

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.

[Yuanwang fleet to carry out 19 space tracking tasks](#)

Yuanwang space tracking ships, which follows the progress of satellites and other space-bound craft, will carry out 19 maritime space monitoring missions in 2017, according to the maritime satellite measurement and control authority on Wednesday.

Yuanwang-5 left port Wednesday and Yuanwang-6 started its journey Monday.

Yuanwang-7 and the rocket transporting fleet will set sail in April.

In 2016, Yuanwang ships completed 14 major scientific research and experiment tasks, including maiden flights of the Long March-7 and the Long March-5, and space journeys of the Tiangong-2 space lab and the Shenzhou-11 manned spacecraft.

[Mainland probes Taiwanese for national security violation](#)

A resident of Taiwan, Lee Ming-che, is under investigation for being suspected of endangering national security, a Chinese mainland official said Wednesday.

Developments of the investigation, in line with judicial process, will be disclosed in a timely fashion, Ma Xiaoguang, spokesperson for the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, told a press conference.

The mainland will protect the legitimate rights and interests of all residents of Taiwan who come to the mainland, as long as they abide by the regulations and laws, said Ma.