

China's Luxury Food Market Declines

BEIJING (AP) — China's suppliers of shark fin, abalone, pricey liquor and other luxury items have been taking a beating since new leader Xi Jinping ordered officials to cut out lavish living.

The Ministry of Commerce said Wednesday that business for high-end caterers in Beijing has plunged 35 percent since Xi's order two months ago.

Xi, who took power in November as Communist Party general secretary, ordered the elimination of banquets and other pomp that has alienated a public that is struggling with high living costs.

During last week's Lunar New Year holiday, sales of shark fin soup at Beijing hotels plunged 70 percent, the ministry said. Sales of abalone and bird's nest soup fell 40 percent.

Makers of expensive liquor have seen sales weaken, and some have cut prices by up to 30 percent.

At a December meeting of the all-powerful Politburo, Xi ordered that arrangements for leaders' visits and the trappings of power be drastically pared back. Under the orders, elaborate welcoming ceremonies are to be eliminated, traffic disruptions avoided, and staid, often worthless reporting on the doings of the leadership dispensed with.

He later called for people to be more frugal and avoid excess following a "Clear the Plate" campaign by netizens calling on restaurants to cut down food waste. His words sparked an anti-food waste campaign in state media and an order by the country's TV watchdog that all radio and television channels cut advertising promoting the culture of giving luxury watches, rare stamps and gold coins — a practice often associated with corruption.

Bearing the brunt of Xi's austerity drive, government officials and state-owned companies reportedly canceled their Lunar New Year banquets at luxury hotels this year.

The anti-waste campaign also extends to the military. The Chinese People's Liberation Army issued an order this week that leftovers be better used, the official Xinhua News Agency said Wednesday.

The report cited the new measures as saying unfinished rice and other dishes should be re-cooked into fried rice with eggs, while leftover vegetables be pickled or made into appetizers.

The measures also forbid the ordering of luxury dishes at military receptions and

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ban hotels run by the army from imposing minimum spending requirements for their events, Xinhua said.

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