

All 228 Incident documents declassified

Written by Taipei Times

Monday, 27 February 2017 08:22 -



People walk past Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall in Taipei on Saturday.

Photo: CNA

President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) yesterday announced the declassification of all historical records relating to the 228 Incident, saying that the measure is critical to establishing the truth and expediting transitional justice.

“Pushing for transitional justice is one of the most important missions for Taiwan’s democracy, but we often have to discern the truth from the mists, with the most crucial yet complicated task being uncovering and collecting the relevant documents, which are scattered across various government agencies,” Tsai said on Facebook.

Tsai’s Facebook post came after the government released a press release touting similar moves, in which it said the speedy declassification of confidential files was aimed at meeting the public’s expectation of transitional justice.

Tsai said collecting such material is also fundamental to the government’s efforts to compile a report on transitional justice, “as many traces of history can be found in past government documents, which reveal the names of the people involved, related incidents or other key elements.”

Of the National Archives Administration’s documents relating to the 228 Incident — which total 1.37 million pages — 4,617 documents were classified, but they have all now been declassified in their entirety, Tsai said.

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“In addition, the related political files containing a total of 990,000 pages from 83 different government divisions were listed as pending transfer [to the administration]. The transfer process is expected to be completed by the end of June,” Tsai said.

The Cabinet plans to allocate additional funds to the National Archives Administration to facilitate a three-year-long investigation and collection of political materials relating to the 228 Incident and the Period of National Mobilization for Suppression of the Communist Rebellion, which is to begin on March 1, Tsai said.

“That will provide the foundation for the writing of our investigative report on transitional justice,” she said.

The 228 Incident refers to a crackdown launched by the then-Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) regime against civilian demonstrations following an incident in Taipei on Feb. 27, 1947. The event marked the beginning of the White Terror era, during which thousands of Taiwanese were arrested, imprisoned and executed. Historians estimate as many as 30,000 people were killed.

Presidential Office spokesman Alex Huang (黃偉哲) said the latest development, goals and purposes of the government’s transitional justice commitment are expected to be the focal points of Tsai’s first speech on the 228 Incident as president.

“Pushing for transitional justice is a necessary process for any democratic nation undergoing a transition from authoritarian rule... It is the government’s responsibility to deal with illegitimate party assets, uncover the truth about human rights violations and problematic policies enacted during the rule of the authoritarian regime, and to restore people’s rights,” Huang said.

The transitional justice bill and the political archives bill have been listed as the Democratic Progressive Party caucus’ priorities in the current legislative session, Huang said.

After the passage of the bills into law, an investigative report on the White Terror era is to be published and a truth and reconciliation commission established, Huang said.

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Source: [Taipei Times - 2017/02/27](#)