

Response to allegations lacking

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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Over the past few weeks, President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) has been swamped by allegations of dubious relations with Ting Hsin International Group (鼎新國際). Despite the Presidential Office's repeated denials, dismissing the claims as fabricated accusations, public doubts over Ma's integrity continue to grow as more allegations surface.

Following separate claims by political commentators Wu Tsu-chia (吳蘇家) and radio host Clara Chou (周曉) , as well as allegations by Democratic Progressive Party Legislator Tuan Yi-kang (團逸康) and People First Party Deputy Secretary-General Liu Wen-hsiung (劉文雄) late last month accusing Ma of having received political donations from conglomerates under the table — a case now under investigation by the Special Investigation Division of the Supreme Prosecutors' Office — a new allegation surfaced this week, questioning the cash flow handled by foundations set up by Ma.

Ma founded the New Taiwanese Cultural Foundation (新台灣文化基金會) after he was elected Taipei mayor in 1998, then the Dwen An Social Welfare Foundation (敦安社會福利基金會) in 1999.

Accusing the New Taiwanese Cultural Foundation of having capital amounting to NT\$1 billion (US\$31.3 million), Chou on Monday questioned the foundation's cash flow and aired suspicions over both foundations' roles during Ma's presidential campaigns in 2008 and 2012.

While the New Taiwanese Cultural Foundation has denied Chou's claim, saying it holds capital of just NT\$20 million, the crux of the allegation — as Chou has said — lies not in the amount itself, but in the flow of money the foundation has handled.

Chou said she suspects dummy accounts have been set up to handle under-the-table donations.

Amid the snowballing allegations questioning the president's integrity, the latest statement released by former Presidential Office deputy secretary-general Lo Chih-chiang (羅智強) dismissing claims that he acted as a guardian angel, or men shen (門神), for the Wei (魏) family that owns Ting Hsin, if anything, only made things look more suspicious.

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After chiding Chou last week for accusing him of having “special relations” with the Wei family, Lo eventually came forward on Tuesday — right before the latest edition of the Chinese-language Next Magazine hit the shelves yesterday reporting the revelation — acknowledging that he did, after all, “have interactions” with Ting Hsin executive Wei Ying-chiao (魏英嫻) four times in 2013 during his stint as the Presidential Office deputy secretary-general.

Despite Lo’s claim the four exchanges were nothing but innocent meetings, the time period mentioned raised many skeptical eyebrows, given that it was about the time that Ting Hsin’s telecom subsidiary, Taiwan Star Cellular Corp (台灣之星), was bidding for a 4G license, as well as when Ting Hsin was seeking to acquire cable television operator China Network Systems Co (CNS, 中華電信), which serves nearly 30 percent of cable television customers in the nation.

“Highest moral standards” has been a popular catchphrase for Ma. At this point, even if Ma truly knew nothing about Lo’s conduct, now that Lo has owned up to it, should Ma not be livid and demanding an explanation from Lo?

The lack of any action from Ma in addressing these allegations against him and his close aides, other than hiding behind press releases, only serves to fuel public annoyance and anger over lax supervision of his officials, as well as further eroding the public’s trust and respect for him as the head of state.

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