

Comment

editorials • opinion

CHINADAILY

中国日报

EDITORIALS

No fear of deflation

WITH THE ANNUAL CONSUMER INFLATION FALLING to a 30-month low of 1.8 percent in July, some experts have urged the government to take precautionary steps against deflation.

It's too early, however, to discuss deflation because the possibility of inflation rebounding in the coming months remains high. The market has been anticipating an interest rate cut or reserve requirement ratio adjustment for the banks after the news that inflation continued to decline.

Indeed, as growth slows, the authorities may cut the interest rate or adjust the reserve requirement ratio to anchor the economy. Low inflation has rid policymakers of the worry that easing monetary policy could lead to rising prices.

But prices are yet to get serious enough to indicate a deflationary cycle. The low reading in July is partly attributable to the base effect as last July saw the three-year high inflation of 6.5 percent.

The month-on-month inflation, after all, rose by 0.1 percent in July, and it better reflects the short-term trend and shows the momentum of price rise is not as weak as indicated by the year-on-year figure.

Volatile food prices, meanwhile, add to the price uncertainties in the coming quarters.

For example, the natural disasters in the past weeks, especially the floods in the northern region, have caused vegetable prices to soar. Another major natural disaster could send food prices surging in the rest of the year.

Rising prices of some commodities, such as soy bean and petroleum, will also have a knock-on effect on food and other products, such as cooking oil and pork, which are major components of the official inflation-gauging basket.

The expected easier economic policies aimed at boosting growth could also push prices up.

Policymakers face growth pressures both from domestic and international markets. The evolving European crisis is still a strong headwind for the Chinese economy and the internal growth momentum remains sluggish. The industrial output growth weakened to 9.2 percent year-on-year in July, the lowest since May 2009, and mediocre retail sales and fixed-asset investment performance in July also disappointed the market.

In such a situation, policymakers are set to take measures to stabilize growth, which will fuel inflation growth.

Of course, inflation will not rise sharply in the coming months because economic activities remain tepid. But the possibility that inflation may gradually increase is high, shaking off concerns over deflation.

Special parents need help

ABOUT 185 MILLION PEOPLE IN CHINA ARE AGED above 60 years, and quite a few of them are single-child parents who have lost their children. Such people require special care, as the sorrow of losing their only child could impair their physical and mental health, and make their remaining life miserable.

The number of single-child families that have lost their children is estimated at nearly 1 million, and it is increasing by about 75,000 a year. The capital alone has 3,900 such families with 7,746 parents, the Beijing family planning commission said.

Their condition is totally different from couples that have never had a child. They have poured all their love and attention (and money) on their only child. Therefore, a deep sense of hollowness will keep haunting them for the rest of their lives.

Had they not followed the call of the government's family planning policy, their trauma would not have been so severe because they would have other children to share their grief and provide the care they need.

It does not mean the family planning policy is to blame for that. But it emphasizes the responsibility of the government to fulfill the needs of such families, who have helped prevent about 400 million births from the late 1970s to the present.

The Law on Population and Family Planning that took effect in 2001 says only vaguely that local governments should help single-child families who have lost their children. Such parents who are Beijing residents can now get 200 yuan (\$31.4) a month in subsidy from the municipal government, and the amount varies from locality to locality. But they need more help, both physical and psychological, to ease their sufferings.

A senior official of the National Population and Family Planning Commission said it would be irresponsible of the government not to work out a solution to the problem.

True, a special department is needed to deal with the specific needs of such families and money is required to solve many of the problems they face.

The government has to fulfill its responsibility of ensuring the well-being of senior citizens who adhered to the government's family planning policy and are now suffering.

CONTACT US

China Daily
15 Huixin Dongjue
Chaoyang, Beijing 100029
News:
(86-10) 6491-8366
editor@chinadaily.com.cn
Subscription:
(86) 400-699-0203
sub@chinadaily.com.cn
Advertisement:
(86-10) 6491-8631
ads@chinadaily.com.cn
Phone app:
chinadaily.com.cn/iphone

China Daily USA
1500 Broadway, Suite 2800
New York, NY 10036
(001) 212 537 8888; editor@chinadailyusa.com

China Daily Hong Kong
Room 1818, Hing Wai Centre
7 Tin Wan praya Road
Aberdeen, Hong Kong
(00852) 2518 5111; editor@chinadailyhk.com

China Daily UK
90 Cannon Street
London EC4N 6HA
(0044) 0207 398 8270; editor@chinadailyuk.com

CHINA FORUM | CHEN XIANGYANG

Taking the best way forward

China should continue to prioritize peaceful development despite US' game of fanning trouble in its neighborhood

The upcoming 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China has drawn the attention of the world. In this context, Party General Secretary Hu Jintao's speech at the opening session of a workshop for ministerial and provincial officials on July 23 further unified senior Party cadres' thoughts and prepared them for the national congress.

