

Taiwan must be tougher with China

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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It should come as no surprise that human rights advocate Lee Ming-che (李明哲) pleaded guilty to the Chinese authorities' charge of "subversion of state power" during a court hearing in China's Hunan Province yesterday.

Lee's wife, Lee Ching-yu (李靜瑜), on Saturday had asked Taiwanese for understanding and forgiveness if her husband said anything unbearable in court against his will, adding: "This is just the Chinese government being adept at forcing confessions."

Indeed. The Beijing authorities can claim all they like that Chinese trials are open and transparent, but the truth is that the judiciary, in a country ruled by an authoritarian regime, is a pretense and a tool for oppression.

People who argue otherwise need to look no further than Lee Ming-che's imprisonment on suspicion of "engaging in activities that endanger national security," despite Beijing providing no evidence of wrongdoing, after his forced disappearance on March 19.

Taiwan's government wants to secure Lee Ming-che's safety and release, so it is understandable that it has remained cautious and low-key to avoid complicating the process.

However, believing that mianzi ("face," 面子) plays an integral part in Chinese customs, Taiwanese officials seem to have harbored a misconception that if they take a reserved approach toward China, Beijing would be given the facade of "saving face," and it would then be more agreeable to sitting at the negotiating table.

However, this kind of soft approach only works to fuel China's arrogance.

As a Chinese proverb says: "Kill some chickens to scare the monkeys" — intimidation, arbitrary detention and the like are nothing new in an authoritarian regime that crushes and demonizes dissidents. With forced disappearances becoming a frequent method used by Beijing to silence and intimidate people critical of the Chinese Communist Party, it is obvious

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what it wishes to achieve with these sorts of fear-mongering tactics.

The tactics have their underlying effects — Lee Ming-che's situation is in the minds of many Taiwanese who are wondering if the same thing could happen to them.

The case could set a dangerous precedent, where "Taiwanese could be arrested in China for what they said or did in Taiwan," as Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) caucus secretary-general Lin Wei-chou (林偉周) said yesterday.

Regardless of whether someone advocates Taiwanese independence, the person could be arbitrarily detained by Chinese authorities and charged with subversion of state power for being critical of the Chinese government.

Taiwan, a nation that takes pride in its democracy and respect for freedom of expression, should be vocal about human rights violations.

Instead of laying low, the government should broadcast the case to the international community to assert collective pressure on China.

A soft touch is useless in dealing with an autocratic regime. The government should stop behaving like an ostrich with its head in the sand, issuing meek rhetoric. It needs to be tougher in its dealings with China.

By being servile in the face of an authoritarian regime, the government is turning itself into an accomplice of injustice.

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