

Minister promises no cover-up in smuggling probe

Written by Taipei Times

Wednesday, 24 July 2019 02:32 -



Minister of Transportation and Communications Lin Chia-lung talks to reporters in Taipei yesterday.

Photo: CNA

Minister of Transportation and Communications Lin Chia-lung (林錫山) yesterday said that he would not cover up any illegal behavior by the management of China Airlines Ltd (CAL, 華航) and would hold top officials accountable following the detention of two National Security Bureau employees.

China Airlines' largest shareholder, the China Aviation Development Foundation, is controlled by the government, with Deputy Minister of Transportation and Communications Wang Kwo-tsai (王國材) serving as board chairman.

After claiming on Monday that a National Security Bureau official who accompanied President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) on her visit to Taiwan's Caribbean allies tried to use officials' speedy clearance through customs to smuggle in cigarettes, New Power Party Legislator Huang Kuo-chang (黃國昌) yesterday accused the airline's management of complicity.

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Asked about Huang's allegations, Lin said that he had asked the airline to launch an internal probe and to cooperate fully with an investigation by prosecutors, adding that the airline should clarify its responsibility in the matter.

"I have also asked the airline to tell the public whether similar incidents have happened in the past and how they were handled," Lin said. "I will not tolerate illegal behavior on the part of the airline, nor will I impede accountability for this case from reaching the highest levels of the airline's management."

Asked if the airline should investigate incidents that might have occurred during former president Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) two terms, Lin said that investigators should follow the evidence wherever it takes them.

The airline's integrity is in question and the investigation should not stop at the present incident, Lin said, adding that the company probe should be comprehensive.

Asked if CAL chairman Hsieh Shih-chien (謝志千) — who assumed the position in April after a strike by pilots in February — would be asked to step down because of the incident, Lin said that the ministry would examine all of the evidence and determine what personnel changes were needed.

The ministry would also ensure that the airline's probe is transparent, as the public should be allowed to see the results, he said.

Lin said that an investigation of the incident would not affect the appointment of a new CAL president, a position that remains vacant.

Taipei City Councilor William Hsu (許水三) of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) said that the incident has shown how the Democratic Progressive Party has placed many of its own people in management positions in the airline.

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The incident was a “corrupt custom” that has been practiced for years, Lin said, adding that the airline should take full responsibility for it to regain the public’s trust.

Source: [Taipei Times - 2019/07/24](#)