

Former provincial Party chief sentenced to 15 years

Zhou Benshun, former Party chief of northern China's Hebei Province, was sentenced to 15 years in prison for corruption, a court in southeast China's Xiamen city said Wednesday.

According to Xiamen Municipal Intermediate People's Court, Zhou's personal assets, worth 2 million yuan (US\$291,545), will be seized, along with other illegal gains and property.

The court found that Zhou took advantage of his official posts from 2000 to 2015 to seek benefit for others in real estate development, project payments, fire control project approval, bank loans and personnel promotions.

He accepted bribes of over 40 million yuan directly for himself or through his family.

The court decided to hand down a lighter penalty to Zhou as he confessed to his crimes, expressed remorse and cooperated in returning the bribes.

Zhou said he would not appeal.

Polar and ski parks are coming to Shanghai

A huge polar-themed ocean park will open in July 2018 in the Lingang area in Shanghai's southeast – part of a Pudong master plan to revamp the area.



As well as a skiing park and planetarium, the master plan will see two new universities opening and other colleges setting up campuses, officials said.

With these new facilities, the Lingang area in the Pudong New Area aims to attract 450,000 residents and 10 million tourists annually by 2020, according to the Lingang management committee.

Shanghai Polar Ocean World, which is planned to cover 300,000 square meters, will include four marine animal interactive programs, three theaters and a further 15 entertainment facilities, its developer said. Upon completion, the park aims to showcase a broad range of Arctic and Antarctic wildlife. It's a 90-minute drive from People's Square in the city center.

Land preparation work has started on the skiing park named WinterStar near the polar park, which is planned to become one of the world's largest indoor skiing resorts, according to the committee.

Construction has also started on Shanghai Planetarium, which is scheduled to open in 2020 to become the world's largest planetarium.

Several universities will open campuses in the Lingang area, and two new ones are setting up shop – the Sino-French arts and design management school of the China Central Academy of Fine Arts, and the Sino-British International Low-carbon College. Both will start enrollment in September.

Construction is under way for a new campus for the Shanghai University of Electric Power.

A yacht training base has also been planned in Lingang, the committee added. Construction has also begun on modern office buildings, hotels, shopping malls and convention centers.

The port area of the city aims to develop itself into a new town featuring science and technology, culture, finance, trade and tourism.

The committee has announced that professionals in the area will be encouraged

to apply for local hukou, or household registration, in a move aimed at attracting talented personnel to help to realize its ambition.

Such professionals will also enjoy preferential housing prices, low rents and accommodation subsidies.

In the future, Lingang will promote an 18.9 kilometer, medium-capacity traffic system, along with electric buses, as well as vehicle and bicycle sharing programs to create a green and efficient public transport system, the committee said.

China's new aircraft carrier to be launched this year

China's second aircraft carrier is scheduled to be launched later this year and is expected to enter the service by 2020, Xu Guangyu, a retired Chinese military officer and consultant to the China Arms Control and Disarmament Assn, said in an interview with Beijing Media Network.

China's first home-made aircraft carrier, designed to be a base for fighter jets and helicopters, is now near completion. The aircraft carrier is the first of the Type 001A class, and represents an important step in advancing China's naval power.

"The aircraft carrier is being built as planned. Most of its major construction and design work has been completed. Its hull has already been assembled in a shipyard. The ship will soon be equipped with aviation, radar and other facilities," said Chinese Defense Ministry Spokesperson Wu Qian in October 2016, when he was responding to media inquiries on alleged aircraft carrier images circulating online.

Yin Zhuo, a Chinese naval expert, also confirmed in a CCTV interview that China's first home-made aircraft carrier is expected to be launched in water in early 2017.

There is still a large amount of work to do at the carrier's outfitting stage after its launching. It will take about one to two years to carry out functional debugging for its devices as well as weapons and equipment. The new aircraft carrier could begin its sea trial by early 2019, Xu said.

Xu also mentioned in the interview that Chinese carrier pilots are also under training, with an expectation of forming two aviation units.

Search for injured porpoise ongoing

More than 80 aquatic animal rescuers are now involved in the search for an injured finless porpoise in the country's largest freshwater lake.

In addition, more than 2,000 fishermen have also been mobilized on Poyang Lake to report traces of the finless porpoise – an endangered mammal considered rarer than China's giant panda – which is known to have life-threatening injuries.

"There are less than 1,000 finless porpoises in China, and the number is declining by 13.7 percent each year," said Hao Yujiang, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Science's Institute of Hydrobiology, who led a team of six from his institute to join the rescue mission on Monday.

Volunteers first saw the mammal, which is similar to a dolphin in appearance, on Feb 5 in Yugan county, Jiangxi province. Photos showed a large fishhook in the back of the porpoise. Rescuers said they saw the porpoise several times, but that it disappeared before they could help.

"The photos showed signs of infection in the wound, meaning rescuing the porpoise is a matter of urgency," Hao said.

The team is prepared to provide medical treatment, and the porpoise might have to be sent to Wuhan, capital of Hubei province, where the institute is headquartered, for further treatment, he added.

Another three local rescue teams as well as two from Hubei province also joined the rescue efforts, bringing the total number of rescuers in the six teams to more than 80.

The local fisheries bureau has distributed notices asking more than 2,000 fisherman to help track down the porpoise, Zhang Jinyang of Yugan county's fisheries bureau told Changjiang Daily, which is headquartered in Wuhan.

Human activities have put the existence of the finless porpoise at great risk, Hao said. "Shipping, fishing, construction and sand excavation in the Yangtze River are all to be blamed for the mammal being endangered."

Zhu Jiang, head of the World Wildlife Foundation's Yangtze River biodiversity conservation project, said, "in previous years, there was a lack of recognition of the finless porpoise's situation in China and government resources to support the mammal's protection were far from enough."

The situation has improved to some extent in recent years, with the Ministry of Agriculture classifying the mammal as a first-class national protected species in 2014, and a plan for its protection being drafted late last year, Zhu said.

However, many issues, such as overfishing and sand excavation, still hinder the mammal's protection, he added.

The finless porpoise's habitat may be further worsened as the Jiangxi government plans to build a series of sluice gates in areas that link Poyang Lake to the Yangtze River to keep water in the lake during winter months, as the lake has been suffering from worsening drought over the past decade.

The mammal's habitat is mainly located in the lower reaches of the Yangtze River, and about 450 of them live in Poyang Lake.

Official pledges safe development of nuclear energy

A Chinese atomic energy official said the country will fine tune its nuclear energy safety standards, develop its emergency response system and improve the management of spent fuel.

Wang Yiren, vice head of the State Administration of Science, Technology and Industry for National Defence, told Xinhua that during the 13th Five Year period (2016-2020), China will undertake a number of nuclear-related projects.

Research into the processing of spent fuel will be conducted, according to Wang, who is also deputy head of China Atomic Energy Authority.

In response to concerns over the safety of inland nuclear power projects, Wang said such worries are understandable, but assured that the projects would be secure.

As energy demands in inland regions have increased, the need for inland nuclear power projects has increased, he said.

Wang said the authorities have also organized expert discussions on the construction of nuclear power stations at sea, to support offshore oil and gas exploitation and the country's islands.

The official also pledged efforts to ensure the supply of uranium resources and nuclear fuel for nuclear energy development.