The important speech comprehensively analyzed the domestic and overseas situations, and stressed that China is still in an important period of strategic opportunities. The 16th CPC National Congress in 2002 had said that the first 20 years of this century was an important strategic opportunity period, which must be fully used.

During the past decade, the international strategic landscape has undergone complex and profound changes with the global financial crisis serving as a "turning point". Although the United States is still the only superpower, its abuse of military force, deficit spending and financial crisis have caused its comparative advantage to decline.

The change in the status of major powers is particularly significant with the old Western powers sliding in strength, and emerging powers scrambling to catch up. The European Union is struggling with the eurozone debt crisis. Japan, which suffers both natural and man-made disasters, has "lost" its development direction and resorted to a "manic" foreign policy.

Though the emerging powers face the "pangs of growth" in varying degrees, their rising momentum is irreversible.

Among the emerging economies, China's performance is especially prominent. Its GDP is now the second largest in the world, and its comprehensive strength and international status have recorded a historic leap.

In the second half of the strategic opportunity period, China's peaceful development has great external sources to tap.

The global power balance is shifting with the collective rise of the emerging powers. China's rise is part of this collective ascent and, hence, not isolated. The emerging economies have begun coordinating and cooperating strategically to resist Western hegemony.

On one hand, the Western powers and the emerging countries compete with and guard against each other. On the other, they have to cooperate in dealing with global challenges. The Western powers are relying more on China. And China and the US are exploring a new non-zero-sum relationship.

The reform of global governance is deepening, and China's say is increasing steadily in important international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and G20. China has become an important player in and defender and reformer of the international system.

In the post-global financial crisis era, the world economy is restructuring and a new round of technological revolution is on the anvil, which can benefit China's independent innovations in technology

and help it build an "innovation-oriented country".

Though the security environment China faces, especially in its neighborhood, is becoming more challenging, Beijing's good-neighborly diplomacy has won the recognition and support of most neighboring countries.

But in the coming decade, China has to take precautions against external challenges.

China's international responsibilities are rising correspondingly with its fast growing economic strength. But since China's per capita GDP is still very low, it cannot undertake as much global responsibility as the West wants it to.

China showed its strong resilience during the global financial crisis and recovered faster than any other country. Some Western powers that are in a deep crisis, however, are trying to foil China's peaceful development through foul means.

With the unfolding of the financial and debt crises in Western developed economies and their shrinking external demands, China's foreign trade is facing greater pressure. Besides, some developed countries have resorted to protectionism against China to squeeze its overseas market. And the US' loose monetary policy could again shift the burden of its crisis onto emerging economies, led by China. Under such circumstances, it is difficult for China to maintain steady growth and create enough jobs.

The combination of the spillover effect of regional turmoil and the side effects of information technology make maintaining political and social stability an arduous task.

Amid the continuing upheaval in West Asia and North Africa, the West insists that it has the "responsibility to protect" people when its actual aim is to achieve "regime change" through armed intervention. Developing countries today find it more difficult to safeguard their sovereignty.

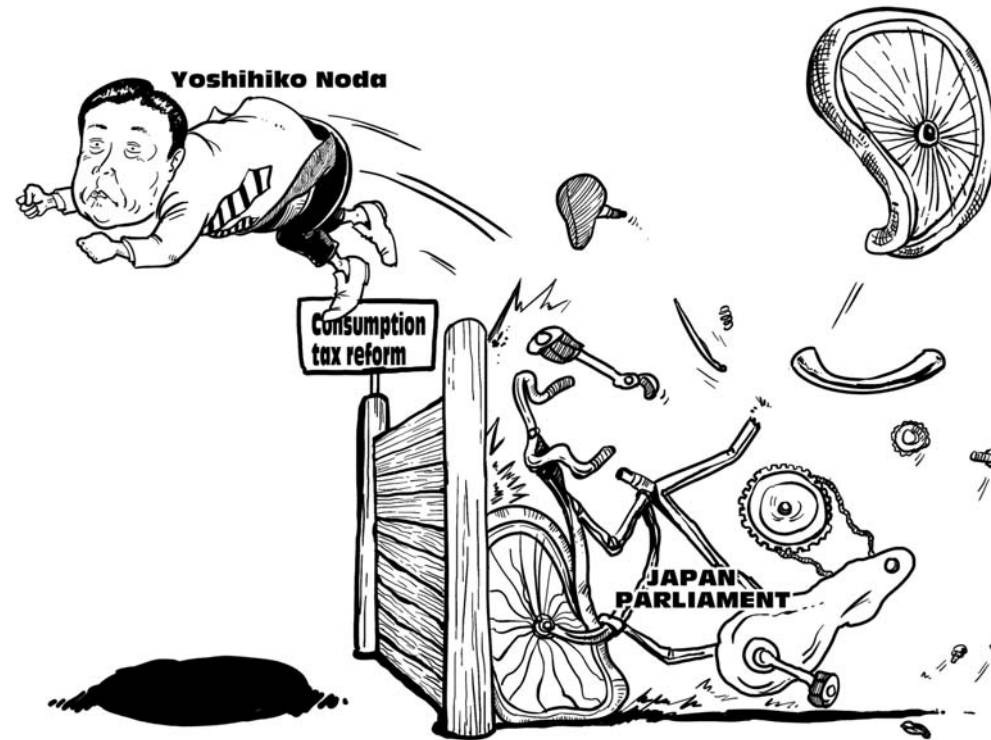
Moreover, the US is trying to use maritime territorial disputes surrounding China to fulfill its own interests. China's rise is worrying for its neighbors that have maritime territorial disputes with it. Using this to its advantage and to maintain its dominant status in the Asia-Pacific region, the US has tried to drive a wedge between China and some of its neighbors and force it to get bogged down in endless troubles in its neighborhood.

