

War on graft a top priority

Prosecutors will keep up their pressure in the fight against corruption this year amid ongoing reform, a senior anti-graft official from the top procuratorate said.

Corruption in elections, environmental protection, food and drug safety and production safety will remain the primary targets, said Lu Xi, director of the General Bureau Against Corruption and Bribery of the Supreme People's Procuratorate.

Job-related crimes by officials in financial sectors such as banking, securities and futures markets, as well as other graft issues that might hinder the development of reforms, also will get special attention from the graft-busters, Lu said in an exclusive interview.

Prosecutors also will monitor key poverty relief programs and funds to help safeguard a clean environment, she said.

"This is a very crucial year for combating corruption, and prosecutors nationwide will continue to take a zero-tolerance attitude toward corruption," she said.

Lu said this year marks the last year before the next key Party congress, and the idea that "the anti-corruption campaign could end in the last year" must be wiped out.

China has carried out a sweeping anti-graft campaign since 2012, when the new leadership was elected at the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. The 19th Party congress is scheduled in the second half of 2017.

Last year, prosecutors nationwide investigated 47,650 corrupt officials, including 21 at or above ministerial level, according to the annual work report by the top procuratorate released earlier this month.

Lu said anti-graft prosecutors also will adapt to the new requirements of the supervision system reform this year.

China is piloting a reform program to set up a new supervisory commission by integrating separate anti-corruption authorities. The program is being tested in Beijing and Shanxi and Zhejiang provinces, and if it functions well, such reforms will be expanded across the country.

Cao Jianming, procurator-general of the Supreme People's Procuratorate, said earlier this month that the top procuratorate will guide its local branches in pilot areas to transfer relevant duties and personnel to supervisory commissions this year and establish a coordination mechanism between the two sides.

Another challenge that many prosecutors face now is the higher threshold for filing a corruption case, which keeps some cases from moving forward, Lu

said.

The amended Criminal Law, which took effect in November 2015, lifted the criminal threshold for graft cases from 5,000 yuan (US\$726) to 30,000 yuan (US\$4,352).

The change also contributed to a decrease of corruption cases prosecutors handled last year nationwide, according to Hong Daode, a law professor from China University of Political Science and Law.

The annual work report of the top procuratorate shows that prosecutors last year handled 35,397 graft cases, down 13 percent from a year earlier.

“Under the new situation, prosecuting departments will strive to adapt to the new standards and take effective measures to maintain high pressure against graft,” Lu said

[Xi attends tree planting activity, calls for protecting nature](#)



Chinese President Xi Jinping (L) waters a sapling as he attends a tree planting activity in Beijing, capital of China, March 29, 2017. [Photo/Xinhua]

Chinese President Xi Jinping on Wednesday stressed the importance of afforestation and urged people, especially the young, to understand and protect nature via tree planting activities.

Xi, also general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, made the remarks while visiting east Beijing's Chaoyang District and planting saplings of different types of trees.

Other top leaders, including Zhang Dejiang, Yu Zhengsheng, Liu Yunshan, Wang Qishan and Zhang Gaoli, also attended the activity.

Xi called for cultivating awareness about loving nature and treasuring lives, and learning about green development.

"Planting trees now will benefit our future generations, and we should roll up our sleeves to plant more trees year after year, generation after generation," Xi said.

Xi planted trees on an area covering more than 13 hectares in Beijing's first greenbelt region. The area used to be a village. In October 2015, villagers were relocated and the land was left for afforestation.

Xi said China has a tradition of planting trees around Qingming Festival, which falls on April 4 this year.

The festival is one of the 24 seasonal division points in China, usually falling on April 4-6 each year. After the festival, the temperature rises and rainfall increases. It is the high time for spring plowing and sowing.

Volunteer tree planting by all citizens is important for raising ecological awareness and creating consensus and synergy in promoting ecological protection, Xi said.

Xi urged school children around the nation to foster awareness about environmental protection starting in childhood, encouraging them to plant trees with their hands for the motherland and a beautiful world.

While acknowledging progress in the afforestation drive over recent years, Xi said the country is still not green enough.

"We should keep on working," he said.

Xi urged Party committees and governments at all levels to coordinate management of mountains, waters, forests and farmland, speed up integrating the afforestation of urban and rural areas, increase afforested areas, and improve the quality of forests.

Xi stressed that it is every citizen's statutory duty to participate in tree planting, and leaders at all levels should set an example in this regard.

Smog plan goes after polluters

China unveiled an environmental plan on Wednesday to curb air pollution in its northern region, which constantly suffers smog in the winter.

Twenty-eight cities in and around the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region are being put under tighter restrictions on processing and production in the coal, cement, steel and other industries that cause high levels of air pollution, according to an action plan.

