

Tsai apologizes for taking credit for NYC purchase

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President Tsai Ing-wen, left, and Minister of Transportation and Communications Lin Chia-lung, waving, accompanied by other officials, wave yesterday while inspecting a bridge in Penghu.

Photo: CNA

President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) yesterday acknowledged that she had confused the facts surrounding the purchase of the building housing the nation's representative office in New York City during a speech she gave on Aug. 17 in Taichung, following criticism from former president Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁).

Talking about her accomplishments in her career in government, Tsai said that she had had the "boldness and vision" to buy the building that houses the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in New York, which has "become a landmark" in the city.

The president yesterday said she was sorry that her mistake had created a disturbance, and she thanked those who brought the mistake to her attention.

During the years of the building's planning she had been a national security team member and had taken part in many discussions involving the nation's policies regarding its relationship to the US, Tsai said.

Part of that participation involved supporting increases in the foreign affairs budget to pay for the building, which she felt was at the front line of the nation's diplomacy, she said.

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Then-premier Yu Shyi-kun's decision to purchase the building was the right choice, and the hard work of foreign affairs officials at the time is the main reason ties between the two nations continue to deepen today, she said.

In a Facebook post on Friday, Chen had criticized Tsai's account of her participation in buying the building.

"That purchase was made during the time that Yu Shyi-kun was premier. [Tsai] had no part in it, and yet she can say such a thing," he wrote.

Planning for and the establishment of the New York office took place from July 2004 to March 2005, while Tsai did not become vice premier until Jan 25, 2006 — when Premier Su Tseng-chang (蘇貞昌) replaced Yu — so she could not have had anything to do with setting up the office, he said.

The decision to buy the building, which cost NT\$1.4 billion (US\$44.5 million at the current exchange rate), and today is valued at NT\$4.5 billion, had come from Yu, Chen wrote, adding that renovations had cost NT\$300 million.

The Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) caucus yesterday accused Tsai of "wanting to be a "god by reaping the rewards of others' hard work."

"Tsai wants to take the credit for the hard work of foreign affairs officials. Is this kind of person qualified for re-election?" KMT Legislator Tung Hui-chen (鄧輝楨) said.

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