripts of the chat.[\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#) [\[4\]](#) Xinhua billed the event in advance as Wen's "annual dialogue with netizens" (27 December 2009).[\[5\]](#)
- Wen's 27 February 2010 online appearance followed his first live "web chat" (*zaixian fangtan*), held by *Zhongguo Zhengfu Wang* on 28 February 2009.[\[6\]](#) Xinhua later described that chat as the first of the "top ten events" of 2009 (29 December 2009).[\[7\]](#)
- On 27 December 2009, *Xinhua Wang* broadcast an exclusive online interview of Wen held inside the Zhongnanhai central leadership compound, in which -- like the web chats -- Wen presented the Chinese leadership's views by "answering netizens' questions."[\[8\]](#) [\[9\]](#)

Suggesting an attempt to portray Wen as accessible and soliciting public opinion, in his live online appearances Wen answered selected questions ostensibly submitted by Internet users. Reports portrayed the live online events as direct and sincere communication between Wen and the public as represented by Internet users, who are sometimes referred to in PRC media as "netizens" (*wang min*) or "net friends" (*wang you*).

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- The moderator of Wen's 27 February web chat claimed to have selected questions from among 190,000 submitted online by Internet users and 70,000 submitted via cell phone instant message (SMS) by users of the joint *Xinhua Wang* -- China Mobile online newspaper, according to the chat transcript (*Xinhua Wang*).[\[10\]](#) The moderator described "net friends" worldwide as "eagerly looking forward" to "meeting" Wen based on the "deep, positive impression" created by the 2009 web chat, in which Wen was said to have answered Internet users' questions in a "frank and honest way."
- Wen and the moderator worked to create personal emotional appeal throughout the chat, starting with the language of Wen's opening remarks emphasizing his sense of duty to "the people" and his desire to have a sincere "heart-to-heart" exchange (*Xinhua Wang*).[\[11\]](#) Wen claimed that he "follows the various issues raised by netizens on the Internet very closely."
- Similarly, a Xinhua report on the February 2009 web chat quoted Wen as saying that the government needs to solicit "questions about governance from the people" (28 February 2009).[\[12\]](#)
- *Jiefangjun Bao Online*, website of the daily newspaper of the Central Military Commission, touted "zero distance" between netizens and the PRC leadership and described Wen as a "super net friend" in a report on the 2009 web chat (10 March 2009).[\[13\]](#)

Wen's answers in his 27 February web chat focused on explaining the PRC's economic policies and creating a positive image of Beijing's performance during the global financial crisis. Wen's earlier online appearances also stressed the administration's handling of the economic situation.

- The major issues addressed by Wen in the recent web chat included employment, stimulus measures to counter the global financial crisis, urban and rural income distribution and living standards, US-PRC trade, cross-Strait economic and financial agreements, and product safety and health reforms (*Xinhua Wang*).[\[14\]](#)
- In *Xinhua Wang's* 27 December 2009 interview, Wen answered questions about China's current and future economic situation, and "how China dealt with" the global financial crisis during 2009.[\[15\]](#)
- A Xinhua report on the February 2009 web chat said that the first netizen question asked how the government would respond to the global financial crisis.

Propaganda Use of Internet Media Remains an Important Goal Despite Apparent Missteps

Despite some apparent missteps, PRC authorities' evolving use of Internet media suggest a determination to maintain control of the online portrayal of leaders by co-opting or eliminating unofficial voices.

- Staff at *Renmin Wang*, a web portal affiliated with party daily *Renmin Ribao*, closed a microblogging account set up for PRC President and CPC General Secretary Hu Jintao shortly after PRC Internet users publicized its existence in mid-February, according to a 23 February report in PRC official English-language paper *China Daily*.[\[16\]](#)
- Suggesting that the account may have been created without Hu's knowledge or consent, *Renmin Wang* staff explained that when the web portal launched its microblogging service, *Renmin Weibo*, on 1 February, it automatically generated microblogging accounts for all registered users of its *Strong Nation Forum BBS*, according to the *Renmin Weibo* website and a 23 February report in *Nanfang Dushi Bao*, a Guangzhou daily affiliated with the Guangdong party committee. The reports said Hu registered on *Strong Nation Forum* for a web chat -- the first by a top PRC leader -- in June 2008.[\[17\]](#) [\[18\]](#)
- An officially sanctioned Internet "fan site" for Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao (URL: politics.people.cn/GB/8198/132796/index.htm), was apparently abandoned shortly after its creation in 2008. Although the site is still accessible, it does not appear to have been updated since 12 September 2008, barely one week after its public launch, judging from OSC observation of the site on 17 March

