

Scholars urge CPC congress to discuss social issues *

By Fu Jing (China Daily)

Beijing, September 19 - With the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) due to get under way next month, scholars have urged its 2,000-plus delegates to put the topics of social justice and equality high on their agendas.

They also suggested delegates discuss "effective ways" to deliver public policies from the highest leadership to Party committees and governments at provincial and local levels.

Wu Yin, vice-president of the country's leading think tank, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), said: "How to achieve social justice has proved a hard nut for the leadership to crack."

She was speaking yesterday [September 18] at the start of a two-day social policy forum in Beijing, jointly organized by the CASS and the China Policy Institute of the UK's University of Nottingham.

Scholars - comprising representatives of the CASS and China studies experts from a number of UK universities - said more social policy debates at the upcoming congress are vital, as they can help China, "faced with numerous opportunities and mounting challenges", achieve smooth social and economic development.

The scholars said they expected two things to be high on the agenda of the congress, which is scheduled to start on October 15.

One is the election of the CPC's highest leadership and the other to agree economic and social development strategies for the next five years.

Wu said while China must maintain its rapid economic expansion, narrowing the income gap, achieving equality and bringing its people under the umbrella of social security must also be top priorities for decision-makers at all levels.

Since 1978, when the country set out its policies of reform and opening-up, its economy has grown at an annual average rate of about 10 percent and, as of 2006, the per capita annual income of urban and rural residents had increased 34-fold and 26-fold, respectively.

However, the Asian Development Bank said China's Gini coefficient - an indicator of the wealth divide - rose from 0.407 in 1993 to 0.473 in 2004.

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And Wu's academy has said the country's richest 10 percent now owns more than 40 percent of all private assets, while the poorest 10 percent shares less than 2 percent of the country's total wealth.

"The figures show how important it is for every Chinese to benefit from the economic growth," Wu said.

Zheng Yongnian, a professor at the University of Nottingham, told China Daily the country's leadership must show its commitment to achieving social equality and justice that the CPC said was one of its development strategies in 2003.

"This strategy is key to China's sustainable development, both economically and socially."

Zheng said that while many measures have been drawn up in recent years to improve education and healthcare, and provide more support for the poor and other vulnerable groups, they had not been satisfactorily implemented.

He said delegates at the congress should therefore discuss not only social policies but also how they can be effectively delivered.

"It's about how to improve the governance of the Party," he said.

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