

CHINA — 30 YEARS OF ECONOMIC REFORM

Hu Jintao pledges to never turn back

‘REVOLUTION’: China’s economic reforms started in the countryside where authorities under the direction of former leader Deng Xiaoping de-collectivized land

AFP, BEIJING

Chinese President Hu Jintao (胡锦涛) pledged yesterday that China would never turn back on its path of opening to the world, as he led celebrations for the nation’s 30 years of spectacular economic reforms.

In a long speech to thousands of faithful from the ruling Communist Party in Beijing, Hu hailed the achievements of historic proportions made in China over the past three decades and promised more.

“There’s no way for us to turn back,” Hu told the audience at the Great Hall of the People on the edge of Tiananmen Square, China’s political heart. “The future development of China must depend on reform and opening up.”

However, in a speech laced with references to Marxist and socialist theory, Hu made it clear the Communist Party would remain in control of the country and that there would be little tolerance for dissent.

“Without stability, we can do nothing and [we will] lose what has been achieved,” he said. “Our party will ... remain the backbone of all national ethnic groups in dealing with various foreign and domestic risks and tests, and remain the core in the historic process of developing socialism with Chinese characteristics.”

Hu was speaking on the 30th anniversary of the start of China’s

opening and reform, which began with a decision by former leader Deng Xiaoping (邓小平) to abandon the strictly closed society chosen by his predecessor, Mao Zedong (毛澤東).

It was on Dec. 18, 1978, that the elite of the Communist Party ratified Deng’s launching of economic reforms.

At that time, China was emerging from the Cultural Revolution, a period of intense social and political upheaval launched by revolutionary leader Mao, and was still suffering famines.

This new “revolution” started in the countryside, where authorities began to de-collectivize land and dismantle communes, but it quickly spread to cities.

Wary of an opposing power base in economically powerful Shanghai, Deng chose the extreme south of the country as the guinea pig for his reforms.

Shenzhen, which borders Hong Kong and was then still a fishing village, and some other southern cities were designated China’s first Special Economic Zones, becoming economic powerhouses that were models for the rest of the country.

Hu pointed to many of these achievements yesterday, saying that China’s economy had grown at an average of 9.8 percent each year since 1978, three times the world average.



A paramilitary police officer stands guard at Tiananmen Square following a ceremony for the 30th Anniversary of Reforming and Opening Up at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, China, yesterday.

With this had come global power, he said.

“Our international status and influence has risen,” Hu said.

But he acknowledged many

problems remained in the Chinese power structure and throughout society.

“There is a long way to go before we realize our grand goal, we have

no reason to be smug,” Hu said. “We must realize our country is still in a primary state of socialism and will stay in that state for a long time.”

Among the problems, Hu said

that there was still a huge rich-poor divide between urban and rural areas, and that the nation’s agricultural foundations remained weak.

China builds world’s biggest cities

NEW LANDSCAPE: To meet new laws on energy usage, buildings will be stripped down, flooded with sunlight, super-insulated in the north and ventilated in the south

AFP, SHANGHAI

China’s past 30 years of reforms have planted seeds that will in the coming decades produce future coastal megacities, an urban population of 1 billion and possibly the world’s biggest economy.

What the next 30 years of reforms have in store may be unclear but experts agree that with widespread pollution problems and a tidal wave of migration set to hit China’s cities, urbanization will be the nation’s biggest challenge.

“The next 30 years are going to be a critical timetable for addressing all the needs of a large population and how China manages cities,” said James Canton, author of *The Extreme Future*.

By 2025 China’s urban population is expected to rise to 926 million from 572 million in 2005, an increase of more than the current US population, management consultants McKinsey and Company said.

By 2030 that number will increase to 1 billion.

Over the next two decades China will build 20,000 to 50,000 new skyscrapers — the equivalent of 10 New York cities, McKinsey said.

More than 170 cities will need mass transit systems by 2025 — more than twice the number in all of Europe — in what McKinsey described as the “greatest boom in mass-transit in history.”