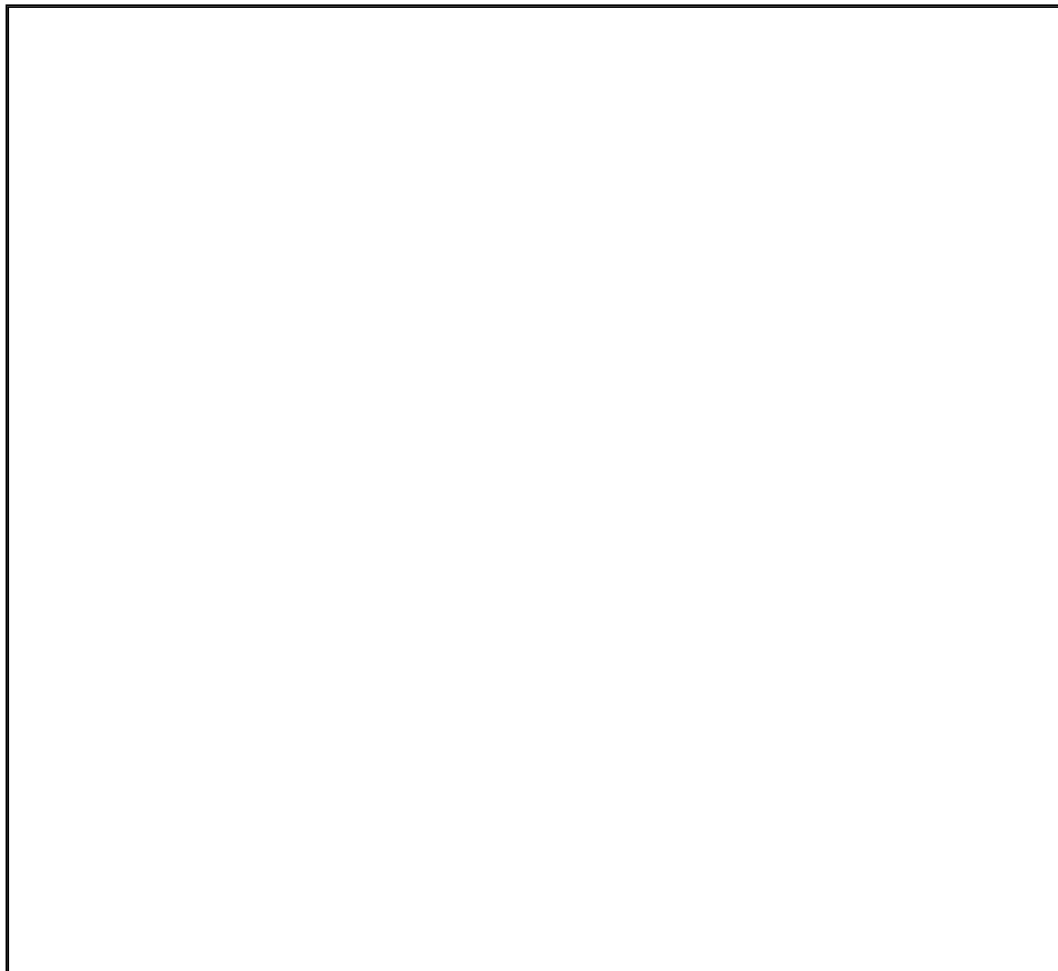
2010. The site apparently was an attempt to co-opt several unofficial Hu and Wen fan sites that appeared in mid-2008.[\[a\]](#)

- Authorities in February 2009 shut down an unofficial "fan site" for provincial-level leaders reportedly inspired by the official Hu-Wen fan site, according to an 11 June 2009 *Global Times* report. [\[19\]](#) Xinhua initially publicized the unofficial fan site (11 June 2009). [\[20\]](#)

PRC authoritative media reporting of leaders' statements indicates sustained attention to the goal of incorporating new technologies into the propaganda system.

- Hu Jintao first signaled top-level approval for leadership engagement with interactive Internet media by conducting a web chat at the offices of *Renmin Wang* in June 2008 (Xinhua, 20 June 2008).[\[21\]](#)
- In a speech at the offices of party daily *Renmin Ribao* on the same occasion, Hu called on media and propaganda workers to "fully understand the social influence of new media" and attach "great importance" to the "building, utilization, and management of the Internet" (*Renmin Ribao*, 21 June 2008).[\[22\]](#)
- In a speech on media policy in November 2009, Politburo Standing Committee member Li Changchun called on media and propaganda workers to "enhance their ability in using new media" and "strive to be experts in releasing news reports with modern information technology" (*Renmin Ribao Online*, 9 November 2009).[\[23\]](#)

The following is a screen shot of the *Zhongguo Zhengfu Wang* (www.gov.cn) feature page for Wen Jiabao's 27 February web chat. The site contains reports, videos, and transcripts.



