

Tsai laments authoritarian mentality of the judiciary

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The government should be held responsible for judicial reform, especially on detention rules, Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Chairperson Tsai Ing-wen said yesterday.

Tsai made the remark yesterday during a keynote speech at a joint meeting of the North American Professors' Association, Taiwan Association of University Professors and the Union of Taiwanese Teachers.

Tsai accused the judiciary of having a residual authoritarian mentality from the martial law period.

Martial law, which began in 1949, was only lifted in 1987.

She said that most judicial workers in Taiwan consider themselves representatives of justice, and often disregard the human rights of the defendants.

"Instead of making judgments independently, many judicial workers accept guidelines from their superiors or guess what their superiors want when they make judgments," she said. "Even public opinion can have an impact on the judiciary."

To train judicial workers to think independently, Tsai said they should be challenged at school.

"The government must take full responsibility for making changes in the judiciary — especially in reforming detention rules," Tsai said. "Not wanting to intervene in ongoing cases cannot become an excuse to avoid responsibility."

Tsai's remarks came only days after the DPP, along with several civic groups, launched a signature campaign to protest the repeated extension of former president Chen Shui-bian's detention.

The law stipulates that a person can be detained for up to four months before he or she is indicted. The detention may be further extended if the court finds new evidences against a detainee.

Chen was first detained on Nov. 12 last year before being briefly released.

Chen was then indicted on Dec. 12 last year, and has been detained at the Taipei Detention Center in Tucheng, Taipei County, since Dec. 30 on charges of corruption, money laundering and embezzlement.

Meanwhile, Tsai yesterday also voiced her concern about authoritarian tendencies appearing in Taiwan over the past year.

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“Compared with advanced democracies in international society, Taiwan still has a long way to go before becoming a complete democracy — and the mentality of the people in power is the most important factor,” she said.

Tsai said that a government with the correct mentality can make a wrong system right, however, a government with the wrong mentality can contort a good system.

“The current government seems to believe that democracy can be compromised in exchange for economic prosperity — such a mentality in the government would certainly have an impact on the public,” Tsai said. “It really worries me that our society has become more conservative and accepting of authoritarianism in the past year.”

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