

Fugitive officials brought back home to face justice

A total of 43 former officials suspected of corruption were brought back from more than 19 countries and regions to face justice in the first 11 months of last year, according to the Supreme People's Procuratorate.

National prosecutors also confiscated about 548 million yuan (\$79.5 million) of illegal assets, said Song Hansong, a senior official with the SPP's Anti-Corruption and Bribery Bureau.

Among the 43 fugitives, 11 were repatriated and the others were persuaded to return to confess to their crimes, Song told China Daily.

The charges mainly involved corruption, bribery and embezzlement, with a total of 16 of them returning from the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, he said.

Since 2016, as part of a national anti-corruption campaign, the SPP has conducted a special action targeting corrupt officials who are still at large abroad.

"We've strengthened law enforcement cooperation with overseas counterparts, especially those in Western countries, to share intelligence and conduct joint investigations," Song said, adding that intensified cooperation has been effective.

In September, Jiang Qian, a former senior executive with State-owned Wuhan Urban Drainage Development Ltd in Hubei province, returned from Canada to confess to his crimes.

Jiang, who fled to Canada in 2011, was accused of abusing his power and of corruption. After he left the country, the prosecuting department in Hubei launched a probe into Jiang, beginning procedures to confiscate his illegal funds left in China and seeking assistance from Canada.

In December 2015, a local court in Wuhan ruled to confiscate Jiang's ill-gotten assets worth 14 million yuan, and Jiang is currently awaiting trial.

According to the Central Commission for Disciplinary Inspection, the top anti-graft watchdog, China will start a new round of action in April to continue its hunt for corrupt officials and economic fugitives.

As part of the action, national prosecutors will deepen judicial cooperation with the international community, especially Western countries, to locate and recover illicitly acquired assets and capture fugitives. Taking measures to prevent corrupt officials from fleeing China will also be a priority this year, according to the SPP.

"Uncovering ill-gotten funds involves presenting solid evidence to our

foreign counterparts when asking them to assist in discovering, freezing and confiscating dirty money,” said Huang Feng, a professor of international criminal law at Beijing Normal University.

Smoking banned in hotel for delegates

The ashtrays and matches in the guest rooms at Jingxi Hotel, one of the designated hotels for deputies to the National People’s Congress, have been removed this year.

The small move, for Shen Jinjin, an NPC deputy and a longtime anti-tobacco campaigner, is a big step forward in tobacco control.

As an NPC deputy for the past decade, he brought forward various suggestions to combat smoking, some of which have been accepted, such as the 100 percent smoking ban in public places introduced by Beijing, Shenzhen and Shanghai.

“We’ve seen strong restrictive measures over tobacco advertising in the new Advertising Law,” added Shen, head of the Disease Control and Prevention Center in Yancheng, Jiangsu province.

“At the two sessions over the years, positive changes can be seen,” he said.

Previously, participants in the two sessions even smoked during group discussions in the meeting rooms, and ashtrays and matches were widely placed.

In that scenario, “I would stop people politely and deliver anti-smoking messages, particularly the proven health-related hazards,” he said. “NPC deputies are usually influential and I don’t want to miss the opportunity to spread the message of tobacco control.”

As a veteran public health worker, Shen knows well the negative health impacts from smoking and the huge medical bills from treating smoking-related diseases.

The National Health and Family Planning Commission estimates that more than 1 million Chinese die from smoking-related diseases each year.

With more information becoming available to the public, a consensus about smoking control has been gradually reached in China, the world’s largest cigarette producer and consumer.

In 2015, Beijing passed the country’s strongest anti-smoking law, and delegates to the two sessions thereafter became able to enjoy a truly smoke-free environment in the city.

“Now they can only smoke outside the hotel, despite the chilly and windy

weather here in early March,” he said.

Also, they began to accept a controlled way of smoking and “some smoking deputies even co-signed my motion urging the country to pass a State-level anti-smoking law,” he noted.

