

Ma and premier stump for KMT in Nantou County

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President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) visited Nantou County in his capacity as Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) chairman yesterday to campaign for the party's candidate for county commissioner Lee Chao-ching (李朝卿).

Ma's trip was a strong show of support for Lee, who was embroiled in a scandal this week, along with Premier Wu Den-yih (吳登益), over their alleged connections with a local gang leader.

Wu, who has been the main target of the Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP) criticism of the politicians' ties with Chiang Chin-liang (蔣欽良), a paroled convicted felon, accompanied Ma on the trip. The premier shrugged off the accusations against him.

"I believe that friends in Nantou will trust me because you all know me well. I am not afraid of the DPP's smear campaign," Wu said while attending the launch of Lee's campaign headquarters.

Ma led Wu and Lee in chanting "Victory for Lee Chao-ching!" and other campaign slogans, but did not comment on the controversy.

Wu, however, said Ma had given his support to him over the matter.

"I called the president last night, and he supported me for making a clear declaration on the matter and addressing the issue in a candid manner," the premier said.

Wu has downplayed his alleged relationship with Chiang, and said he would resign if the DPP could provide any evidence of irregularities stemming from the connection within three days.

Ma had agreed with him that the public should be willing to accept people who have erred as long as they know they have done wrong, Wu said.

The DPP candidate for commissioner race, Lee Wen-chung (李文忠), has accused Wu of making arrangements for distributing local gravel contracts and the election of a new Nantou County Council speaker and vice speaker during a trip the premier took last December with Chiang and Lee Chao-ching to Bali, Indonesia.

Lee Chao-ching said yesterday that the Bali trip had been a fact-finding mission to help Nantou develop its tourism industry.

He condemned his DPP opponent for making groundless accusations against Wu and himself, calling it a smear campaign, and he urged the public not to believe the DPP's allegations.

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Meanwhile, the DPP's attempt to play up the allegations appeared to have backfired after the party's acting spokeswoman said yesterday that a party member who has publicly spoken out against the party on the matter could face disciplinary action.

Huang Wen-chun (黃文春), the head of the DPP's office in Caotun Township (草屯), appeared at a press conference with Chiang to say she could confirm that Lee Wen-chung had tried, but failed to garner Chiang's support, supporting the parolee's claim that Lee Wen-chung had sought his support but turned against him when he rejected the request.

Acting DPP spokesperson Hsiao Bi-khim (蕭百愷) said the party reserved the right to take disciplinary actions against Huang for making false claims against another DPP member.

The DPP Central Standing Committee will discuss the matter on Wednesday, she said, encouraging all Nantou County DPP staffers to tell the police if they have been harassed by gangsters over the issue.

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