

Shooting not a case of mistaken identity, Lien says

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Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) Central Committee member Sean Lien (連戰) yesterday challenged prosecutors' claims that the suspect in his shooting had targeted another person, but mistakenly shot him in the face.

The Banciao District Prosecutors' Office yesterday announced it was indicting suspect Lin Cheng-wei (林成偉) — also known as “Horse Face” (馬臉) — on manslaughter, attempted murder and other charges because he allegedly planned to shoot then-KMT city councilor candidate for New Taipei City (新北市) Chen Hung-yuan (陳鴻源) on the eve of the Nov. 27 special municipality elections because of a land dispute with Chen's family.

However, in an alleged case of mistaken identity, he shot Lien, the son of former vice president Lien Chan (連戰), the prosecutors said.

Describing the claim from the prosecutors as “fallacious,” Sean Lien's lawyer, Liu Tsung-hsin (劉宗愷), said Lin had shown himself to be a very cautious man because he had tested the gun before the shooting and it was highly unlikely that such a cautious man would mistake Sean Lien for Chen.

“I am afraid that the claims made by the Banciao District Prosecutors' Office are unacceptable and the public will not accept such an explanation,” he told a press conference yesterday evening.

Liu said that Lin must have studied Chen's appearance and background before the shooting, and would have been unlikely to target the wrong person, especially since he shot Sean Lien at close range and was able to see his face clearly.

He urged the Prosecutor General to move the case to the Special Investigation Panel (SIP) for further investigation and said the National Security Bureau should also be involved in the probe in order to “find out the real truth.”

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Sean Lien previously said that Lin called out his name before shooting him in the face, but in an interview with the Chinese-language United Daily News last month, Sean Lien said instead that he was not sure who shouted his name, but said that Lin had cursed him as he approached.

During the interview, Sean Lien stood firm in his belief that his shooting was not a mistake. He said he and his family were not concerned with whether the shooter would be sentenced to death, and they only wanted prosecutors to find out the truth.

KMT Central Standing Committee member Lee Te-wei (李德偉), a close friend of Sean Lien, added that Sean Lien also called on prosecutors not to rule out a political motive for the shooting, and urged the government to step up efforts to improve public security and restore public confidence.

Sean Lien continued to challenge the evidence collected by the prosecutors and said a video, which did not include sounds of the shooting, was not solid evidence.

At a separate news conference yesterday, Chen also challenged prosecutors' claims, denying that he and his father knew the shooter.

Chen joined Sean Lien in dismissing the prosecutors' claims that Sean Lien was shot in a case of mistaken identity, and said the financial dispute mentioned was made up because they lack a motive for the shooting, urging the SIP to take over the case.

"I have asked my father several times and he said he has never heard of Horse Face, let alone met him or had any disputes with him. None of our family members had any interaction with Horse Face," Chen said.

Chen said members of his family had been running for public office for more than two decades and he questioned why, if Lin had any unsettled feud with his family, he waited until election eve to take action.

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Chen, who eventually won re-election, added that during the campaigning period, his campaign headquarters never received any verbal or written threats from Lin or his associates.

“We have never received any extortion threats from Lin and therefore we find it hard to believe the entire shooting was purely about money,” Chen said, urging prosecutors to go after what he called the “real mastermind” behind the shooting and find the truth so that his family would not have to live in fear.

Chen said that because Lin was in dire financial straits before the shooting, someone had to have given him the money to buy the gun and ammunition — estimated to have cost at least NT\$300,000 — or furnish him with the weapon itself.

Meanwhile, Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) spokesperson Lin Yu-chang (林郁昌) said prosecutors had failed to make clear the suspect’s real motive and the source of the pistol, and whether there were any accomplices.

The indictment did not resolve the public’s doubts and would not be accepted by the public, he added.

Saying the indictment suggested Sean Lien’s wound on his face was quite different from what National Taiwan University Hospital said about Sean Lien’s situation on the night of Nov. 26 just a few hours before the five special municipality elections, Lin accused the KMT of exaggerating Sean Lien’s condition to manipulate the elections.

News of the shooting quickly spread to major televised campaign rallies being held that night, with KMT candidates imploring their audiences to pray for Sean Lien and oppose violence.

DPP Legislator Kuan Bi-ling (關碧玲) said several KMT lawmakers at the rallies hinted that the DPP was behind the violence, behavior interpreted by the DPP as intended to sway voters.

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On Dec. 31, the DPP filed three lawsuits to invalidate the elections in Taipei, New Taipei City and Greater Taichung.

At a separate setting yesterday, KMT Legislator Chao Li-yun (趙麗雲), noting the public has misgivings about the handling of the election-eve shooting, said the misgivings are a result of the lack of an independent forensic institution to carry out impartial investigations.

Chao urged the Ministry of Justice, the Department of Health and the Ministry of Education to coordinate the establishment of an independent forensic center “to improve the independence, the credibility and the image of the nation’s judicial system.”

She also called for the development and nurturing of local forensic talent. The Legislative Yuan passed a forensic pathology law in December 2005 stipulating that schools of medicine or teaching hospitals of a certain scale should establish dedicated forensic departments.

However, no such departments have been planned or set up to date.

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