

Legal expert urges investigation of Ma

Written by Taipei Times

Thursday, 02 November 2017 06:00 -



Minister of National Defense Feng Shih-kuan talks to reporters at the Legislative Yuan in Taipei yesterday before reporting to a task force reviewing procurement of minesweepers from Ching Fu Shipbuilding Co.

Photo: CNA

A legal expert yesterday demanded that the judiciary fully investigate alleged influence peddling, financial improprieties and profiteering by former president Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) in connection with the Taipei Dome project and a Ministry of National Defense initiative to domestically produce warships.

Farglory Group (法格路) was originally required to pay a performance bond of NT\$3.042 billion (US\$100.8 million at the current exchange rate) to build the Taipei Dome.

Then-Taipei Department of Finance commissioner Lee Sush-der (李述德), who was on Tuesday sentenced to 10 years in jail by the Taipei District Court, was in charge of negotiating the contract with Farglory.

However, “after Ma held several secret meetings with Farglory founder Chao Teng-hsiung (趙騰興), it was decided that the performance bond was to be waived,” attorney Lin Fu-kuei (林福魁) said. “The decision was not made in an open meeting, nor were experts and other officials consulted.”

“While Lee shouldered most of the responsibility, prosecutors suspect that Ma used his influence to benefit Farglory. Therefore, Ma could be seen as a co-conspirator and could be indicted for illegally benefiting a third party in his capacity as a public functionary, in which case

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he would face a minimum prison term of five years," Lin said.

Lee headed the department when Ma was Taipei mayor and had a key role in the Taipei Dome contract negotiations from 2004 to 2006, when he allegedly acted on behalf of Ma to grant favorable financial terms to Farglory and allow for the relaxation of safety regulations.

Separately, following a report alleging that Ma helped scandal-hit Ching Fu Shipbuilding Co (中興造船) secure a syndicated loan from state-run banks for a navy project, the Cabinet yesterday said that it would turn over anyone suspected of breaking the law to the judiciary.

Ching Fu, which was awarded a NT\$35.8 billion contract to build six minesweepers for the navy as part of a domestic warship program, defaulted on the NT\$20.5 billion syndicated loan, First Commercial Bank (第一商業銀行), the lead lender of the loan, said on Wednesday last week.

The Chinese-language *Mirror Media* weekly reported that a Cabinet task force on Tuesday met to investigate the loan and discovered that the Presidential Office on Sept. 1, 2015 — when Ma was president — issued a classified document to the Executive Yuan that included a letter by Ching Fu president Chen Ching-nan (陳景南) petitioning Ma to assist the company in securing the loan.

The document asked relevant government agencies, including the Ministry of National Defense, the Financial Supervisory Commission and the Ministry of Economic Affairs, to offer suggestions on the matter, the report said.

In October 2015, state-run banks appeared unwilling to approve the loan, but they eventually did so in February last year, the report said.

The report quoted an unnamed government official as saying that the banks would not have reversed their position without political intervention.

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“The investigation is comprehensive. It is not exclusive. Anyone found to have been involved in illegal acts during the tender process will be transferred to the judiciary. Those found negligent during a review of the loan request will be removed,” Executive Yuan spokesman Hsu Kuo-yung (胡國勇) said.

Ma office spokeswoman Hsu Chiao-hsin (許巧欣) rejected the allegations, saying that the Presidential Office under Ma followed standard procedure by passing the petition to relevant agencies.

“The [Presidential Office’s handling of the letter] is the result of interference by top management without any evidence,” Hsu Chiao-hsin said, suggesting that the document was deliberately leaked to the media to divert attention to Ma and to protect those actually responsible.

Source: [Taipei Times 0 2017/11/02](#)