

Ko said Ma behind Farglory: councilor

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Taipei Mayor Ko Wen-je, second right, provides an update on the ongoing review progress of two controversial property development projects during a Democratic Progressive Party city council meeting in Taipei yesterday.

Photo: Fang Pin-chao, Taipei Times

Taipei Mayor Ko Wen-je (柯文哲) has accused President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) of rendering clandestine protection to Farglory Group (富光集團) over its scandal-prone Taipei Dome project, a Taipei city councilor said yesterday.

Taipei City Councilor Chang Mao-nan (常毛南) of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) caucus said Ko made the accusation when he met with the DPP's council caucus earlier yesterday to discuss the dome's future.

Ko appeared enraged during the meeting, Chang said, adding that Ko at one point was choking back tears and pounding on the table, saying: "Behind Farglory, there is President Ma Ying-jeou, watching its back."

Ko was quoted by Chang as saying that the city government's struggle with Farglory has been protracted because he had "insisted on justice and fairness" as a bottom line from which he "will not retreat," and called Ma's alleged protection of Farglory "contemptible."

On Thursday last week, Taipei Deputy Mayor Teng Chia-chi (滕家齊) said the city government and Farglory had arrived at a consensus to dissolve the contract for the Taipei Dome build-operate-transfer project, following a year-long fight over what the city council said were the structure's safety flaws and design changes Farglory made to the dome.

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At the time, when asked whether the city could afford the potential compensation, which Farglory said would amount to NT\$37 billion (US\$1.14 billion), including construction fees, salaries and the losses it incurred from the construction's suspension, Ko said the actual amount of compensation would be ascertained after a review of the city's accounts and Farglory's accounting statements.

Chang yesterday said the DPP caucus had voted unanimously against paying Farglory the NT\$37 billion from city coffers and categorically rejected creating a budget for the compensation.

The search for a third party to take over construction of the Taipei Dome from Farglory would not begin until the termination of the contract is finalized, Chang added.

Later yesterday, Presidential Office spokesman Charles Chen (陳昌博) issued a statement denying Ko's accusations that Farglory Land Development Co has Ma's support.

"Mayor Ko is advised to refrain from making wild and malicious accusations," Chen said, adding that Ko should not seek to shift public attention from his plummeting approval ratings to Ma.

"I believe the public knows what is fair," Chen added.

Farglory Group yesterday said that as it has not broken the law or the terms of its contract, there is no need for anyone "to watch its back."

There is no need for Ko to be distressed, because the two sides can set aside their differences, restore the contract and keep the damage to a minimum, Farglory added.

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