

China to crack down on lavish public-funded fetes

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In this May 4, 2009 file photo, a Chinese petitioner wears a hat with the words "Officials Corrupt, Changed Judiciary" in Beijing, China. China plans to crack down in the coming year on lavish parties and seminars organized by government officials, hoping to placate a public angered by corruption and accounts of sex and booze-fueled fetes held at taxpayer expense. On Wednesday, Dec. 29, 2010, Communist party officials released their plan for stamping out corruption in 2011, which includes a crackdown on excessive partying at taxpayer expense. (AP Photo/Ng Han Guan, File)

(AP) -- China plans to crack down in the coming year on lavish parties

and seminars organized by government officials, hoping to placate a public angered by corruption and accounts of sex and booze-fueled fetes held at taxpayer expense.

Along with vast improvements in quality of life for most Chinese, China's booming economic growth has led to an ever-larger gap between rich and poor and a surge in corruption that brings unwanted public criticism. The Communist leadership sees any public discontent as a threat to government stability.

Many of the parties made headlines this year, including some at which [excessive drinking](#) led to deaths of revelers. Other bashes were memorialized in a diary that ended up on the Internet - allegedly written by an official who was later arrested - chronicling [casual sex](#), drinking and under-the-table payments at parties.

Lavish official tours to Las Vegas and other places cost taxpayers about 400 billion yuan (\$58 billion) every year, according to state broadcaster CCTV. On one such trip two years ago, officials spent taxpayers' money on a \$700-a-night Las Vegas hotel and visits to a San Francisco sex show.

It reached a point where President Hu Jintao gave a speech in April warning officials of the temptations of beautiful women, money and power.

Still, the government says some progress is being made. Spending of public money on overseas junkets, receptions and cars declined 5.7 billion yuan (\$860 million) in 2010, according to Wu Yuliang, the ruling Communist Party's top corruption-fighting official. He did not say how much was spent on such activities overall.

Wu said 113,000 officials were punished this year for corruption, with

more than 4,300 cases transferred to judicial authorities for possible legal action.

Wu, speaking at a news conference Wednesday, addressed the lavish parties specifically, saying a special campaign was under way to "eradicate the phenomenon of extravagance and waste."

[China](#) has launched numerous anti-graft campaigns in recent years. Some have seen judges and high-profile party figures sentenced to years in prison. Others have brought down some of China's top corruption hunters, who were found to be lining their own pockets. One even saw the head of the country's food and drug agency executed for approving fake medicine in exchange for cash.

Still, some critics say graft is too deeply ingrained in the system and can't be solved with regulations.

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