

Former president's appeal begins at Taiwan High Court

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Former president Chen Shui-bian's (陳水扁) appeal against his conviction on embezzlement and money laundering charges began yesterday at the Taiwan High Court.

Former first lady Wu Shu-jen (吳淑珍) did not appear in court, citing ill health.

The former president also said he felt unwell, tired and bloated. He has been diagnosed with gastroenteritis, commonly known as stomach flu. However, he did appear in court to answer judges' and prosecutors' questions.

Aside from Chen, the court also summoned several other defendants and witnesses, including Huang Wei-sheng (黃偉生), who was in charge of Chen's finances when he ran for Taipei mayor.

Judges and prosecutors asked Huang about his handling of funds that remained after Chen's election campaign. Huang seemed to offer little useful evidence to the court, saying that although he was in charge of handling the money, he was not in charge of actual bookkeeping.

Huang said several volunteers served as bookkeepers, but he had no recollection of their names or even their nicknames.

When asked why he handed cash from the remaining funds to the former first lady instead of depositing into a bank account or giving it directly to Chen, Huang said he did not remember the specific reasons, but that Chen left all his finances in the hands of his wife.

Prosecutors said they were suspicious of Chen's claims that he had millions of NT dollars left over following the campaign, but Chen said his numerous election campaigns had been funded by political donations, so it was normal to have accumulated large amounts of cash in unused funds.

The former president also backed up Huang's testimony by saying that he indeed never paid any attention to bookkeeping records because he was busy campaigning.

The case is currently in its second round of judicial review at the appeals court. Chen and his wife received life sentences and fines of NT\$200 million (US\$6.06 million) and NT\$300 million respectively in the first trial on Sept. 11 last year.

Chen has been in detention since December 2008.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court on Thursday turned down an appeal by Wu on access to some of the family's frozen domestic assets.

The assets have been frozen since October by prosecutors, who intend to use them to pay fines handed down to the former first family.

Wu had asked that prosecutors remove the freeze on one of the family's bank accounts

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containing more than NT\$8 million, but the appeal was dismissed on the grounds of incorrect procedure.

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