

Ministry vows strict arable land protection

The Ministry of Land and Resources will do all it can to ensure the government's 4-trillion-yuan (\$580 billion) stimulus package does not lead to misuse of the country's dwindling land banks, a senior official said on Wednesday.

Speaking at a press briefing in Beijing, Vice-Minister Lu Xinshe said land and use conditions are already closely monitored and managed in real-time via satellite, on-site inspections and the Internet.

Anyone, local leaders in particular, found violating them will be severely punished, he said.

Following a recent national land inspection, Xu Shaoshi, minister of land and resources, reprimanded the "primary leaders" of nine cities and asked them to streamline local land use, Lu said.

The government's stimulus package includes numerous large-scale construction projects that will require vast areas of land. But with arable land banks dwindling, and officials vowing to adhere to "the strictest land management policies", authorities are wrestling with the challenge of how to balance supply and demand.

The effective implementation of the stimulus package "needs the solid support of land and coal resources", Lu said.

The land ministry's primary tasks are to "offer proactive support" for the policies, while "strictly regulating and managing" land use, he said.

To that end, it will submit a revised draft of the Land Management Law to the State Council before the end of the year, he said.

The ministry is also determined to ensure farmers are paid reasonable compensation for any loss of land, the vice-minister said.

"Generally speaking, land that needs to be seized shall be seized, but we must also protect the farmers' interests," he said.

In the past, there have been many cases of farmers claiming that they were not fairly compensated for land lost to urbanization projects, which saw huge tranches of arable land being lost across the country.

As a result, since 2004, central and local authorities have been closely monitoring the use of land for non-agricultural purposes.

In January of this year, more than 2,700 officials were referred for prosecution on land use violation charges following a 100-day campaign run by the land ministry. The central government has also said that the nation's arable land bank must not fall below 1.8 billion mu (120 million hectares). As of the end of last year, the total area was 1.826 billion mu.

China Daily - Xinhua

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