

Source says Ma in the clear over gondola

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The Control Yuan is close to concluding its investigation into the Maokong Gondola and has found President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) not to be responsible for problems with the project, a Control Yuan member said on condition of anonymity yesterday.

The gondola, which has been suspended since Oct. 1 last year after mudslides eroded the ground beneath a support pillar, was one of Ma's major projects when he was Taipei mayor.

Control Yuan members Tu Shan-liang (涂善亮), Chen Yung-hsiang (陳永祥) and Ger Yeong-kuang (葛永光) are in charge of the probe.

The anonymous member said that Ma did not make mistakes in his decision to build the gondola.

Before the system was suspended, the gondola brought great benefits to the Muzha area, attracting more than 5 million visitors in a year, he said.

However, the anonymous official said that the Taipei City Government under Ma's administration was found to be partly at fault for an incomplete evaluation of the geology of the tower sites, inadequate project design and insufficient testing.

He said the Control Yuan might censure the Taipei City Government led by Hau Lung-bin (郝龍斌) as it gave inconsistent accounts for the weakened Tower No. 16 (T16) and failed to explain clearly to the public how it was going to address the unsafe tower.

The Control Yuan is expected to hold a plenary meeting next month to discuss the report.

The Presidential Office yesterday said it respected Control Yuan decisions.

Presidential Office Spokesman Wang Yu-chi (王郁琦) said that since January it has been saying that the decision to go ahead with the construction project was justified. The system had brought 5 million tourists to Maokong, Muzha and southern parts of the capital and created many business opportunities, he said.

It has also reiterated that there was nothing wrong with the safety of the T16 pillar, he said, adding that the construction process was legal and free of irregularities. The Control Yuan's investigation report substantiated those claims, he said.

Regarding the Control Yuan's criticism of the planning of the project, Wang said the Presidential Office fully respects the Control Yuan, which exercises its power independently, and did not interfere with the investigation process.

Meanwhile, Hau said the city government was happy to accept any corrective measures.

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“However, we can assure people of the safety of the gondola, as engineers have examined the system and confirmed its safety,” Hau said.

He said the plan to reopen the gondola by the end of this year remained unchanged.

When asked for comment, Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) Legislator Lo Shu-lei (羅淑蕾) said the result of the investigation was “illogical,” adding that the problems had much to do with poor design and construction completed during Ma’s mayoral terms.

Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Taipei City Councilor Chuang Ruei-hsiung (莊瑞雄) said the former Ma administration should take responsibility for avoiding an environmental assessment and rushing construction.

“But the Hau administration did not have the courage to correct Ma’s wrong policy. It continued risking people’s lives and lied about the safety of the gondola,” Chuang said.

“All major municipal projects, from the Maokong Gondola to the Neihu MRT Line, have proved disappointments for Taipei residents and Mayor Hau needs to clean up the mess left by Ma,” he said.

DPP Taipei City Councilor Chien Yu-yen (陳玉蓮) condemned the Hau administration for insisting on reopening the gondola this year without a thorough environmental assessment and warned that it was still unsafe.

▫ Additional reporting by Mo Yan-chih and Flora Wang

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