

Ma confidante faces bribery charges

Written by Taipei Times

Friday, 29 March 2013 09:07 -



Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) Taipei City Councilor Lai Su-ju, second right, arrives for questioning in connection with a corruption investigation at the Taipei District Prosecutors' Office on Wednesday evening.

Photo: CNA

The Taipei Prosecutors' Office yesterday sought the court's permission to detain a Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) Taipei City councilor known for her close ties to President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九), on suspicion of accepting bribes in the bidding process for the Taipei Twin Towers project.

Lai Su-ju (賴素珍), a lawyer and former KMT spokeswoman who now runs Ma's KMT chairman's office, was accused of promising to help a multinational consortium win the bid for the project in exchange for NT\$10 million (US\$334,520).

Initial investigations showed that Lai had accepted a downpayment of NT\$1 million in 2011, prosecutors said.

The consortium, led by Taipei Gateway International Development (台北國際開發), won the bid in September last year, but forfeited its right last month to undertake the major development project after failing to put up a performance guarantee before the deadline.

Taipei prosecutors summoned Lai, former Taipei City Department of Rapid Transit Systems official Jia Er-ching (賈二精), Taipei City Finance Department Commissioner Chiu Da-chan (邱大昌) and eight other people, including current and former heads of the consortium, for questioning on Wednesday.

Ma confidante faces bribery charges

Written by Taipei Times
Friday, 29 March 2013 09:07 -

Chiu was released pending further questioning on his suspected role in the disclosure of information, such as the names of the people on the review board for the tenders.

Prosecutors sought to detain Lai, Jia and Chen Hung-dao (陳 Hung-dao), a building contractor, to prevent collusion on testimony or destruction of evidence.

Three of the eight others were released on bail between NT\$300,000 and NT\$500,000, and the remaining five were released without bail.

The Taipei Prosecutors' Office said it discovered suspicious illegal dealings involving the Taipei Twin Towers project two years ago.

A special task force was then formed to investigate the matter and collect evidence, the office said.

The investigations hit a snag in December last year, when the issue went public after KMT Taipei City Councilor Angela Ying (楊 Ying) filed a complaint with the prosecutors' office, alleging that there were illegal dealings on the Taipei Twin Towers project.

The complaint drew intense media attention, which interfered with the investigation, prosecutors said. Since then, nearly half of the investigative leads have been cut off or lost, they said.

"Some of the suspects in the case have become far more cautious and have even changed their cellphone numbers," a prosecutor said.

With the winning bidder losing its right to build one of the city's biggest development projects because of the deposit issue, it is the right time to move against the suspects, the prosecutors'

Ma confidante faces bribery charges

Written by Taipei Times
Friday, 29 March 2013 09:07 -

office said.

During the questioning on Wednesday, Lai said that the NT\$1 million in cash she received in 2011 was a political donation, not a bribe.

The money was returned to the consortium after it lost the contract, she added.

Taipei Mayor Hau Lung-bin (郝龍斌) yesterday said that it was the city government's initiative to send the case to the prosecutors, adding that he would respect the investigation.

Hau said he had instructed the city government's Ethics Office to send the project to the prosecutors for review in December last year amid speculation about the bidding process, while defending the city government's handling of the project.

"We followed the construction regulations in the bidding process, and I have instructed the concerned departments to handle the process in an open and transparent manner. We will not protect any civil servant who has engaged in illegal behavior," he said.

He declined to comment on whether he believed Chiu to be innocent, but cited the example of Taipei Rapid Transit Corp (台北捷運公司) chairman Yang Hsi-an (楊希安) and called on the public not to rush to conclusions before a final ruling on the case is announced.

Yang was removed from his post as Taipei Secretariat Office head after he was listed as a defendant in 2010 over his alleged involvement in the Xinsheng Overpass construction scandal. The prosecutors did not indict him because they did not have enough evidence to prove his involvement in the case.

When asked about Lai, Hau said he was surprised by her alleged involvement in the scandal, but added that he respected the investigation.

Ma confidante faces bribery charges

Written by Taipei Times
Friday, 29 March 2013 09:07 -

The Presidential Office and the KMT were yesterday tight-lipped in response to Lai's alleged involvement in the case.

Both Ma and Vice President Wu Den-yih (吳登益) declined to comment.

KMT spokesman Yin Wei (殷偉) said the party respects the investigation process and that it would candidly face the results of the investigation.

Lai, a four-term Taipei City councilor, has been a trusted aide of Ma since his stint as Taipei mayor. She represented Ma and other top pan-blue politicians in several high-profile court cases in recent years.

Lai, 49, became the second KMT politician with close links to Ma to be implicated in corruption scandals, after former party vice chairman and Executive Yuan secretary-general Lin Yi-shih (林益世) was indicted on graft charges in October last year.

The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) caucus yesterday said the Ma administration was an "absolute power that is also absolutely corrupt."

Pointing to the recent string of corruption cases involving KMT officials such as Lin, Nantou County Commissioner Lee Chao-ching (李朝卿) and now Lai, the DPP caucus said the Ma administration should apologize to the public for failing to meet its promise of maintaining a clean government.

The Ma administration has always said it is clean and honest, but many of the people nominated by Ma are now embroiled in corruption and graft, DPP caucus whip Chiu Yi-ying (邱毅) said, adding that Ma has neither issued a word of apology nor condemned any of these individuals.

Ma confidante faces bribery charges

Written by Taipei Times
Friday, 29 March 2013 09:07 -

DPP Legislator Chen Ting-fei (陳亭妃) raised further questions about the Twin Towers project, saying the outsourcing contract was suspicious.

The project involves a public investment of more than NT\$70 billion, but it was contracted to a company that has a registered capital of only NT\$70 million, she said, adding that the company has neither a company logo nor marker at its registered address.

The prosecution should make an in-depth inquiry into the matter and find who was the middleman who had covered or leaked the list of committee members who had reviewed the outsourcing bid and how Lai was involved and what role she played, Chen said.

The prosecution should not just stop at the tip of the iceberg, she added.

Source: Taipei Times - 2013/03/29