中国政府网首页 今日中国 中国概况 国家机构 政府机构 法律法规 公文公报 政务互动 政府建设 工作动态 人事任免 新闻发布

温家宝总理与网友在线交流

— 中国政府网、新华网联合专访

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温家宝总理与网友在线交流

2009年2月28日温家宝总理与网友在线交流
2009年12月27日温家宝总理接受新华社专访

温家宝：有决心在本届政府任期内把房地产市场管好

- 温家宝：春节和群众在一起不仅高兴而且心里踏实
- 温家宝：让百姓活得“更有尊严”有三方面含义
- 温家宝：分好社会财富这个“蛋糕”是政府的良知
- 温家宝：“用工荒”并没有改变就业形势严峻状况
- 温家宝：珍惜与网民交流的机会 明年还来在线访谈
- 温家宝：医患矛盾根本在制度 要推高医德风尚
- 医疗制度改革是政府的重要任务 从五个方面着手
- 温家宝：举办世博会让世界了解中国让世界了解世界
- 温家宝：如果出现假冒伪劣产品我们一定严惩不贷

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[中国政府网、新华网]温总理已经来到了访谈现场。 [02:27:14:40]

[中国政府网、新华网]温总理正在了解网友提问的情况。 [02:27:14:40]

[主持人]各位网友，大家好，这里是中国政府网、新华网联合在线访谈。我是主持人赵艳，我们今天邀请到的访谈嘉宾，是海内外网友热切期盼的温家宝总理。一年前，就是在这个访谈间，温总理首次与我们的网友进行在线交流，长达两个多小时，坦诚的答了大家的提问，给网友们留下了深刻的印象。众多的网友都一直期待着，能再有机会和总理在网上交流。今天，温总理满足了大家的愿望，在百忙之中再次来到了我们的访谈间。温总理，您好。 [02:27:14:40]

[温家宝]您好。 [02:27:15:00]

[主持人]我首先代表中国政府网、新华网的海内外网友向您表示热烈的欢迎。 [02:27:15:00]

[温家宝]谢谢。 [02:27:15:00]

[主持人]总理，我们访谈预告发出去之后，网上一片欢腾，网友们热情高涨。访谈刚开始时，编辑们告诉我，仅通过新华网论坛发出来的帖子就已经超过10万条，此时此刻，海内外的网友都在电脑旁等待着您，总理，请您先和网友说几句话吧。 [02:27:15:05]

[温家宝]网友们，很高兴同大家进行在线交流。去年是2月28日，我本来也想还取在2月28号，但我考虑到明天是正月十五，是阖家团圆的日子，所以我就改到27号。在这里，我向大家拜年。 [02:27:15:20]

[温家宝]这次在线访谈，我的心情确实不那么紧张，倒有一种十分珍惜的感情，因为我知道这样的机会不多了。这些天来，我一直十分关注网上网民提出的各种问题。 [02:27:15:00]

[温家宝]我在中南海28年，可以说是一个没有节假日的人，这几天我就更觉得心情特别重。 [02:27:15:00]

[温家宝]看到人民需要解决的问题，我常常而思之，夜以继日，坐而待旦，坐以待旦，我还应当

网友提问摘录 >>

- [李长的心]：温总理你好，现在幼儿园收费太高，要3000多半年，工薪阶层承受不起，请多多关注！
- [胡军博士]：总理最近提出要倡导教育家办学风气，那么，什么机制才能选出“教育家”来办学？那个“制度千里马”又在哪里？
- [春风吹又生]：总理您好，在现在的情形下，我们很大一部分年轻人往往为物质条件所束缚而不能全身心的树立远大的目标并且投入自己喜欢事业的。对于这点您怎么看？

网友快评 >>

- 新华网评：温总理真情温暖亿万网民
- 民意春风 民生温暖
- 温总理言必行、行必果堪称楷模
- 总理给人的感觉像“父亲”
- 各级领导干部应多学总理与网民交流
- 今天我是个幸福的网民
- “民生”也需要人关爱
- 大国总理不容易，我向总理问声好！
- 旅游业如何健康发展

一个人为多数人所信任的时候，他已经不再属于自己，他已经是“公共财产”，属于人民了，我要鞠躬尽瘁，死而后已，真正做到无愧于人民，我要带着真心、真意、真情来同网友们交流的。

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赴广西旱灾地区慰问群众



与广西各族群众共迎新春



在省部级干部研讨班上讲话



就政府工作报告深入农家



同北京市社区群众座谈



征求对政府工作报告的意见



在新疆考察雪灾



在北京调查了解民生情况



元旦期间赴黑龙江看望群众



接受新华社独家专访











[a] See the 24 September 2008 OSC Analysis, **Creation of Leader Fan Site Reflects PRC Image Management** ([CPF20080924534001](http://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_4...)).

