

Former work safety chief sentenced to 15 years in prison

Yang Dongliang, former head of the State Administration of Work Safety, was sentenced to 15 years in prison for accepting bribes and embezzlement on Tuesday by a court in Beijing.

Yang accepted the verdict and will not to appeal.

According to the verdict by the Second Intermediate People's Court of Beijing, from 2002 to 2015 when Yang was vice mayor of Tianjin and a member of the standing committee of the Communist Party of China Tianjin municipal committee, head of the State Administration of Work Safety and other posts, he help others in running businesses, promotions, tenders and other issues, illegally accepting assets worth 28.5 million yuan (US\$4.1 million).

In 1999, as head of Tianjin's economic commission, Yang bought an apartment with public funds of 270,800 yuan.

Yang was shown leniency as he pleaded guilty, expressed remorse and returned his illegal gains.

2 die in China factory blast

At least two people have died and four injured after an explosion at a chemical factory in north China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, local authorities said Tuesday.

The blast occurred at 9 a.m. at Lixin Chemical in Alashan League, Inner Mongolia, according to the local safety bureau.

No chemical leaks have been discovered.

An investigation is underway.

SNP must "mind the gap" on tax



The Scottish Conservatives are warning the SNP that they must “mind the gap” with the rest of the UK ahead of today’s key vote on tax rates.

The warning comes as the Scottish Parliament prepares to vote for the first time to set new rates of income tax, following the successful implementation of the new Scotland Act.

The SNP Government – under pressure from the Greens – has decided to reject a plan to lift middle earners out of the higher rate of tax, as proposed elsewhere in the UK.

It will instead freeze the rate – dragging police officers, senior teachers and nurses into paying it.

The Scottish Conservatives will today step up their call for the SNP Government to prioritise economic growth by setting competitive tax rates no higher than the rest of the UK.

Scottish Conservative shadow economy secretary Dean Lockhart said:

“Over the last 18 months, Scotland’s growth rate has been around a third of that for the UK – with the result that employment is now falling in Scotland.

□ “The SNP’s plans to set tax rates higher than the rest of the UK will only worsen this growing divide we are seeing, deterring investment and reducing new jobs.

“Our message to the SNP today is clear: it needs to mind the gap. Higher taxes in Scotland means lower growth, which will deliver less cash for government to spend on our vital public services.”

“Derek Mackay’s handling of the business rates crisis has shown that this Scottish Government simply does not understand business and the economy.

“It is must start to listen to job creators who need a Government which goes for growth, not one which punishes aspiration.”

BCC comments on public sector finances for January 2017

Commenting on the public sector finances for January 2017, published today by the Office for National Statistics, Suren Thiru, Head of Economics at the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC), said:

“The slight improvement to the UK’s fiscal position in January confirms that the government remains on track to meet the Office for Budget Responsibility’s forecast for 2016/17. The public finances in January typically show a surplus, as it tends to be a strong month for tax receipts due to the timing of self-assessment tax returns.

“Stronger than expected growth over recent quarters has boosted UK tax revenue, which means that the Chancellor is likely to report lower short-term borrowing forecasts in next month’s Budget.

“However, over the long-term, the task of restoring public finances remains significant. If UK growth becomes more sluggish, as we expect, the UK will find it increasingly challenging to generate the tax receipts needed to deliver real progress in cutting the deficit.

“The only sustainable way to boost tax receipts is for the government to create the conditions to support long-term business investment. Next month’s Budget should tackle the increasing burden of up-front costs for businesses, including action on business rates. This will help firms to deliver the type of job creation and growth needed to achieve a real strengthening of the UK’s tax base.”

Ends

Notes to editors:

The British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) sits at the heart of a powerful network of 52 Accredited Chambers of Commerce across the UK, representing thousands of businesses of all sizes and within all sectors. Our Global Business Network connects exporters with nearly 40 markets around the world. For more information, visit: www.britishchambers.org.uk

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[News story: £4 million awarded for tech which gives motorists advance](#)

notice of congestion and free parking spaces

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Government awards £4 million for tech projects that will cut congestion, speed up journeys and clean up the environment.

