

Chen supporters, police in violent clash

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PHOTO: WANG YI-SUNG, TAIPEI TIMES

Supporters of former president Chen Shui-bian were yesterday involved in violent clashes with the police outside the Taipei District Court, where the former president and some of his former aides are being tried.

Hundreds of Chen's supporters gathered outside the court building yesterday, wearing green T-shirts and carrying signs with slogans such as "Release A-bian now" and "No police state."

Supporters staged a peaceful demonstration until the afternoon, when a man asked police officers guarding the court building whether he could go into the building to use the restroom.

Police officers refused his request, saying he was a familiar face among the protesters and that his attitude was provocative.

This angered fellow protesters, who shouted at the police. The verbal clashes soon turned into pushing and shoving, with police officers attempting to maintain order by forming lines with their shields.

Several protesters tried to break through the police line with their fists and began hitting the police shields with their signs.

While protesters and police clashed outside the courtroom, conflict also arose inside the courtroom.

A former city councilor who had been listening to the former president's trial was escorted out of the courtroom yesterday after causing a commotion.

Wu Ching-yu had been sitting in on the former president's trial when he suddenly shouted

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toward Presiding Judge Tsai Shou-hsun: "There are so many available seats, why don't you let more people in?"

At the time, there were dozens of empty seats in the courtroom. Because of the sudden loudness of his voice, many jumped in their seats.

Chen and his court-appointed attorney, who had been quietly discussing the case at the time, also stopped their conversation.

Bailiffs then escorted Wu out of the courtroom.

Chen and two of his former aides, office director Lin Teh-hsun and former Presidential Office deputy secretary-general Ma Yung-cheng as well as former director-general of the Presidential Office's accounting department Fon Shui-lin, were summoned to appear in the Taipei District Court yesterday regarding Chen's alleged misuse of his presidential "state affairs fund."

Prosecutors say that more than NT\$27 million (US\$821,000) was withdrawn from the fund through the use of "inappropriate -receipts" to claim reimbursements.

At the beginning of the trial, when Tsai asked Chen routine questions such as whether or not he knew his rights, Chen was silent as usual.

The court stenographer recorded "no answer" whenever Chen was asked to speak by the court.

Chen had previously told Tsai that he would not speak in his defense in court because he had not committed any crime. He also refused to plead guilty, call witnesses or cross-examine witnesses.

However, Chen broke his silence yesterday, exchanging whispers with his court-appointed attorney Tseng Te-rong.

When Tseng visited the detained former president at the Taipei Detention Center last month, Chen refused to see him, sending only a note to Tseng to tell him that he was doing this to protest against an unfair judicial system.

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