[1] [Internet | | 27 February 2010 | 27 February 2010 | Wen Jiabao Xinhua Online Interview Video | http://news.xinhuanet.com/video/2010-02/27/content_13057796.htm | (U) | (U) |]

[2] [OSC | | [CPP20100228001002](http://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_4...) | 27 February 2010 | 27 February 2010 | FYI -- PRC Premier Holds Live Chat With Chinese Netizens 27 Feb | | (U) | (U) | Beijing Xinhua Wang in Chinese -- Multimedia Chinese-language news website sponsored by Xinhua (New China News Agency), China's official news agency, offering official documents and a wide variety of international and domestic news, including video transcripts of major news conferences; URL: <http://www.xinhuanet.com>]

[3] [OSC | | [CPP20100227066007](http://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_4...) | 27 February 2010 | 27 February 2010 | WEN JIABAO HAS WEB CHAT WITH NETIZENS ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL ISSUES AT HOME, ABROAD | | (U) | (U) | Beijing Xinhua Domestic Service in Chinese -- China's official news service (New China News Agency)]

[4] [OSC | | [CPP20100227136001](http://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_4...) | 27 February 2010 | 27 February 2010 | Transcript of PRC Premier Wen Jiabao's Online Chat on Domestic, Sino-US Issues | | (U) | (U) | Beijing Xinhua Wang in Chinese -- Multimedia Chinese-language news website sponsored by Xinhua (New China News Agency), China's official news agency, offering official documents and a wide variety of international and domestic news, including video transcripts of major news conferences; URL: <http://www.xinhuanet.com>]

[5] [OSC | | [CPP20091227968033](http://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_4...) | 27 December 2009 | 27 December 2009 | XINHUA: PREMIER WEN PROMISES ANNUAL DIALOGUE WITH NETIZENS AHEAD OF PARLIAMENT SESSION | | (U) | (U) | Beijing Xinhua in English -- China's official news service for English-language audiences (New China News Agency)]

[6] [OSC | | [CPP20090306530001](http://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_4...) | 6 March 2009 | 6 March 2009 | OSC REPORT: PRC MEDIA CALL PREMIER'S WEB CHAT 'HEART-TO-HEART' TALK WITH PEOPLE | | (U) | (U) |]

[7] [OSC | | [CPP20091229968238](http://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_4...) | 29 December 2009 | 29 December 2009 | Xinhua: Xinhua's Top Ten News Events of 2009 | | (U) | (U) | Beijing Xinhua in English -- China's official news service for English-language audiences (New China News Agency)]

[8] [OSC | | [CPP20091227968015](http://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_4...) | 27 December 2009 | 27 December 2009 | Xinhua: Premier Wen To Hold Exclusive Interview With Xinhua on Sunday | | (U) | (U) | Beijing Xinhua in English -- China's official news service for English-language audiences (New China News Agency)]

[9] [OSC | | [CPP20091228172001](http://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_4...) | 27 December 2009 | 27 December 2009 | XINHUA INTERVIEWS WEN JIABAO ON CURRENT ECONOMIC SITUATION, ECONOMIC WORK IN 2010 | | (U) | (U) | Beijing Xinhua Domestic Service in Chinese -- China's official news service (New China News Agency)]

[10] [OSC | | [CPP20100227136001](http://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_4...) | 27 February 2010 | 27 February 2010 | Transcript of PRC Premier Wen Jiabao's Online Chat on Domestic, Sino-US Issues | | (U) | (U) | Beijing Xinhua Wang in Chinese -- Multimedia Chinese-language news website sponsored by Xinhua (New China News Agency), China's official news agency, offering official documents and a wide variety of international and domestic news, including video transcripts of major news conferences; URL: <http://www.xinhuanet.com>]

