VIEWS

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Tackle the root causes of corruption

The 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) held its fifth plenary session from Monday to Thursday in Beijing, adopting the Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Certain Major Issues concerning Persevering with Full and Rigorous Party Self-Governance.

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2012, China's anti-corruption efforts have made remarkable progress.

However, the challenges facing the anti-corruption campaign remain grave and complex.

Existing corruption has not yet been fully eradicated, while new cases continue to emerge.

While intensifying investigations and prosecutions is important, it is even more important to identify and address institutional weaknesses revealed by individual cases, thereby reducing opportunities for corruption and effectively preventing its spread.

Focusing narrowly on individual cases and treating them in isolation will not address corruption at its root.

Besides following necessary procedures and examining specific violations of Party discipline and State laws, it is vital to delve deeper into the underlying causes of corruption.

Corruption is often linked to the exercise of power. The recurrence of corruption cases points to risks in the exercise of power, institutional weaknesses and oversight gaps.

By looking beyond individual cases and conducting a comprehensive review of the exercise of power, policy implementation and work procedures, we can identify institutional bottlenecks and offer targeted, practical recommendations to strengthen anti-corruption governance. This is essential for tackling corruption at its source.

This is particularly important when similar cases recur in the same regions, industries or sectors. In such instances, it is necessary to identify loopholes in the exercise of power and weaknesses in institutional safeguards so that timely adjustments can prevent similar incidents in the future.

Addressing both symptoms and root causes is essential to eradicating the conditions that breed corruption.

Investigations and prosecutions not only deter and punish those involved in corrupt practices but also serve as warnings to potential offenders, prompting officials to stop misconduct before it escalates.

Only by tackling the root causes of corruption can this menace be effectively curbed, ensuring that the CPC maintains its essential character, political integrity and fundamental purpose.

For example, since early 2026, the discipline inspection and supervision commission of Hefeng county in Hubei province has discovered recurring problems in the management of rural collective funds, assets and resources.

The authorities subsequently introduced county-level measures governing the entire process of small-scale construction projects undertaken by rural collectives and revised the county's financial management rules.

These steps have helped address institutional weaknesses and remove conditions that foster corruption.

Investigating cases is not an end in itself. The ultimate goal of the anti-corruption campaign is to improve governance. The fight against corruption depends on investigating individual cases, but it doesn't stop there. The key is to integrate case investigations with post-investigation rectification and governance, linking problem identification, institutional improvement and tangible results.

Lessons drawn from individual cases should, where appropriate, be translated into governance practices that can be applied more broadly.

Hence, political oversight, efforts to improve conduct and strict enforcement of Party discipline must play a stronger role in preventing corruption.

Party organizations at all levels must fulfill their responsibilities for full and rigorous Party self-governance, ensuring that the fear of punishment deters officials from engaging in corrupt practices.

Anti-corruption efforts must be closely integrated with the development of laws, regulations and institutional rules.

By tightening institutional constraints and strengthening the systems governing the exercise of power, officials can be prevented from abusing their positions for personal gain.

Also, ideological development and integrity education must be strengthened, fostering a culture of integrity that shapes officials' values and behavior.

The goal is to cultivate an internal commitment to ethical conduct so that officials refrain from corruption not only out of fear of punishment or constraints of rules but also a genuine desire to maintain integrity.

The defining feature of China's anti-corruption efforts is an integrated approach that ensures officials do not have the audacity, opportunity or desire to engage in corruption.

The three elements — a deterrence mechanism that discourages corruption, a preventive mechanism that makes it impossible, and a safeguard mechanism that fosters unwillingness — must work in coordination and reinforce one another.

Together, they should cover officials throughout their careers, from joining the Party and entering public service to leaving office and retiring, creating a concerted force against corruption.

Building robust institutional safeguards against corruption can fundamentally narrow the scope for rent-seeking, eliminate backroom dealings and curb corrupt practices in a systematic manner. A strong and disciplined organization must first ensure that its own members meet the highest standards.

To implement the CPC Central Committee's major decisions and arrangements for sustained and rigorous self-governance, the fight against corruption must be pursued with greater resolve and a clearer understanding of the challenges ahead.

This requires tackling corruption at its source.

Investigations and prosecutions should identify institutional weaknesses and greater effort should be devoted to improving the systems that govern the exercise of power.

Institutional rules must be enforced more rigorously, and preventive safeguards must be established early.

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The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Yu Chunhai

Putting people first to revive consumer spending

A walk in the park costs nothing, but it could lead to spending on a cup of coffee, a meal out or a weekend trip. Similarly, family gatherings and socializing with friends can spur spending. However, before people open their wallets, they need something more intangible: the time and energy to truly enjoy life.

