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Ex-Drug Head Executed

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Zheng, 63, was sentenced to death on May 29 by the Beijing Municipal No. 1 Intermediate People's Court after being found guilty of taking 6.49 million yuan (US\$850,000) in bribes and dereliction of duty.

Zheng appealed for leniency in a second hearing of his case on June 12, pleading that the penalty was "too severe" and asking the court to reconsider the sentence. He also gave evidence that implicated other officials in the case.

The Higher People's Court of Beijing rejected Zheng's appeal on June 22 and upheld the death sentence.

"The evidence provided by Zheng was obtained by the prosecution team before his confession," said the court, which then asked for a review and the approval of the Supreme People's Court (SPC).

The SPC ratified the death sentence against Zheng saying, "The judgement made by the first and second hearings was authentic, the evidence was complete and the death sentence was appropriate."

"Zheng's dereliction of duty has undermined the efficiency of China's drug monitoring and supervision, endangered public life and health and has had a very negative social impact," said the SPC.

The bribes taken by Zheng, including cash and gifts, were received either directly or through his wife and son, according to the court.

The court said Zheng "sought benefits" for eight pharmaceutical companies by approving their drugs and medical devices during his tenure as China's chief drug and food official from June 1997 to December 2006.

Zheng violated reporting rules and decision-making processes when approving medicines between 2001 and 2003. He failed to make careful arrangements for the supervision of medicine production, which is of critical importance to people's lives, said the court.

The consequences of Zheng's dereliction of duty have proved extremely serious. Six types of medicine approved by the administration during that period were fake. Some pharmaceutical companies used false documents to apply for approvals, the court said.

(Xinhua News Agency July 10, 2007)

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