Taiwanese CEO Barred From Leaving U.S. During Probe

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — The chief executive of a leading Taiwanese LCD screen maker has been barred from leaving the U.S. during a U.S. Justice Department probe into alleged price-fixing, the company said.

Hsinchu-based AU Optronics Corp. said in a statement filed Saturday with Taiwan's Stock Exchange that a U.S. court has demanded its chief executive, Chen Lai-juh, stay in the United States until his trial on price-fixing allegations begins. Chen traveled to the U.S. earlier to prepare for his defense, the company said.

A federal grand jury in San Francisco indicted AU Optronics's Houston-based U.S. subsidiary and six company officials, including Chen, in June on charges of conspiring to fix prices of LCD panels worldwide from September 2001 to December 2006.

LCDs, or liquid crystal displays, are the flat display screens used in many laptop computers, cell phones and new TVs.

The U.S. Justice Department has accused a number of Asian LCD manufacturers of selling the screens at illegally fixed prices to companies including Apple Inc., Dell Inc. and IBM Corp.

According to the Justice Department, six LCD suppliers have pleaded guilty to price-fixing charges and have been ordered to pay fines totaling more than $860 million.

Among Taiwanese LCD makers, Chunghwa Picture Tubes Ltd., Chi Mei Optoelectronics Corp. and HannStar Display Corp. have all pleaded guilty and paid fines of hundreds of millions of dollars.

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