

Fugitive's ex-business partner levels fraud, bribery charges

Qu Long, a former business partner of Guo Wengui – one of China's most-wanted fugitives who is still at large in the United States – accused Guo on Wednesday during a small news conference of committing fraud and bribery that he said amounted to more than 1 billion yuan (\$150 million).

Qu said he is preparing materials and working closely with his legal team to have Guo criminally prosecuted in a Chinese court. He said he will offer solid evidence to judicial authorities in the US.

"I will take the chance of exposing his crimes to the media and the public in case other innocent people might be cheated by him, and I hope US law enforcement officers will repatriate him back to China to face trial as soon as possible," Qu said during the news conference at a Beijing hotel, which was attended by domestic and foreign media.

Qu made the accusation 50 days after being declared innocent and set free after having served six years in prison. In 2012, he said, he was framed by Guo and convicted of fraud and embezzlement, and then sentenced to 15 years in prison. He said he was tortured by Guo's accomplices in judicial departments.

Guo and Qu became business partners after Guo asked Qu in 2006 to serve as executive director of Beijing Zhengquan, one of the companies Guo controlled in Beijing. Qu said Guo had also boasted about having close relationships with high-ranking government officials.

In 2010, Qu claimed that Guo had colluded with Ma Jian, vice-minister of the Ministry of State Security, to abuse power, persecute business owners and unlawfully plunder enterprises' assets, and that huge bribes were involved. He communicated his charge to the Ministry of State Security and the top anti-graft watchdog.

Qu also claimed that Ma had acted as the protective umbrella and helped Guo illegally acquire national securities and embezzle an enormous amount of State-owned assets.

Qu said he had sent a letter to anti-graft authorities but Ma managed to intercept it. To keep Qu quiet, Guo bribed Ma to ask the police in Hebei to criminally detain and investigate Qu on made-up charges.

Ma then contacted Zhang Yue, former head of the Political and Legal Affairs Committee of Hebei, to interfere in the case, Qu alleged.

In 2015, Ma was investigated on suspicion of graft.

An investigation into Zhang Yue was launched in 2016.

In April, Qu's wife appealed to the Hebei High People's Court for a retrial, and in September the court overturned the conviction because of lack of evidence. The court also said the Hebei police had no authority to investigate the case.

Judiciary reports on effort to push reform

China's top judicial authorities presented long-anticipated reports on Wednesday to national legislators on their progress in upholding the law and preventing wrongful convictions in the wake of important judicial reforms in 2013.

The Supreme People's Court and Supreme People's Procuratorate both submitted reports to the bimonthly session of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress on Wednesday.

The top court said it had overturned 37 wrongful convictions since November 2012, including in the high-profile case of Nie Shubin, who was exonerated on Dec 2, 2016, more than two decades after he was wrongly executed for rape and murder.

"We've issued guidelines in recent years to prevent wrongful cases, such as the one regulating evidence reviews by courts, and we've ordered courts not to convict defendants on insufficient evidence," said Zhou Qiang, president of the top court. "The aim is to uphold justice and protect human rights."

Thanks to these efforts, courts acquitted 4,032 defendants in accordance with the law between 2013 and September this year, the report said.

Courts have also been ordered to strictly exclude evidence obtained illegally, including evidence gained by torture, "and not to force anyone to plead guilty", Zhou said.

In Shanghai, for example, between July 2016 and September this year, the city's courts received 24 applications from defense attorneys to strike evidence suspected to have been obtained illegally, leading to 15 reviews on the legality of evidence, he said.

The top prosecuting authority said in its report that it has also improved its work system to guard against wrongful cases.

"What we want is to keep prosecutors from making mistakes or proceeding with unsound prosecutions," said Cao Jianming, procurator general of the top procuratorate.

Since 2013, charges against 870 people have been dropped after discovery of improper or illegal evidence, according to the report delivered by Cao.

Wang Dianxue, a criminal defense lawyer in Beijing, applauded the authorities' efforts to remove improper evidence "because the stricter the review of evidence, the more effective the avoidance of wrongful convictions".

Many courts start their review program when lawyers apply for the exclusion of improper evidence, he said. But improving communication with lawyers so they understand more about the application period also is necessary.

[China sees first drop in number of impoverished counties](#)

With 28 counties casting off poverty this year, China shortened its list of poorest counties for the first time in more than 30 years, a concrete step toward delivering on the country's goal of completely eliminating poverty by 2020.

An anti-poverty official said Wednesday that 26 more counties will soon announce their withdrawal from the list after Lankao and Jinggangshan had the "impoverished" label removed at the beginning of the year.