This connection offers a fresh perspective on China's efforts to boost household consumption. A wide range of measures, from income support and social security to consumer subsidies and trade-in programs, aim to encourage spending. Yet consumption remains a modest part of economic activity.

In 2025, household consumption accounted for about 40 percent of China's GDP, up about 1.5 percentage points over the previous decade.

The challenge is not simply whether people have money to spend. It is also whether they feel confident about the future, find goods and services that meet their needs, and have enough time to enjoy what their income can buy.

A noteworthy trend emerged in 2025: per capita consumption grew more slowly than per capita disposable income, with the gap widening as the year progressed. This suggests that higher incomes don't automatically translate into stronger spending. Factors such as job security, income growth and future expenses influence decisions just as much as current purchasing power.

These concerns assume greater importance as China transitions to new growth drivers, including artificial intelligence. While emerging technologies can boost productivity, create new industries and enhance services, they don't always immediately translate into broad-based employment growth. AI-driven industries may generate substantial economic value without creating as many jobs as previous technological shifts.

For workers navigating this transition, uncertainty about the availability and quality of jobs can lead to precautionary saving. Families tend to delay discretionary purchases when they are unsure about future income security.



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Therefore, supporting consumption also means ensuring that technological progress is accompanied by opportunities for people to participate in the economy and share its benefits.

But income and confidence are only part of the picture. Consumption is not an isolated economic transaction; it is intertwined with people's lifestyles. People have needs as individuals, family members and participants in society.

Some needs, such as food, housing, healthcare and financial security, are immediate and essential. Others relate to development, recreation, relationships and a sense of belonging. These needs are interconnected, but not all depend solely on money.

A family might be able to afford a weekend outing but doesn't have the time to take one. A worker may have the means to eat out yet be too exhausted after a long day. Someone may wish to pursue a hobby, visit friends or explore a nearby destination but find that work leaves little time for anything beyond daily necessities.

When time is scarce, consumption can narrow down to essentials. What appears as reluctance to spend in economic data might actually be a lack of opportunity to enjoy life beyond work.

It is here that non-market activities become economically significant. Walking, exercising, spending time with family and meeting friends may contribute little to the GDP directly, but they create the conditions for spending.

A stroll can lead to a drink at a café; a day in the countryside can bring business to restaurants; a relaxed weekend can generate demand for accommodation and local attractions.

Leisure is not just a reward that comes from economic activity; it can also help generate it.

When people have the time and energy for social life, they are more likely to explore new experiences, services and activities that bring enjoyment.

That does not mean leisure should be justified solely by its contribution to economic growth. Rest, family life and social connections have their own value. A healthy economy should make room for these, rather than measure well-being solely by the volume of goods and services purchased.

The question of working time is therefore relevant to China's consumption agenda. It is important to ensure that workers can take the rest and leave which they are entitled to. Effective enforcement of labor protections, alongside a workplace culture that values productivity rather than simply time spent on the job, can help people balance professional responsibilities with personal life.

No single measure will resolve China's consumption challenge. Sustained progress requires stable employment, reasonable income growth, stronger social protection, accessible public services and a more responsive supply of goods and services. Better protection against future risks can also give households the confidence to spend rather than save for every possible uncertainty.

Ultimately, a consumer economy depends on more than purchasing power. It relies on people having both the means and the freedom to make use of it. Providing security to households is important, as is giving them space to live.

When people have time to rest, care for their families, maintain social ties and explore the world around them, spending can emerge more naturally from everyday life. Putting people first is not separate from the goal of stronger consumption; it is integral to making that goal sustainable.

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The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

He Wenjiong

Strengthening social security to unlock consumption potential

A family may be able to afford a new refrigerator, a weekend trip or a meal out, yet hesitate to spend. The prospect of an aging parent needing care, a serious illness bringing hefty medical bills or rising childcare costs can make even routine purchases feel risky.

Social security can help ease that uncertainty by strengthening low-income households' purchasing power and protecting families against major life risks, boosting consumer confidence and economic growth.

China has made remarkable progress in building its social security system since reform and opening-up, extending coverage, introducing new programs and enhancing benefits. By the end of September 2026, 1.079 billion people were enrolled in basic pension insurance, 251 million in unemployment insurance and 327 million in work injury insurance. But gaps remain, leaving some groups more vulnerable to life's major risks than others. Closing these gaps would not only strengthen public welfare but could also unlock consumption that households are holding back out of caution.

Consider retirement, for instance. For people approaching old age, the question is not simply how much they can spend now but also how they will pay for daily necessities after they stop working.