Beijing pioneered the introduction of strong smoking bans in public places, which should be expanded nationwide, he urged.

“We have the knowledge that smoking harms health and we have wide support from the public for smoking controls. Why is it so difficult to make a national law?” he said.

In November, Mao Qun’an, spokesman for the National Health and Family Planning Commission, the nation’s top health authority, said a national law would be enacted in 2016—and though the commission was charged to draft such a law, it didn’t.

Shen blamed that on interference from the tobacco industry, a major source of tax revenue for the government. “The fight is not over, and I will keep up the effort,” he said.

[Audits help money get to the poor](#)

Inspection and audit efforts to prevent the improper use of poverty relief funds have paid off, said the top poverty relief official.

Liu Yongfu, director of the State Council Leading Group Office of Poverty Alleviation and Development, made the comment on Tuesday during a news conference at the fifth session of the 12th National People’s Congress.

“In 2013, we audited poverty relief funds used in 17 counties, where 15 percent of the money was improperly used,” Liu said. “In 2016, we audited 30 counties and the ratio was down to only 3 percent.”

He said the country’s disciplinary watchdog unearthed about 16,000 cases related to improper use of poverty relief funds in 2016, leading to more than 19,000 people being punished. A hotline set up by the office has received more than 10,000 phone calls in the past two years.

“Previously, the majority of problems were related to corruption and waste. Now, the main problem is many of the funds are kept in the account unused,” Liu said.

“More problems are now found in townships and villages instead of cities and counties.”

He said the government will also help grassroots officials improve their

ability to “spend the money well”. Each county is encouraged to set up a database so that the funds and projects are subject to public supervision.

China lifted 12.4 million rural residents out of poverty last year as part of the central government’s campaign to lift the remaining poverty-stricken people out of poverty by 2020. There are still 43.3 million people living below the poverty line of 2,300 yuan (\$335) in annual income, according to National Bureau of Statistics.

Last year, China managed to increase the average per capita annual income of rural residents living in registered poor areas to 8,452 yuan, an increase of 8.4 percent compared with 2015, according to the bureau.

[Chinese federation holds Women’s Day gathering](#)



A gathering celebrating International Women’s Day is held in Beijing, capital of China, March 7, 2017. The All-China Women’s Federation held a gathering attended by Chinese women from various circles and foreign diplomats here on Tuesday ahead of International Women’s Day. (Xinhua/Zhang Yuwei)

The All-China Women’s Federation held a gathering attended by Chinese women

from various circles and foreign diplomats here on Tuesday ahead of International Women's Day.

The federation has carried out the decisions made by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and pushed forward reform to better serve women over the past year, said the federation's president Shen Yueyue in a speech.

Shen, who is also vice chair of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, China's top legislature, said the federation will unify and lead the country's women to follow the Party and make new contributions to welcome the 19th CPC National Congress, slated for later this year.

China is willing to work together with women worldwide in building a community of shared future, she added.

More than 1,000 people were present at the event to observe International Women's Day on March 8.

[The latest NHS staff survey demonstrates again the enormous pressures facing people working in our health service – Justin Madders](#)

Justin

Madders MP, Labour's Shadow Health Minister, responding to the NHS Staff Survey 2016, said:

"The latest NHS staff survey demonstrates again the enormous pressures facing the people working in our health service in the face of Theresa May's neglect and lack of interest. The Government's endless underfunding of the NHS and demands on staff to do more and more with less is taking its toll and stretching workers to breaking point.

"The Government urgently need a plan to give our brilliant NHS staff the support they need at work. It should be a badge of shame for Theresa May that morale in the NHS is so low. The Prime Minister ought to be using her first Budget to help NHS workers so that they feel valued in their work and are able to care for patients to the best of their abilities without the fear of illness or harassment. The winter crisis would have been so much worse without the

dedication of NHS staff but this survey is a clear warning that they cannot go on endlessly without more support.”