

Over 4,000 officials held accountable for lax environmental efforts

China has held 4,018 officials accountable for poor environmental protection efforts during the latest round of inspections, the Ministry of Environmental Protection said Tuesday.

The central government just wrapped up its month-long third round of inspections to review local government work on environmental protection, the ministry said.

The inspections covered the seven provincial regions of Tianjin, Shanxi, Liaoning, Anhui, Fujian, Hunan and Guizhou.

Inspectors looked into more than 23,000 cases and imposed fines totaling 336 million yuan (49 million U.S. dollars), while 355 people were detained, according to the ministry.

China is fighting pollution and environmental degradation after decades of growth triggered problems such as smog and contaminated soil.

Chinese submersible Jiaolong dives to 6,699 meters in Mariana Trench

China's manned submersible Jiaolong descended to 6,699 meters in the Mariana Trench on Tuesday, recording images of two swimming snailfishes.

Tuesday's mission was Jiaolong's fourth dive in the trench this year.

The dive began at 7:03 a.m. local time and reached the planned depth at 10:21 a.m. where scientists worked for three hours and ten minutes.

Jiaolong collected samples of rock, sediment, deep-sea life and sea water in this dive, and recorded images of two swimming snailfishes.

"Research on snailfish, a typical deep-sea species, deepens our understanding on the evolution of deep-sea fishes and their environmental adaptation mechanism," said scientist Peng Xiaotong.

Jiaolong's first dive of this year in the world's deepest known trench took place on May 23, with Xinhua News Agency journalist Liu Shiping descending inside the submersible along with scientists to a depth of 4,811 meters. The second and third dives on May 25 and 27 reached depths of 6,300 meters and 6,544 meters respectively.

Heavy rain to sweep south, southwest China

Heavy rain will sweep parts of southwest and south China in the coming three days, the National Meteorological Center (NMC) said Tuesday.

Rainstorms will hit parts of Chongqing Municipality and the provinces of Guizhou, Hunan, Jiangxi, Fujian and Guangdong from Wednesday to Friday, with thunderstorms or hailstones in some areas, according to the NMC.

It also forecast downpours in the southeastern part of Tibet Autonomous Region from Tuesday to Wednesday under the influence of cyclone Mora.

The NMC warned of risks of urban waterlogging, mountain torrents and landslides in those regions.

From Saturday to next Wednesday, heavy rain will also be seen in the eastern part of northwest China as well as regions along the lower reaches of the Yellow River, the Huaihe River and the Yangtze River, according to the NMC.

Drought affects millions of hectares of farmland in China

Drought has affected 2.67 million hectares of farmland in China due to lack of rainfall in the country's north and northeast, according to latest official statistics.

As of May 27, 120,000 people and 500,000 livestock faced shortage of drinking water as a result of the drought, said Chen Lei, minister of water resources, at a video conference of the State Flood Control and Drought Relief Headquarters.

Authorities have dispatched 15 work teams to help heavily-affected regions, said Chen, who is also deputy head of the headquarters.

About 5.5 million people have joined the fight against drought, drilling wells or working on pumping stations to irrigate over 4 million hectares of farmland, according to the minister.

He demanded priority be given to ensuring drinking water safety for rural and urban residents.

Archaeologists start digging in Xiongan New Area

Cultural relics protection and archaeological work have been launched in the Xiongan New Area, a new economic zone near Beijing, the provincial government of Hebei said.

The archaeological team consists of several groups from the provincial, city and county levels and archaeologists from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the National Museum, the Palace Museum and the Chinese Academy of Cultural Heritage.

The three counties of Xiongxian, Rongcheng and Anxin in the area have a long history and are rich in cultural relics. The third national archaeological survey showed a total of 189 immovable cultural relics in the area.

According to the work plan, the archaeologists will complete 200 square kilometers of field investigation by July and produce a report by August for review and deliberation. A final report will be finished by the end of March, 2018.