China's basic pension system offers different arrangements for employees and other residents. While employee pensions generally provide more substantial support, many older residents, particularly older rural residents, receive meager benefits.

For many older people covered by the urban and rural residents' pension scheme, pension benefits are insufficient even to meet basic living needs, limiting both their purchasing power and their confidence to spend. Raising that floor is also among the most efficient ways to generate demand. Older rural residents with limited incomes are likely to spend a substantial share of any additional pension income on everyday needs, including food, medicine and household goods.

Economist Liu Shijin has estimated that an extra 1 trillion yuan ($150 billion) of rural pension spending could raise GDP by about 1.2 trillion yuan. Pension spending deserves greater attention alongside industrial policies as a means of supporting domestic demand.

Similarly, the fear of medical bills constrains spending, affecting households at any stage of life. China has achieved broad basic medical insurance coverage. Enrollment holds at around 95 percent of the population, and the government subsidy for the scheme covering rural and non-working urban residents rises by 24 yuan to at least 724 yuan per person in 2026. Even so, families still face substantial out-of-pocket expenses when serious illness strikes.

The purpose of social security is not to persuade people to spend money they cannot afford to lose.

For lower-income households, the financial strain may extend far beyond the immediate medical emergency.

To address this concern, China should consider capping out-of-pocket payments for essential medical services, with clear definitions and safeguards for the sustainability of the system. The 15th Five-Year Plan for Universal Medical Security, issued in August, keeps fund payments at about 80 percent of in-scope inpatient costs for employees and 70 percent for residents. Higher reimbursement rates may still leave families with hefty medical bills. An annual cap on out-of-pocket costs for essential care would offer greater financial certainty.

China should also steadily integrate the basic medical insurance schemes for employees and for urban and rural residents, gradually establishing a unified basic medical insurance system covering the entire population.

For younger families, financial calculations often begin before a child is even born. The costs of childbirth, childcare and education can shape household budgets for years, leaving little room for other spending. While financial support alone won't reverse declining fertility rates, families should not have to bear these costs without adequate social support.

China has already taken a practical step in improving access to maternity benefits. In early 2026, the country completed the nationwide rollout of direct maternity allowance payments to eligible individuals, rather than routing the funds through employers. In the first seven months of 2026, maternity allowance spending reached 60.78 billion yuan, according to the National Healthcare Security Administration.

Further reform should ensure equal benefits for maternity-related medical expenses under the employee and resident insurance schemes, establishing a maternity allowance scheme covering all women who give birth, and expanding affordable childcare options. The National Healthcare Security Administration has said that efforts are under way to expand maternity insurance participation among eligible flexible workers, migrant workers and workers in new forms of employment.

Extending access to these groups would help make family support more consistent as employment patterns change. A more balanced distribution of public education resources and improved teaching arrangements during compulsory education would reduce the long-term pressures on young and middle-aged families. In addition, parents should receive support that gives them more time to care for their children and helps them balance work and family responsibilities.

The same principle applies to the evolving labor market. As technology and the organization of production have changed, the number of workers in informal employment and their share of the workforce have grown. Employee social insurance schemes are still largely designed for workers in formal employment with clearly defined employment relationships. As a result, many workers in informal employment, including those in newer forms of work, face barriers to joining these schemes.

For someone whose income fluctuates from month to month, uncertainty about future benefits can make saving seem more urgent than spending. Making employee social insurance more inclusive, so that protection extends to workers across different forms of employment, would help give all workers greater certainty about their future protection and strengthen their confidence to spend.

As China ages and households shrink, caring for older relatives who can no longer live independently forces many families to juggle paid work and demanding caregiving responsibilities. The financial and emotional strain affects not only the older person's quality of life, but also the working-age family's ability to earn and spend.

Long-term care insurance can help distribute this burden more broadly. In March 2026, China issued national guidelines to accelerate the establishment of long-term care insurance, with the goal of achieving basic nationwide coverage by the end of 2028.

By September, 121 pooling areas had established the system, and 22 provinces had issued implementation plans.

These measures alone cannot guarantee stronger consumption. Household income, job prospects and the availability of goods and services also matter, while expanding social security requires sustainable funding. Reform must balance adequate protection with sound funding and long-term sustainability.

The purpose of social security is not to persuade people to spend money they cannot afford to lose. It is to help ensure that they do not feel compelled to save every available yuan against the next illness, the next stage of family life or the next unexpected bill. When people have greater confidence in their future, they can spend with greater peace of mind — and economic growth can rest on a firmer foundation of household well-being.

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