

China to step up war on corruption

China is set to launch the next phase of its anti-corruption campaign following the upcoming conclave of the Communist Party of China (CPC), held every five years.

The final preparations for the new edition of the anti-graft drive began in the Chinese capital on Monday. About 120 members of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection — the party's anti-graft arm — are participating in the two-day plenum.

The meeting will review the agency's work report for the past five years. The final document will be submitted for endorsement to the party congress, which begins its session from October 18.

Analysts say that having already cracked down on the king-pins of corruption, called "tigers" in semi-official parlance, the next round of the campaign will mainly focus on "flies". These are the lower level officials, whose names may have surfaced after the extensive patronage networks of the high-flying "tigers" were exposed.

During his signature clean-up drive that began after he took over office in 2012, Chinese President Xi Jinping went after top guns of the party, including Zhou Yongkang, the former security czar. Mr. Zhou also belonged to the all-powerful seven-member standing committee of the Politburo, headed by President Xi.

Unwritten rule

His conviction and life-sentence broke an unwritten rule of sparing top leadership from criminal investigation. Other heavyweights felled by the sweeping campaign included former military leaders Xu Caihou and Guo Boxiong.

Both were Vice-Chairmen of the powerful Central Military Commission, the apex body of China's military establishment. In fact, the clean-up followed by restructuring of the People's Liberation Army became one of President Xi's boldest, and probably unfinished, moves, during his first term in office.

China's anti-graft drive has so far netted more than 250 senior officials, military generals and corporate executives. Nearly 1.4 million cadres have been "disciplined," official figures say.

While Mr. Xi's unprecedented attack on corruption has been hugely popular, it has apparently threatened the momentum of economic growth. It is widely perceived that the fear of anti-corruption inspectors raiding their offices or homes has discouraged officials to clear major investment projects.

Economic impact

The disruption of networking between corporate executives and party officials over lavish parties has, presumably, fractured the economic decision making cycle.

Aware of the problem, a recent article in *Qiushi* journal — the flagship of the Central Committee of the CPC — warned officials not to avoid business dealings, fearing that they could become victims of the anti-graft drive. It asserted that "the consequence [of this attitude] is equally serious — and the impact equally damaging" as corruption.

New commission

Analysts say a new overarching anti-corruption architecture is expected to be cleared during 19th Party Congress, though its formal launch may have to await the annual session of the National People's Congress (NPC) — China's Parliament — in March. That includes the formation of the National Supervision Commission, subordinating similar bodies at the provincial level.

Unlike the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI), which has jurisdiction only over the party members, the new commission will have powers to investigate all, including non-Communist Party members.

At the end of the party congress, a change of guard in the CCDI is expected. Having attained the unofficial retirement age of 69, current CCDI head, Wang Qishan, one of Mr. Xi's trusted allies, is likely to be replaced by Li Zhanshu — the President's chief of staff.

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