China has unprecedented opportunities for its development but it also faces challenges, and its scientific and peaceful development still has a long way to go.

That's why it should proceed with confidence, generate new ideas in diplomatic strategy by sticking to the Scientific Outlook on Development, use its advantages and avoid the pitfalls, and make full use of the important strategic opportunity period to build a well-off society in an all-round way and keep creating new opportunities.

The author is deputy director of World Politics Research Institute, affiliated to the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations.

LI FENG



BERLIN FANG

Care for children left behind in rural areas

When visiting home, I saw folks worried about a certain "problem boy" aged about 5 years. A grandma in her 60s takes care of the boy because his parents have left to work in a city as migrant workers. "The boy is way too naughty and out of control. I don't know what I can do now," sighed the weary grandma.

She works harder than most grandparents to raise the child. I have nothing but sympathy and respect for her as she desperately tries to do the best for the child.

I spent some time with the boy, and found him to be neither bad nor dumb. He has just one "problem": He has tons of energy to burn. I suggested installing something like a ping-pong table or a basketball wall mount in the courtyard. The grandma shook her head: "Then all neighbors' kids will come to play and turn my courtyard into a public playground." That could be a worse problem to handle.

There are millions of children like this boy in China. They are labeled "left-behind children" (*liushou ertong*). These children are raised by aging grandparent(s) while their parents become migrant workers, returning only during major holidays. Grandparents in the countryside are usually poorly educated. As a

result, such children grow up without proper care and attention.

If Sigmund Freud is right, such a childhood would lead to issues later in life.

China is losing vast areas of its countryside to urbanization, with shopping malls, karaoke bars and teahouses, along with apartment complexes, mushrooming everywhere. Yet few people care to build facilities to cater to the needs of the left-behind children. These children also suffer development problems. Someone should care. We all should, considering how lives of people get interwoven in numerous ways, and how we as fellow human beings should care for each other in the first place.

It takes money, effort and a loving heart to make a difference in the lives of these children. Other countries have gone through similar stages of development and we can probably learn a lesson or two from their experiences.

One notable example is the Police Athletic League that started in New York City in 1914 as the police commissioner sought to find safe places for children to play. He ordered a search for empty lots that could be turned into playgrounds. In addition, he designated some blocks as playground blocks where children could play sports without having to worry

about the traffic. This is a brilliant way of directing at-risk children's energy from street temptations to sports and other healthy activities.

In suburban United States, there are sports programs, free playgrounds and sports facilities that children and youths can use for after-school or summer recreation and exercises.

The left-behind children in China are at great risk. They are vulnerable to poor parenting (grandparenting, to be more precise) practices, unhealthy food sold at local stores, and the lack of the basic infrastructure for education, sports and recreation. Many of these children are bright and their growth can be stunted by the environment. They deserve better.

The situation is getting worse every year. Because of the shrinking pool of students, rural schools with insufficient enrollment are closed, merged or used for other purposes. In my hometown, for instance, a primary school has been turned into a Buddhist temple.

I am calling for greater involvement of governments, businesses, schools and non-profit organizations to do something about the situation. People with resources can do grand things such as building rural activity centers equipped with facilities for

sports and healthy recreation. They can also do small things like installing basketball hoops on vacant lots.

In the countryside, there are many cemented lots for drying crops and are used mostly during harvests. When vacant, they can be used as a playground with some small investment.

It is difficult to get local officials to earmark funds to develop recreational and sports facilities for the local community because such development does not yield quick economic results. Carefully designed and implemented programs to care for left-behind children could also create social entrepreneurship opportunities, or even create jobs and business opportunities.

More importantly, investment in left-behind children is a gift to the community that will keep on giving. Think of the impact on the lives of these children!

As Frederick Douglass once said, it is "easier to build strong children than to repair broken men". Inaction now will create bigger problems in the future, and such problems will require much more resources to fix.

The author is a US-based instructional designer, literary translator and columnist writing on cross-cultural issues.