

Mogul linked to Mexico bribery set free

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MEXICO CITY --

A construction mogul at the center of a bribery scandal that tainted the image of Mexico City's leftist government was released from prison early Tuesday, recaptured and then set free again.

The latest chapter in the three-year saga of Argentine businessman Carlos Ahumada began before dawn Tuesday when he was released from a Mexico City prison after being acquitted of embezzlement - only to have a squad of city police detain him again a few steps from the prison door.

The police wrestled him to the ground and shoved him into a car, though prosecutors later acknowledged that he was merely being served a summons to testify in another case and currently faces no further charges.

He was questioned at a downtown police building for several hours, and finally was released again near midday. Visibly tired and dirty after the scuffle with police, Ahumada - who has accused authorities of trying to silence him - did not want to talk much.

"I'd like to, but I'm very tired, exhausted," he said to throngs of journalists outside police offices. "Please, I want to go home."

Ahumada has described the city's prosecution as a political vendetta in retaliation for a series of videos he made showing him giving large wads of cash to members of the leftist Democratic Revolution Party, which governs the city.

The videos damaged the party's reputation and forced it to bar several of its most prominent activists from political activities.

But chief city prosecutor Rodolfo Felix Cardenas denied there was any political tint to the case.

"If he were being politically persecuted, he would still be down there (referring to the lower floors of police offices) and he wouldn't be released," said Felix Cardenas.

Ahumada originally fled to Cuba after the videos were leaked to news media, but the Cuban government sent him back to Mexico to face accusations he embezzled money from the city government, with which he had construction contracts.

Prosecutors say a new investigation of other contracts could lead to a new round of fraud and fake-document charges against Ahumada.

Ahumada's lawyer, Enrique Ostos, protested the Tuesday detention and said Ahumada showed signs of being beaten.

Cardenas defended police officers' actions, saying Ahumada's friends, relatives or bodyguards may have tried to interfere with police serving the summons Tuesday.