

Ma trying to influence case: lawmakers

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Former president Ma Ying-jeou, center, yesterday attends a forum on education in Taipei held by the Global Views Educational Foundation.

Photo: CNA

Lawmakers and judicial officials yesterday responded to charges made by former president Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九), who has accused prosecutors of leaking information related to an ongoing case in which he is involved, saying that Ma is trying to interfere with the judicial process and shift the public's focus away from an investigation into financial irregularities in the sales of Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) assets.

"If prosecutors have evidence of wrongdoing, they should summon Ma for questioning and detain him," Democratic Progressive Party Legislator Wang Ding-yu (王定宇) said.

"This key recording was recovered from digital files that were deleted, leading to suspicions of tampering and destruction of evidence," he said, referring to media reports of prosecutors obtaining a recording that allegedly implicates Ma in financial irregularities arising from the sale of KMT-controlled media companies and other assets more than a decade ago.

"The evidence reportedly shows that Ma not only knew about the KMT asset sales, but that he was the one who approved them," Wang said. "If so, Ma should be immediately detained, in line with the treatment received by former president Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁)."

Ma drew significant media attention on Wednesday, when he and his lawyers filed a complaint at the Taipei District Prosecutors' Office naming Chief Prosecutor Shing Tai-chao (程泰朝) and head prosecutor Wang Hsin-chien (王欣謙) as those responsible for leaks at the office.

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Ma then applied with the Taiwan High Prosecutors' Office for the case to be transferred to another jurisdiction, citing the leaks as proof that he would not be treated fairly by the current prosecution team.

At a news conference yesterday, the Taipei District Prosecutors' Office requested that people not engage in speculation, saying that leaks reported by the media have not been verified and are unrelated to prosecutors.

"We urge Ma not to make emotional statements or manipulate public sentiment, which could be an attempt to shift the focus away from the case and interfere with the investigation," Deputy Chief Prosecutor Chou Shih-yu (周希宇) said.

"Our office has always maintained the confidentiality of cases under investigation. Much of the content of media reports of leaks do not correlate with factual information," Chou said. "Prosecutors strictly adhere to the legal process, and their work is not based on any political considerations."

As a number of defendants, witnesses and lawyers are involved in the investigation, it would be difficult to determine who allegedly provided information to the media for their own purposes, he said.

While attending a forum on education in Taipei yesterday, Ma refused to comment when asked by the media about the purported recording, in which he reportedly instructed that then-China Times Group chairman Albert Yu (余英时) be given a NT\$480 million (US\$16 million at the current exchange rate) "concession" in the KMT's sale of China Television Co (CTV 中視) in 2005.

King Pu-tsung (邱勝雄), a close associate and top aide of Ma who was also at the forum, said: "That was not true at all."

Separately, New Power Party Legislator Hsu Yung-ming (許永明) was critical of Ma, saying that

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he treated the Taipei District Prosecutors' Office like "a buffet meal," taking dishes to eat as desired.

Hsu said Ma interfered with the judiciary when he applied pressure on the Special Investigation Division by saying that "These prosecutors will be dismissed if they do not produce a result" during investigations of Chen over alleged financial irregularities.

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