

Ministry approves Kuan's appointment

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Minister of Education Yeh Jiunn-rong holds a news conference in Taipei yesterday to announce the ministry's decision to approve the appointment of National Taiwan University professor Kuan Chung-ming as the university's president.

Photo: CNA

The Ministry of Education yesterday said it would appoint National Taiwan University (NTU) professor Kuan Chung-ming (關中明) as the university's president according to its election result, but asked the school to review within three months a procedural flaw and other issues that arose during the election process.

"We will reluctantly agree to appointing Kuan as NTU's president, but we strongly demand that the university conduct a review of the procedural flaw and other controversies that arose during the election process," Minister of Education Yeh Jiunn-rong (蔣偉寧) told a news conference at the ministry.

The review should cover the university's rules and procedures on approving teachers' part-time positions, its administrative support for the election process, as well as ways to fix election procedural flaws, Yeh said, adding that the conclusion should be submitted to the ministry within three months.

"The ministry would not be the only one reading the report, as it would be available for public review. NTU must provide an explanation to the public, as the controversy has caused problems beyond the university," he added.

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Kuan was on Jan. 5 elected NTU president and was originally scheduled to take office on Feb. 1, but the ministry on April 27 refused to appoint him on the grounds that there was a conflict of interest in the election process, because Kuan was an independent director at Taiwan Mobile Co (聯電) and company vice president Richard Tsai (蔡啟芳) was on the election committee.

It also found that Kuan had begun working at Taiwan Mobile as an independent director and member of its compensation committee before the university approved his application to take up the positions.

The ministry ordered a re-election, but the university refused and filed an administrative appeal requesting that the ministry honor the election results and appoint Kuan.

In an effort to resolve the standoff, Yeh, who took office in July, asked the university to only relaunch parts of the election process that were affected by the conflict of interest and to do so without Tsai's participation.

The university again refused.

The ministry decided to appoint Kuan because although fixing the procedural flaw is important, it is difficult to do so when the university is uncooperative, Yeh said.

The ministry has to consider other interests that are also important, including "the rights of NTU's students, the development of Taiwan's higher education and the social disputes the controversy has caused," he said.

"The problem is not about the qualification of the president, but the election procedure," he added.

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National Yang-Ming University (NYMU), which faced a similar conflict of interest in its presidential election in December last year, would also be required to review its election process and submit a report within three months, he said, adding that in NYMU's case, the procedural flaw was not found until after the ministry appointed the new president.

"The university is happy to see that the ministry respects university autonomy and values the rights of teachers and students," NTU said in a statement.

The university "will make improvements and provide a report on related issues" as required by the ministry, it added.

Following the announcement, the offices of Democratic Progressive Party legislators reportedly received an influx of calls from people protesting the decision.

DPP Legislator Lee Chun-yi (李俊毅) criticized the decision, saying it raised questions about the ministry's stance.

"In the future, universities can just do whatever they want and ignore the ministry, because even when there is a procedural flaw, the ministry would not deal with it," he said.

Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) Legislator Ko Chih-en (高志恩), on the other hand, praised the decision, saying Yeh displayed "the courage to be responsible."

Additional reporting by Chen Yun and Chiu Yen-ling

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