

Name: Alert ID: TMML2024033382670 BEIJING (Reuters) - China will try Gu Kailai, the wife of ousted Politburo member Bo Xilai, on charges of murdering a British man, state media said on Thursday in the latest turn in a scandal that has rocked the government in Beijing and could bring Gu the death penalty. The contentious dismissal of Bo has already shaken the Communist Party's looming once-in-a-decade succession, and now Gu and family aide Zhang Xiaojun will be prosecuted for allegedly poisoning businessman Neil Heywood last year over "conflict of economic interests", the official Xinhua news agency said. "The facts of the two defendants' crime are clear, and the evidence is irrefutable and substantial," said the Xinhua report summarizing the indictment. "Therefore, the two defendants should be charged with intentional homicide." Gu and Zhang will face trial in Hefei, a city in eastern China, far from Chongqing, the sprawling municipality in the southwest where Bo made his political base and where Heywood died in a hillside hotel in November. Bo has not been named as a suspect in the murder case, but he is separately under investigation by party authorities and could also face trial at a later time. Political observers have said a failure to forge a unified stance on handling the divisive Bo case could affect the Communist Party's focus on working out the leadership changes that will be decided at the upcoming congress. Bo, the 62-year-old party chief of Chongqing before his dismissal, was widely seen as pushing for a spot in that new leadership until felled by the scandal brought to light by his former police chief, Wang Lijun. "As big as this case is, the party congress will now proceed quite smoothly," said Joseph Fewsmith, a professor of Chinese politics at Boston University. "The party has handled this case as one of one person breaking the law. The ideological issues have been pushed to the side, although that doesn't mean they're not there." TRIAL SEEN IN EARLY AUGUST Xinhua did not give a date for the trial, but Shen Zhigeng, a lawyer who had been employed by Gu's family, told Reuters that her trial was likely to start on August 7 or 8. China's party-run courts rarely find in favor of defendants, and Gu and Zhang could face the death penalty. In London, the British Foreign Office responded to news of the indictment by saying it was glad the investigation was continuing. "The details of the ongoing investigation are a matter for the Chinese authorities," it added in a statement. "However we are glad to see that the Chinese authorities are continuing with the investigation into the death of Neil Heywood. We are dedicated to seeking justice for him and his family and we will be following developments closely," it added. The indictment comes around a week after Frenchman Patrick Henri Devillers, 52, flew from Cambodia to China to serve as a witness in the case. Devillers was detained last month in Cambodia at the behest of Beijing because of his suspected business links to Gu. Bo and his wife have had no chance publicly to address the accusations against them since Bo was ousted from his Chongqing post in March. But shortly before his dismissal, Bo said that he and his family had been the victims of slanderous accusations by foes of his policies, especially his controversial crackdown on organized crime. Since Bo's sacking, supporters of his left-leaning policies and rhetoric have continued to argue that he is the victim of a political plot. The removal of Bo has triggered rifts and uncertainty, disrupting the Communist Party's usually secretive and carefully choreographed process of settling on a new central leadership in the run up to the 18th Party Congress. The congress, scheduled to be held late this year, possibly in October, will appoint that leadership. President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao will then step down from their government posts at the National People's Congress in early 2013, when Vice President Xi Jinping is likely to succeed Hu as president. "This just shows that the Party has put the Bo Xilai case behind. It shows the center is on top of this case and the whole Party's priority is the party congress," Wang Zhengxu, senior research fellow at the School of Contemporary Chinese Studies, University of Nottingham, said of Gu's indictment. Gu has been in police custody for months on suspicion of committing or arranging Heywood's murder, though no details of the motive or the crime itself have been publicly released, other than a general comment from Chinese state media that he was killed after a financial dispute. Xinhua said that the economic dispute between Gu and Heywood involved her son. After his dismissal from the Chongqing post, Bo was suspended from the party's top ranks in April, when Gu was named as a suspect in the November 2011 murder of Heywood. The businessman was a long-time friend of the couple whose son had earlier studied in England with the help of Heywood. The son, Bo Guagua, graduated from Harvard University this year and is still believed to be in the United States. Since Bo was ousted, he and Gu, formerly a powerful lawyer, have disappeared from public view. "Bo's career has been over for a long time," said Fewsmith, the professor of Chinese politics. "I don't think it's a surprise," he said of the indictment of

Gu, “because it’s pretty clear that they wanted to get the Gu Kailai case out of the way before the party congress.”