

US offers assistance in blunder probe

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The US has expressed concern over the navy's accidental launch of a missile into the Taiwan Strait on Friday last week and offered to provide technical assistance to help determine the cause of the incident, Minister of Foreign Affairs David Lee (李顯赫) said yesterday.

Lee made the comments on the sidelines of a meeting of the legislature's Foreign Affairs and National Defense Committee, which was held to review President Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) achievements during her first state visit to the nation's diplomatic allies in Latin America.

"On Friday at noon, shortly after the navy's accidental missile launch, we informed the American Institute in Taiwan's [AIT] political section of the incident," Lee said.

"On the same day, we also notified the Taipei-based representative offices of the Philippines and Vietnam, where the injured fishing crew members are from," Lee added.

Asked about Washington's response after "reporting" to the US about the missile blunder, Lee said that the ministry only "informed" the US of the incident, rather than reporting to it.

Regarding some academics' calls for the government to hold an international news conference to explain the incident, Lee said that as the event involved many technical issues, only the Ministry of National Defense would have a clear picture of the incident.

Lee said that while the government has not yet gained a complete understanding of the incident, more details are expected to emerge within the next few days.

The locally developed Hsiung Feng III missile was launched from one of the navy's 500-tonne Chinchiang-class corvettes at Zuoying Military Harbor in Kaohsiung during a drill at 8:15am on Friday.

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It struck a Taiwanese fishing boat — the *Hsiang Li Sheng* (向利生), which was operating in waters southeast of Penghu County in the Taiwan Strait — killing its captain, Huang Wen-chung (黃文忠), and injuring Huang's son and two crew members from the Philippines and Vietnam.

During a question-and-answer session at the meeting, Lee said that as the incident occurred just before Tsai landed in Los Angeles for a transit stop, the president talked about and exchanged opinions the incident with AIT Chairman Raymond Burghardt, who received Tsai as her airplane arrived.

“Burghardt expressed the US’ hope to help us understand why such a matter happened,” Lee said.

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