Southwest China's Chongqing and Tibet and northwest China's Xinjiang each saw five counties removed from the list of the poorest. The rest come from regions including Hebei, Henan and Jiangxi.

Xia Gengsheng of the Leading Group Office on Poverty Alleviation and Development under the State Council said that since the first group of 331 poorest counties was included on the list in 1986, the number had been on the rise.

Although some areas managed to rid themselves of poverty, more fell into the impoverished category.

A county can be removed from the list if less than 2 percent of its population lives below the poverty line, defined as a per capita annual income of 2,300 yuan (348 U.S. dollars) at 2010 prices. In western regions, counties must have less than 3 percent of people living in poverty to be removed from the list.

At the end of 2016, there were 832 impoverished county-level regions across China.

Xia said the 28 counties went through rigorous evaluation, including

assessments from third-party institutions and then examination by both central and local governments.

“Another 100 or so counties filed withdrawal applications this year,” Xia said.

But removal from the list does not mean poverty relief efforts will fade away, according to Xia, who promised continued favorable policies, subsidies and financial support to ensure stable development of those areas in the transition period.

Poverty reduction has been high on the government’s agenda and various means have been adopted, including e-commerce, relocation and improved infrastructure.

More than 60 million people have been lifted out of poverty in the past five years in China, with the percentage of the country’s population in poverty dropping from 10.2 to less than 4.

The country aims to eradicate poverty by 2020 by lifting the remaining 55 million rural poor out of poverty.

[2,400-year-old horse and chariot pit unearthed in China](#)

Archaeologists in central China’s Henan Province have excavated a 2,400-year-old pit containing horses and chariots beside a tomb possibly belonging to a lord.

The No. 3 Horse and Chariot Pit is one of a cluster of tombs belonging to noble families of the Zheng State, a vassal state during the Spring and Autumn (770-476 B.C) and Warring States periods (475-221 B.C), near the city of Xinzheng.

Since February, four chariots and 90 horse skeletons have been unearthed from the pit, the largest of the three within the cluster that have been excavated so far.

The total number of horses buried in the pit may exceed 100, said Ma Juncai from the provincial cultural heritage and archaeology institute, who led the excavation.

“As the main tomb has been looted and no written records have been found yet, it is difficult to identify the tomb owner,” he said, adding it may belong to a Lord from the late Spring and Autumn Period judging from the size of the tomb and the details of items found inside.

Bronze artifacts have also been discovered in the pit, which Ma said provides important information on technology, production, social status and funeral practices of the period.

Ma said he believes the chariots were for daily use by a Lord and his wife.

One of chariots is significantly larger and more extravagant. Measuring 2.56 meters long and 1.66 meters wide, it is equipped with rain and sun protection and decorated with bronze and bone artifacts.

Li Hongchang, director of the Zheng State Horse and Chariot Pit tourist site, said that it is believed that during the Zheng State horses were usually killed first, then placed into a pit beside the owner's tomb with dismantled chariots added on top.

Excavation of the tombs and the surrounding 20 hectares of land has already found 18 large pits containing horses and chariots and more than 3,000 tombs.

[China reports lowest urban unemployment rate since 2008](#)

The registered unemployment rate in Chinese cities stood at 3.95 percent at the end of the third quarter, the lowest level since 2008, official data showed.

China created 10.97 million jobs in the first nine months, 300,000 more than the same period last year, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (MHRSS) announced on Wednesday.

The job market has remained stable with the unemployment rate at its lowest level since the global financial crisis in 2008, Lu Aihong, a senior MHRSS official, said at a press briefing.

The registered unemployment rate is calculated based on the number of unemployed people who register with human resource authorities or employment service institutions.

The figure, 0.09 percentage points lower than the same period last year, was flat with that in the second quarter and slightly down from 3.97 percent in the first quarter.

"China's job market has remained stable with many indicators reaching their best level in history," said Lu.

China has set an increase of 11 million jobs as its target for the whole year, which was basically accomplished as of September, Lu added.

The steady labor market came on the back of the sound social and economic development as well as concerted efforts by all departments in implementing job policies, Lu said.

To ensure stable employment, China has rolled out an array of pro-employment policies for graduates, redundant workers, the disabled and migrant workers, while the country's entrepreneurial wave has helped fuel job creation, according to Lu.

At the same time, he admitted that a huge workforce will continue to put pressure on the job market, especially with structural problems becoming more prominent as China's economy enters a "new normal."

In the next stage, China will strive to ensure re-employment of workers made redundant during the country's excess capacity cuts, help college graduates seek jobs, improve professional skills training, and support people in setting up their own businesses.