

Gov't to avert duty-related crimes in poverty alleviation

China will make more efforts to supervise and prevent duty-related crimes on 69 poverty alleviation projects, said a circular Tuesday.

"The projects cover villages that need to be relocated to another place so as to get rid of poverty," said the circular, issued by the Supreme People's Procuratorate, the National Development and Reform Commission, and the State Council Leading Group Office of Poverty Alleviation and Development.

"Duty-related crimes should be prevented during identifying poor population, operating central and local funds, handling loans and resettlement housing construction, and bidding," the circular said.

It also urged procuratorates, development and reform organs, and poverty reduction departments at all levels to increase efforts in punishing violators, and providing judicial protection to project operations and funds security.

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.

[Minister welcomes report on substance misuse among older adults](#)

The independent Advisory Panel on Substance Misuse (APoSM) was asked by the Welsh Government to provide advice on the additional actions needed to tackle

the problem of substance misuse in an ageing population.

Older adults are forming an increasingly large proportion of the population; they are also, as a group, more likely than earlier generations to develop substance misuse problems. This is resulting in greater demands on health, social care and other services.

The [Report](#), published today, concludes that although there is significant work already underway, substance misuse services need to adapt to meet the needs of older adults, and more specialist older adults' services need to be developed.

Interim Chair of the Advisory Panel on Substance Misuse, Richard Ives, said:

“The proportion of older adults in the population is increasing rapidly, and so is the number of older adults with substance use problems. Services must respond to this social change and need to be flexible in providing effective treatment for older clients.”

In welcoming the Report, Minister for Social Services and Public Health, Rebecca Evans, said:

“Substance misuse among older adults is a growing problem. Levels of alcohol and drug misuse – including illicit drugs and prescription and over-the-counter medication – is a cause of concern.

“The Welsh Government, together with Public Health Wales, is taking forward a range of actions to support this group of people, including implementing a new treatment framework specifically targeted at older substance misusers.

“But we recognise that challenges remain and we agreed that APoSM should explore and advise the Welsh Government on this, to examine what more could be done to tackle this issue. I would like to thank the Panel for this comprehensive Report which will be a useful contribution to our evidence base on substance misuse among older adults, as we look to build on the good work already underway in Wales.”