

Former dot.com star wants entrepreneurial Japan

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TOKYO (AP) — Takafumi Horie, the Japanese dot.com celebrity imprisoned for nearly two years on securities fraud charges, is cooking up dozens of ventures and demanding the nation reduce regulation to give more opportunities to young entrepreneurs.

"It was as though I was set back 10 years," the founder and former chief executive of Internet service provider Livedoor said Wednesday when recalling his imprisonment.

Before his 2006 arrest, his lavish lifestyle had drawn media attention, and he was known as "Horiemon" for his resemblance to a pudgy cartoon character. He went to prison in 2011 after an unsuccessful appeal of his 2007 conviction. He is out on parole since March, with nine months left of his term.

Horie, now about 30 kilograms (66 pounds) lighter after 21 months in prison, told reporters that the Japanese government should stop getting in the way of entrepreneurs.

Japan under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has embarked on an ambitious attempt to break its economy out of two decades of stagnation. So far, though, the government has done little to encourage entrepreneurs and risk taking.

Horie, 40, has already announced several new business plans, including most recently a social media app "7gogo," a celebrity group-talk platform similar to Google's Hangout services, except subscribers monitor conversations among

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famous people.

He also plans to work on his past ideas, such as his rocket tourism project, which commercializes space travel for regular people, he said at the Foreign Correspondents' Club in Tokyo.

He praised the recent growth of crowdsourcing and social media as ways young people's businesses could be nurtured.

Horie also had praise for Osaka Mayor Toru Hashimoto, who recently attracted a storm of criticism for defending Japan's "comfort women" system in which women from South Korea, Japan and other Asian nations were forced to work as sex slaves for the Japanese military before and during World War II.

Horie said Hashimoto is an advocate of smaller government and he supports Hashimoto's prime ministerial ambitions, which have now dimmed because of the comfort women comments.

"The best thing the government can do is to not get in the way," said Horie.

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