Apps that notify motorists of congestion and free parking spaces, and real time journey information for visually impaired passengers, are just some of the projects that will receive a share of £4 million government technology funding today (21 February 2017).

Nineteen councils across England will receive between £50,000 and £300,000 each for their ideas to improve journeys through digital innovation.

The government money will be spent on developing cutting edge technology such as apps and sensors which can be used to cut congestion, improve parking in city centres and alert drivers when electric car charging points become available.

Successful bidders include:

- £234,000 for Blackpool to use Bluetooth technologies to cut traffic congestion
- £182,000 for Dorset to provide advance congestion warnings for drivers on the A31 using an app
- £300,000 for Warrington to provide real-time information to businesses and public through on-street information displays, social media and phone apps
- £150,000 for Coventry for a real-time bay availability system across 450 pay and display parking spots
- £204,000 for Westminster, Hounslow, Hammersmith and Fulham to roll out a new generation of electric vehicle charge points which will provide real-time data to motorists when they are available
- £50,000 for Peterborough to use digital technology to provide real time journey information directly to visually impaired people

Roads Minister Andrew Jones, said:

I congratulate today's winners for coming up with cutting-edge, innovative ideas that will transform journeys for passengers and motorists across the country. Technology is rapidly evolving and

this important work shows that if we get it right, it can cut congestion, speed up journeys, clean up the environment, and improve accessibility.

Andrew Jones is visiting one of the competition winners, Westminster Council, today where he will see smart technology in practice including a hands-free parking app which reduces the time motorists circulate by showing available space.

Local authority	Project	Funding awarded
Blackpool	Traffic congestion and parking Bluetooth management technology	£234,000
City of York	Connected vehicle data for traffic signalling to improve congestion	£295,200
Derbyshire	Early warning system for congestion enabling drivers to communicate with one another and avoid traffic	£237,500
Dorset	Advanced congestion warnings app	£182,100
Southampton	Enabling council to deliver real time travel information to better manage road network	£90,000
Swindon	Alert system for local authority traffic managers to better disseminate congestion information	£235,000
Warrington	Using Bluetooth and Smart technology to manage traffic flow and provide real-time information to businesses and the general public	£300,000
Worcestershire	Information sharing system so traffic incidents can be dealt with quickly by highway staff and vehicles	£300,000
Newcastle	Connected bus scheme for Arriva Fleet to equip more buses with vehicle infrastructure technology.	£98,200
Portsmouth	Developing platform for Portsmouth's Traffic Management Centre, enabling communication exchange between vehicles infrastructure and other vehicles	£285,000
Reading	Improve roadworks warning, parking and traffic information	£250,000
Coventry	Real time information on parking bay availability to improve parking services	£150,000
Somerset	Provide advanced traffic signal phase and timing information for traffic on the M5 – Junction 24, through Bridgewater, to Hinkley Point	£290,000
West Midlands	Real time information for HVG drivers to avoid unnecessary stops at traffic signals via hands free smartphone app	£285,000

Local authority	Project	Funding awarded
Hounslow, Hammersmith, Fulham and Westminster	Sharing information about electric charge points by deploying parking sensors in electric vehicle bays	£204,000
Luton	To collect live car park availability data and give straight to drivers to reduce congestion by reducing time looking for spaces	£73,500
Milton Keynes	Provision of real time information with cameras/sensors and 7 laser sensors at key junctions in Central Milton Keynes enabling monitoring of all available parking	£175,000
Oxfordshire	Real-time parking information for Blue Badge, Pay and Display and electric vehicle charge points with a particular focus on vulnerable road users	£239,000
Peterborough	Real time journey information for the visually impaired with a focus on visitors being able to access the new Royal National Institute for the Blind head offices in Peterborough	£50,000