The plan, jointly issued by the Ministry of Environmental Protection, Ministry of Finance, National Development and Reform Commission, National Energy Bureau and six provincial-level governments, was made public on Wednesday.

Under the plan, all the cement and casting plants will have to suspend production during the heating season from Nov 15 to March 15, except those providing heating services and processing dangerous waste in 28 cities in the region and the three neighboring provinces of Shandong, Shanxi and Henan.

All the coal-fired power plants in these cities will be shut down if they fail to reach low emission standards by the end of October, the plan says.

In addition, producers must cut aluminum capacity and production of electrolytic aluminum by more than 30 percent across the 28 cities in winter, and some cities like Shijiazhuang and Tangshan in Hebei province, China's top steel-producing province, will have to cut their iron and steel output in half.

Chen Jining, minister of environmental protection, said at a news conference earlier this month that fighting air pollution in winter in North China has become the priority in the country's smog-control efforts.

The plan also requires transporting coal by trucks in Tianjin, Hebei and other ports around Bohai Bay to end before October to reduce emissions. Instead, railway transportation is encouraged.

Some other tasks, such as improving emission standards, vehicle exhausts, dust controls and improving emergency responses against smog, also are included in the plan.

These strict measures come in a bid to meet the air-quality improvement goals set in the nation's Action Plan of Air Pollution Control and Prevention, which says Beijing should lower the annual average concentration of PM2.5 – hazardous fine particulate matter – to 60 micrograms per cubic meter by the end of 2017. The level in 2016 in Beijing was 73.

"The new plan is very comprehensive and strict, and it includes temporary measures and long-term measures, such as upgrading gas quality," said Chang Jiwen, an expert in environmental policies with the State Council Development Research Center.

[News story: The Valuation Office Agency's online business rates service](#)

Service availability and alternative arrangements for making 2010 business rates appeals.

The Valuation Office Agency's online service will be unavailable after midday on Thursday 30 March 2017. This is so we can make improvements ahead of publishing the 2017 rateable values on 1 April, as well as preparing for the 2017 business rates appeals systems in England and Wales. The online service will resume on 1 April.

If you would like to propose a change, or appeal your 2010 rateable value, you can download the [appeals to the 2010 Rating List business rates PDF form](#) and email it to us by 23:59 on 31 March 2017. More details on how to use this form, and how to submit it, accompany the form.

Agents can continue to submit appeals online using the Agents service.

[Medicines should help, not harm, says UN health agency launching new global patient safety 'challenge'](#)

29 March 2017 – Medicines should help, not harm, says UN health agency launching new global patient safety 'challenge'

Underlining that medicines should fulfil their real purpose – help people, not harm them – the United Nations health agency today launched a world-wide 'Challenge' that seeks to reduce severe, avoidable medication-associated damage across the globe by half over the next five years.

"We all expect to be helped, not harmed, when we take medication," said the Director-General of the UN World Health Organization ([WHO](#)), Margaret Chan, [announcing](#) the new campaign *Global Patient Safety Challenge on Medication Safety*.

"Apart from the human cost, medication errors place an enormous and unnecessary strain on health budgets. Preventing errors saves money and saves

lives.”

According to estimates, the global cost associated with medication errors has been estimated at \$42 billion annually or almost 1 per cent of total global health expenditure. In terms of impact on the health of people, for instance in the United States, medication errors cause at least one death every day and injure approximately 1.3 million people annually.

While low- and middle-income countries are estimated to have similar rates of medication-related adverse events to high-income countries, the impact is about twice as much in terms of the number of years of healthy life lost.

Furthermore, many countries lack good data, something that the new initiative will attempt to address.

The initiative will also improve the way medicines are prescribed, distributed and consumed, and increase awareness among patients about the risks associated with the improper use of medication.

It also urges countries to take early priority action to address key factors, including medicines with a high risk of harm if used improperly, patients who take multiple medications for different diseases and conditions, and patients going through transitions of care, in order to reduce medication errors and harm to patients.

The actions in the Challenge will focus on four areas: patients and the public, health care professionals, medicines as products, and systems and practices of medication.

The initiative also aims to make improvements in each stage of the medication use process including prescribing, dispensing, administering, monitoring and use and the UN health agency will disseminate guidance, and develop strategies, plans and tools to ensure that the medication process has the safety of patients at its core, in all health care facilities.

“Over the years, I have spoken to many people who have lost loved ones to medication-related errors,” said Sir Liam Donaldson, the WHO Envoy for Patient Safety. “Their stories, their quiet dignity and their acceptance of situations that should never have arisen have moved me deeply. It is to the memories of all those who have died due to incidents of unsafe care that this Challenge should be dedicated.”

This is WHO's third global patient safety initiative, following the Clean Care is Safe Care challenge on hand hygiene in 2005 and the Safe Surgery Saves Lives challenge in 2008.