
Law amendments adopted to protect personal information, punish bribe-taking relatives of officials

BEIJING, Feb. 28 (Xinhua) -- China's top legislature approved a number of criminal law amendments here Saturday that better protect personal information and punish bribe-taking relatives of officials.

One of the amendments adds an article which forbids staff in government offices, financial, medical and educational institutions, as well as transport and telecommunications departments, which usually have access to personal data, to sell or leak such information.

Offenders can face a maximum jail term of three years as well as fines. But how much someone will have to pay is not specified.

For offenses systematically committed by government offices or corporations, those directly responsible will face the same penalties, according to the amendment, which was proposed in August last year.

People who obtain another person's private information illegally will face the same penalties as those who illegally divulge information, said Lang Sheng, vice chairman of the Legislative Affairs Commission of the National People's Congress (NPC) Standing Committee, the national legislature.

Another amendment bans relatives of people who have close relations with government employees from conducting corrupt deals between the employee and bribe-givers.

Lang said the amendment not only targets the officials' family members but also their lovers, classmates and other acquaintances. It is aimed to prevent people around officials from taking bribes and helping others to seek illegal benefits from the officials.

Offenders in "very serious cases" can face a minimum jail term of seven years, according to the amendment.

Proposed punishments also include fines and confiscation of personal property, but the draft does not define the seriousness of a case or the exact amount of fines.

This also applies to government employees who have already left their posts, as well as their family members, if they are involved in power-for-money deals.

The revised law doubles the sentence to ten years in prison for officials who are found in possession of large amounts of money or property but cannot explain how they get them.

The amendments also ban the counterfeiting, theft, sale or illegal transfer of military license plates. Offenders can face three to seven years in prison.

The amendments, which take effect Saturday, also impose penalties on computer hackers and on people involved in pyramid selling and illegal banking.

One of the amendments prohibits employees of financial organizations to provide insiders' information to non-financial personnel to help them make profits in securities trading.

Lang said financial organizations include securities companies, fund management companies, commercial banks, insurance companies, securities and futures exchanges, related regulatory institutions and industry associations and other financial institutions.

He said if people are found doing inside trading, they will face up to five years in prison and fines one to five times the amount of their illegal gains. Serious offenders will face five to ten years in prison.

The amended law also tightens controls on abductors, abettors who organize adolescent crimes and cultural relic smugglers.

Winning 161 out of the 165 votes, the amendments were approved at the seventh meeting of the Standing Committee of the 11th NPC, which was held from Feb. 25 to 28.

President Hu Jintao signed an order to put the amended law into effect on Saturday.