Chinese cities will leverage

their manufacturing strengths to become innovation centers for products such as nanotechnology, smart materials and state-of-the-art pharmaceuticals, Canton said.

They will also be home to the world’s largest middle class, he said. But to accommodate more than 1 billion people, entirely new forms of infrastructure and security frameworks will need to be developed.

“You’re going to have to say no to somebody. You will see the emergence of biometric identification; you will not be able to enter some cities,” he said.

As cities become bigger, land reclamation will leave little water between Hong Kong and the mainland, Canton said.

And he said demographic, economic and ecological pressure will leave China with no choice but to try innovative solutions.

“Very few times in the history of a global civilization will you see this ability of creating something fresh and new,” Canton said.

“They are going to do some very stunning things in terms of the next cities of the future,” he said.

Economist and urban planner Stanley Yip (葉祖達) is already working on the next generation of Chinese cities.

He is leading British engineering consultancy Arup’s work with various cities across China on experimental eco-towns as part of a



A worker cleans the window of a building in Changzhi, Shanxi Province, yesterday.

drive by Beijing to develop competing sustainable solutions.

The future of Chinese architecture and design could be dictated by a new law requiring all new buildings to cut energy use by half by the end of 2010, he said.

To meet those requirements, new buildings will be stripped down, flooded with natural light, super-insulated in cooler northern cities, and more open and ventilated in the south. Solar panels will become common features.

“All these devices will come in and they will start to change the look and feel of the buildings,” Yip said.

China’s economy is currently the world’s fourth biggest and by 2025 it is expected to overtake Japan for the number two spot, the US National Intelligence Council said.

The biggest threats facing China’s communist leaders are urban challenges such as the growing gap between the rich and poor, a

fraying social safety net, official corruption and environmental damage, the council said.

But barring a “perfect storm,” where several of these problems escalate dramatically at the same time, the Communist Party is likely to maintain its grip, it said in its latest forecast.

By 2038, China will likely be the world’s largest economy but most incomes will still lag behind the West, said Yao Shujie (姚樹潔), head of Nottingham University’s School of Contemporary Chinese Studies.

The next generation of leaders’ priorities will be mending the country’s social and environmental fabric, Yao said.

“The last 30 years didn’t do so well in terms of equality and social justice and the environment and there was slow progress in terms of political reform,” Yao said.

“These are going to be the biggest challenges in the next 30 years,” he said.

With Olympics over China shuts down sensitive Web sites

AP, BEIJING

With the glare of the Olympic spotlight gone, China has resumed blocking access to the Internet sites of some foreign media, reversing itself on earlier promises to expand press freedom as part of its bid to win the games, human rights groups and press advocates said.

The Chinese-language Web sites of the BBC and Voice of America, along with the Hong Kong-based media *Ming Pao* and *Asiaweek*, are among the sites that have been inaccessible since early this month, the press rights group Reporters Without Borders said.

“Right now, the authorities are gradually rolling back all the progress made in the run-up to this summer’s Olympic games, when even foreign Web sites in Mandarin were made accessible. The pretense of liberalization is now over,” the group said in a statement on Wednesday, as it urged China to unblock the sites.

Earlier this week, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao (劉建超) defended China’s right to censor Web sites that have material deemed illegal by the government, saying that other countries regulate their Internet usage too.

During the Summer Games held in August, China allowed access to long-barred Web sites such as the BBC site and Human Rights Watch after an outcry from foreign reporters who complained that Beijing was failing to live up to its pledges of greater media freedom.

The fact that China has now chosen to re-block those sites is not so surprising, said Rebecca MacKinnon, a journalism professor who teaches about media and the Internet at the University of Hong Kong.

“I don’t think very many people expected to see the Olympics herald a whole new era in China, at least not as far as politics and media,” she said.

