

# 19<sup>th</sup> CPC NATIONAL CONGRESS | Comment

## Emphasis on more equitable society

A cleaner environment and a better balanced distribution of the fruits of economic growth are high on Xi's agenda

By YAO YANG

In his opening speech on the first day of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) on Oct 18, General Secretary Xi Jinping said China has entered a new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and the main contradiction in Chinese society is no longer the gap between people's wants and the limits of social production; instead it is "the contradiction between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people's ever-growing needs for a better life". This signals a paradigm shift in the Party's assessment of its main challenge.

For a long time the Party believed its main challenge in improving people's living standards was the deficiency of production. After nearly 40 years of spectacular growth, however, China is now the world's second-largest economy, its per-capita income is more than 10 times what it was 40 years ago, and the Party's centennial goal of establishing a well-off society by 2020 will soon come true.

However, the fruits of economic growth have not been evenly dis-

tributed across the population. And although China is a much more affluent society today and the skylines of many Chinese coastal cities dwarf those in Europe, income and wealth inequality has greatly widened and many people in inland provinces' rural areas have just about managed to move into safer houses.

Also, high economic growth has come at the cost of the environment: Smog has become a frequent phenomenon in the North China plains, surface and ground water has been contaminated by industrial wastes and ecosystems have been impaired in many areas.

This is precisely the gap "between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people's ever-growing needs for a better life". For most Chinese people, "a better life" no longer merely means higher income; it also includes a more equitable distribution of wealth, a just society and cleaner environment. As such, Xi's statement makes it clear the Party is now ready to narrow this gap, because it will focus not only on growth but also on building a more harmonious, equitable, just and eco-friendly society.

**"Under Xi's direction, poverty alleviation has gained momentum, as he has emphasized targeted poverty reduction for individual families."**

China has been already making efforts to achieve that goal. Under Xi's direction, poverty alleviation has gained momentum, as he has emphasized targeted poverty reduction for individual families, which is different from the past focus on reducing poverty at the county level. And the decline in the poverty rate from 10 percent five years ago to 4 percent today reflects that Xi's plan has been effective.

Besides, with the substantial increase in the central government's fiscal transfer to inland regions, income is now growing faster in inland provinces than in coastal areas. These changes have reduced overall income inequality, with the Gini coefficient of household income declining from the peak of 0.491 in 2008 to 0.465 last year.

More important, the anti-corruption campaign has, to a large extent, restored social justice. The aim of the anti-corruption drive is not just to punish corrupt officials, but also to deter potential offenders. Befittingly, Xi also said on Oct 18 that more robust institutions will be introduced to fight corruption.

Environmental protection is

high on Xi's agenda too. As part of the structural adjustment plan announced two years ago, factories that fail to meet the environmental standards are being forced to close, because the government has never been more serious about environmental protection. Along with pollution reduction, many cities have begun to take measures to restore the ecosystem, even investing huge amounts for the purpose. As a result, there is real hope among the people that they will get to enjoy blue skies and clean water again in the future.

The CPC was established as a party to build a more equal and prosperous society. The Party still carries that conviction despite the ups and downs in its history. In the last 40 years, the Party has made greater efforts to build a prosperous society. The CPC National Congress has unfolded a new era in the Party's effort to achieve the goal of building a prosperous, but more equal, just and eco-friendly, society.

*The author is Cheung Kong Scholar and Boya Chair Professor, and the dean of the National School of Development, Peking University.*

## Xi reiterates importance of rule of law

System of governance is key to maintaining social order and the successful continuation of reform

By QIAO XINSHENG

The phrase "rule of law" appeared 19 times in the report General Secretary Xi Jinping delivered to the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) on Oct 18.

In his speech, Xi said "the overall goal of comprehensively advancing law-based governance is to establish a system of socialist rule of law with Chinese characteristics and build a country of socialist rule of law".

In fact, as Xi said, "law-based governance" has been actively developed over the past five years as an important pillar of the Four Comprehensives, the four political goals put forward by Xi. The other three are to build a moderately prosperous society, deepen reform and strictly govern the party.

In October 2014, the Fourth Ple-

num of the 18th CPC Central Committee made the historic decision to comprehensively advance the rule of law, which reflects the Party's legal awareness, and its determination to more equitably distribute the fruit of reform and lead the Chinese people into a well-off society.

China has a long history of the rule of law. But its rule of law is different from what the term means in modern parlance.

The Party began promoting the rule of law in the modern sense of the term in the 1990s, in order to establish a socialist rule of law in the country and overcome the problems arising due to the market economy reform.

The rule of law means law-based governance, which is important to maintain social order, institutionalize the fruit of reform, and ensure the orderly progress of future reforms.

The CPC Central Committee with Xi Jinping as its core fully understands the problems associated with China's socialist rule of law. It has said the aim of the rule of law is to govern the country according to the Constitution, and the authorities at various levels must act according to the law.

The 18th CPC Central Committee laid out the road map for establishing complete rule of law in China, saying the people occupy the principal position in the rule of law, as its primary purpose is to protect people's rights and interests, and to allow them to supervise civil servants' exercise of power.

The decision of the Fourth Plenum of the 18th CPC Central Committee is particularly important because it says the power of the State originates from the people, and calls for protecting people's rights and interests by improv-

ing the legal system. The National People's Congress, China's top legislature, has issued a series of important legal documents since the 18th Party Congress in 2012, remarkably improving the legal system in order to better protect people's rights and interests.

The election and criminal laws have been amended, so have the laws related to market economy and litigation, to ensure smooth social and economic development, as well as to address people's concerns and grievances.

The revision of the business registration system and suspension of some clauses in the laws on joint venture operation and foreign enterprises in China have given overseas investors greater access to the country's free trade zones. And the negative-list management model for trade, exercise of power and government responsibilities,

piloted in the free trade zones, have now been implemented throughout the country.

The concept and promotion of the rule of law over the past five years have brought about qualitative, as opposed to quantitative, changes in Chinese society and governance.

The anti-corruption campaign, carried out in accordance with the rule of law, is a case in point, as it has helped clean the Party and the government, improved governance and effectively protected people's rights to supervise the government, as required by the Constitution.

And the 19th Party Congress has injected new vitality among the authorities to make greater efforts to establish comprehensive rule of law in the country.

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