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### Courts beef up protection of intellectual property rights

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BEIJING - China's efforts to prevent infringements upon intellectual property rights have been gaining ground and judges are now hearing more cases than they did in the past, the country's top court announced on Tuesday.

A total of 42,931 civil cases involving intellectual property rights were accepted in 2010, which was 40 percent more than in 2009, and verdicts were reached in 41,718 of them, the Supreme People's Court said in its annual report on intellectual property rights protection.

It put the total value of disputed intellectual property at almost 8 billion yuan (\$1.2 billion).

"The role our justice system plays in solving conflicts connected to intellectual property rights is becoming more important and obvious," said spokesman Sun Jungong as the report was released on Tuesday.

In March, Chief Justice Wang Shengjun said a total of 48,051 intellectual property rights cases (including criminal and administrative cases as well as civil ones) were heard by the courts in 2010, which was up by a third on 2009.

Among the civil intellectual property rights cases, 1,396 involved foreign entities, which was slightly more than the previous year, according to the report.

Among the administrative cases heard by courts last year - a category that often involves foreign entities suing the Chinese government's institutions - 815 cases that mainly involved patents included foreign entities. Foreign firms were involved in 34 percent of administrative cases.

Kong Xiangjun, president of the Intellectual Property Tribunal under the Supreme People's Court, said most of the foreign-related intellectual property rights cases involved multinational companies in China.

The courts also punished 6,000 people from 3,942 criminal cases who were responsible for producing or selling fakes, or infringing on copyrights.

China hopes to see more domestic innovation and the development of companies that are competitive globally as a result of the stronger protection of intellectual property rights.

However, the crackdown against violations of intellectual property rights has been a challenge in China because of the scale of the problem.

In the past five months, police have arrested 14,185 suspects during an ongoing campaign to dent the production and sale of counterfeit goods, including software, wine, drugs and bags bearing the names of luxury brands.

During the same period, more than 7,000 factories and sales outlets specializing in counterfeit goods were shut down, according to figures released by the Ministry of Public Security at a news conference last week.

Kong said the country's economic development and the globalization of China's economy had fed the fire but he expressed the court's determination to continue to strengthen protection and foster domestic innovation.

"We will make it easier and lower the cost for people to safeguard intellectual property rights and also hand out more severe punishments to those who violate the rights," Kong said.

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The Supreme People's Court has worked with the Ministry of Public Security and the country's top prosecuting authority - the Supreme People's Procuratorate - to supervise 145 major cases nationwide. By March 15, the prosecuting authority had approved warrants in 39 cases and arrested 159 suspects.

Hu Zejun, the deputy head of the prosecuting authority, said on Tuesday that, between October 2010 and March, it investigated 81 government employees who allegedly covered up for suspects in 54 cases connected to the sale of fake goods.

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