MacKinnon noted that the policing of the Internet in China, which has the most online users in the world with more than 250 million, swings between phases of looser monitoring and then tighter regulation.

“There were a lot of foreigners running around covering the Olympics. It made sense to unblock at that time,” she said.

Nicholas Bequelin, Asia researcher for Human Rights Watch, said Beijing is also taking advantage of the fact that the world’s attention has shifted away from China after the Olympics.

“It’s easier to suppress dissent when you don’t have 10,000 journalists in town,” he said.

Bequelin said he believed that the Internet restrictions were part of a larger attempt at political control during a period of uncertainty and potential instability for the government. China is facing a serious economic downturn this year, and social unrest has increased.

“I think we’re heading toward a sensitive period for the leadership,” he said. “Information control is the basic tool of political control in China.”

Shenzhen mirrors China’s 30-year reforms

MIGRANT WORKERS: Labor rights groups say the prosperity and growth of the Special Economic Zone has been fueled by the exploitation of workers in sweatshop conditions

AFP, SHENZHEN

Once a migrant worker, today a successful businesswoman and writer, An Zi’s career has closely mirrored that of Shenzhen, a southern Chinese city that has flourished during 30 years of market reforms.

She was only a teenager on the day in 1984 when she watched her cousin return to her village from work in a Shenzhen television factory — an experience that changed her life.

“When I saw her, I noticed the way she dressed, wore make-up, her body, her way of thinking, everything had changed about her,” said An, now 41, recalling why she decided to leave her rural home in Guangdong Province.

“I was in the first group of migrant workers to participate in the opening up and reform policy and

the beginning of Shenzhen,” said An as her carefully manicured hands softly combed through her stylishly cut hair.

Since arriving, An has risen to run her own business, an employment agency for domestic workers, while also becoming a successful author of self-improvement books.

DRAMATIC CHANGE

Like her, Shenzhen, which borders the former British colony of Hong Kong, has changed dramatically over the years, since it was given the status of a special economic zone in 1980.

“When Shenzhen was established, there were only a little over 30,000 people here living on two or three small roads, this was a small impoverished border village,” Mayor Xu Zongheng (許宗衡) told

journalists recently.

The former poor fishing village has boasted an annual economic growth rate of 26.9 percent over the past 28 years.

POPULATION

The exploding economy has also seen the population balloon to 11 million, although only 2 million are permanent residents and the rest are part of China’s huge army of migrant workers.

“We have worked hard, we have advanced, we have dared to innovate, we have had remarkable success in our economic and social development that approaches a miracle in the history of modernization, urbanization and industrialization,” Xu beamed.

With its ultra-modern skyscrapers, Shenzhen does not need to

envy neighboring Hong Kong. With its parks, palm trees and wide boulevards it compares more favorably with Silicon Valley.

But even if Shenzhen was built thanks to the efforts of millions of people like An Zi, not all have succeeded like her.

MICROCOSM

Located in the Pearl River Delta, the heartland of China’s export-oriented economy, the region is a microcosm of the nation, with widespread inequalities and accents from all corners of the country.

The ongoing global economic downturn has led to factory closures and growing unemployment among the migrant workers.

Labor rights groups say the prosperity of Shenzhen and neighboring Guangdong Province has largely come from the exploitation of migrant workers, many of whom have endured sweatshop working conditions.

Near Shenzhen’s business center, in a poor part of town with run-down buildings, many in decay, a group of migrant workers played billiards to pass the time before the next job came along.

“Right now there are only small jobs. We will see after the Chinese New Year [end of January] if the situation improves,” one 53-year-old worker from a town hundreds of kilometers away said.

For the authorities, the economic crisis offers an opportunity to deepen an ongoing transformation of Shenzhen away from its traditional textile industries toward high tech companies.

“These kinds of companies, who have brands that are founded on their own property rights, sustain our development,” mayor Xu said. “I am sure that if we persevere in the restructuring and optimization of our production, we will become a model of a modern industry with strong competitiveness.”