[11] [OSC | | [CPP20100227136001](http://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_4...) | 27 February 2010 | 27 February 2010 | Transcript of PRC Premier Wen Jiabao's Online Chat on Domestic, Sino-US Issues | | (U) | (U) | Beijing Xinhua Wang in Chinese -- Multimedia Chinese-language news website sponsored by Xinhua (New China News Agency), China's official news agency, offering official documents and a wide variety of international and domestic news, including video transcripts of major news conferences; URL: <http://www.xinhuanet.com>]

[12] [OSC | | [CPP20090301138002](http://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_203_121123_4...) | 28 February 2009 | 28 February 2009 | Xinhua Sidelights on Wen Jiabao's Internet Chat With Netizens 28 Feb | | (U) | (U) | Beijing Xinhua Domestic Service in Chinese -- China's official

news service (New China News Agency)]

[13] [OSC | | [CPP20090311710007](#) | 10 March 2009 | 10 March 2009 | JFJB Article on Netizens' Online Exchanges With State Leaders | | (U) | (U) | Beijing Jiefangjun Bao Online in Chinese -- Website of daily newspaper of the Central Military Commission of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), reporting on a wide range of military affairs. URL: <http://www.chinamil.com.cn/>]

[14] [OSC | | [CPP20100227136001](#) | 27 February 2010 | 27 February 2010 | Transcript of PRC Premier Wen Jiabao's Online Chat on Domestic, Sino-US Issues | | (U) | (U) | Beijing Xinhua Wang in Chinese -- Multimedia Chinese-language news website sponsored by Xinhua (New China News Agency), China's official news agency, offering official documents and a wide variety of international and domestic news, including video transcripts of major news conferences; URL: <http://www.xinhuanet.com/>]

[15] [OSC | | [CPP20091228172001](#) | 27 December 2009 | 27 December 2009 | XINHUA INTERVIEWS WEN JIABAO ON CURRENT ECONOMIC SITUATION, ECONOMIC WORK IN 2010 | | (U) | (U) | Beijing Xinhua Domestic Service in Chinese -- China's official news service (New China News Agency)]

[16] [OSC | | [CPP20100223167008](#) | 23 February 2010 | 23 February 2010 | China Daily Cites Report: PRC President Hu Jintao's Micro Blog Closed | | (U) | (U) | Beijing China Daily Online in English -- Website of China's official English-language newspaper, offering both the website of the paper and additional content; URL: <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/>]

[17] [OSC | | | 22 February 2010 | 22 February 2010 | Renmin Wang Chuxian "Hu Jintao" Shiming Renzheng Weibo | (http://epaper.nddaily.com/A/html/2010-02/22/content_1015976.htm). | (U) | (U) | Guangzhou Nanfang Dushi Bao (Online) in Chinese -- Popular and occasionally outspoken daily newspaper affiliated with Nanfang Ribao, the daily newspaper of the Guangdong Provincial CPC Committee.]

[18] [OSC | | [CPP20100224715031](#) | 24 February 2010 | | OSC Summary: Prominent PRC Activist Bloggers' Postings, 18-24 Feb 2010 | | (U//FOUO) | (U//FOUO) |]

[19] [OSC | | | 11 June 2009 | 11 June 2009 | Unofficial Fan Club for Party Leaders Closed | http://special.globaltimes.cn/2009-06/436407_5.html | (U) | (U) |]

[20] [OSC | | [CPP20090121968098](#) | 21 January 2009 | | Xinhua 'China Focus': 'Website Forces China's Officials To Listen to Fans' | | (U//FOUO) | (U//FOUO) | Beijing Xinhua in English -- China's official news service for English-language audiences (New China News Agency)]

[21] [OSC | | [CPP20080620354001](#) | 20 June 2008 | 20 June 2008 | Xinhua 'Record' of Hu Jintao's Inspection of RMRB on Its 60th Anniversary | | (//FOUO) | (//FOUO) | Beijing Xinhua Domestic Service in Chinese -- China's official news service (New China News Agency)]

[22] [OSC | | [CPP20080621701001](#) | 21 June 2008 | 21 June 2008 | Apparent Text of Hu Jintao Speech at Renmin Ribao on Its 60th Anniversary | | (//FOUO) | (//FOUO) | Beijing Renmin Ribao Online in Chinese -- Website of daily newspaper of the CPC Central Committee (People's Daily)]

[23] [OSC | | [CPP20091109710003](#) | 9 November 2009 | 9 November 2009 | PRC Li Changchun's Speech at 10th Festival of Chinese Journalists | | (//FOUO) | (//FOUO) | Beijing Renmin Ribao Online in Chinese -- Website of daily newspaper of the CPC Central Committee (People's Daily)]

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