

Reopen the KMT illegal party asset sales probe

Written by Huang Di-ying 黃帝英
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The Supreme Prosecutors' Office Special Investigation Division (SID), abolished on Jan. 1, was responsible for investigating possible irregularities in the 2005 sale of three media companies previously owned by the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT), namely the Broadcasting Corp of China (BCC), China Television Co and Central Motion Picture Corp (CMPC) — a case that involved former president and then-KMT chairman Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九).

However, in August 2014, when the nation was focused on relief operations following a series of gas explosions in Kaohsiung, the SID closed the case, saying that it had found no evidence of illegality. At the time, people in the legal field criticized the SID and suggested that it was trying to avoid oversight by closing the case at a time of crisis.

After the SID's abolition, the Executive Yuan's Ill-gotten Party Assets Settlement Committee has investigated the sale of land belonging to CMPC.

The committee found that the SID did not summon Ma for questioning, even though he was the main decisionmaker in the sale.

On Tuesday, news media reported that the SID had discovered statements made by KMT figures, one of which had said: "At the time, we barely got paid."

In view of these findings, the committee is compiling new evidence that it will hand over to the Taipei District Prosecutors' Office, possibly this week. Reopening investigations into the disposal of the three companies would help clarify suspicions about Ma's involvement in the sale of the KMT assets and it would help restore public confidence in public prosecution.

There are other dubious points to the case besides procedural problems, such as the SID's apparent failure to question Ma and the way it closed the case just after the Kaohsiung disaster.

KMT Central Policy Committee director Alex Tsai (蔡啟芳) has been embroiled in a war of words

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with Hsu Chiao-hsin (許昭欣), spokeswoman for Ma's office.

"Someone sold the party assets, but could not collect the money... Someone will go to hell if you [Hsu] mention the CMPC case again," Tsai wrote on Facebook.

The SID's closure of the case has clearly not removed doubts about the sale, so the Taipei District Prosecutors' Office should reopen investigations.

While investigating the BCC sale, the assets committee found that people related to the case had said that when the KMT sold its stake, "some people made higher bids than Jaw Shaw-kong (Jaw 昭雄)," referring to the former politician and radio commentator who eventually bought the BCC in 2006 and became its chairman.

These people accused the KMT of underpricing the BCC when it sold it to Jaw, which constitutes breach of trust, a criminal offense.

The existence of such recorded statements also means that the Taipei District Prosecutors' Office could summon people other than Tsai for questioning. Furthermore, there is likely to be more evidence in the committee's files that could constitute a valid basis for reopening the investigation.

The SID's involvement in the scandal — in which Ma allegedly collaborated with then-prosecutor-general Huang Shih-ming (黃世明) to divulge classified information, conduct unwarranted phone-tapping and wage a political war against then-legislative speaker Wang Jin-pyng (王金平) — caused it to degrade into a political tool and lose all credibility.

That is why the public remained utterly unconvinced by the SID's conclusions when it closed the case in the wake of the gas blasts. Now that new evidence has come to light, and in view of Tsai's revelations, the Taipei District Prosecutors' Office should take up the case where the SID left off.

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