

319 SHOOTING: Lu urges probe into ‘319 shooting,’ points at Beijing

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Former vice president Annette Lu speaks at a forum in Taipei yesterday.

Photo: CNA

Former vice president Annette Lu (呂秀蓮) yesterday called on the government to relaunch an investigation into an assassination attempt on her and former president Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) on March 19, 2004, adding that Beijing might have plotted the shooting to intervene in Taiwanese politics.

Lu spoke at a forum in Taipei marking the 13th anniversary of the shooting, addressing persistent speculation that it was staged by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) to secure Chen's re-election.

The shooting took place one day before the 2004 presidential election as the pair was campaigning in Tainan, where a bullet grazed Chen's abdomen and another hit Lu's knee.

The Tainan District Prosecutors' Office closed the case in 2005, saying the shooting was the work of a lone gunman, Chen Yi-hsiung (陳義雄), who was found dead 10 days after the incident.

Lu yesterday cited exiled Chinese academic Yuan Hongbing (袁宏斌) as saying that Beijing might have plotted the assassination to polarize Taiwan as part of its scheme to annex the nation.

According to Yuan, former Chinese president Hu Jintao (胡錦濤) asked Xin Qi (辛琪), a Chinese

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People's Liberation Army major general actively involved in civilian exchanges with Taiwanese academics and politicians in his capacity as Chinese Culture Promotion Society deputy director, to plot the shooting without killing Chen Shui-bian or Lu.

The shooting was aimed at damaging Taiwan's democracy and making Taiwanese believe that elections were rigged, but it had to see Chen Shui-bian and Lu re-elected so that the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT), losing power and authority, would be willing to succumb to China, Lu said.

Beijing assigned nine agents to execute the plot, and Chen Yi-hsiung might have been recruited as the gunman, Lu quoted Yuan as saying.

A fisherman in Tainan allegedly saw Chen Yi-hsiung with the suspected agents near Anping Harbor (安平) on March 26 and 27, 2004 — a few days prior to Chen Yi-hsiung's death — seeking to rent a boat from the fisherman, possibly to use it to escape, Lu said.

Lu said she struggled for a few years to accept Yuan's theory as a possible explanation of the shooting, "but I am determined to make the case a subject of public debate again" in light of the suspected intervention by Beijing, Lu said.

Alternatively, local crime rings might have instigated the shooting to influence the election, because bets were placed on the election result, she added.

Former president Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) has asked if the shooting was plotted by Chen Shui-bian himself, but did not comment on the shooting during his eight years in office, even though the now-defunct Special Investigation Division (SID) had assembled a task force to investigate it, Lu said.

"Was [the SID] so stupid that it could not crack the case? Or did it find the answer, but [the truth] was the opposite of what they accused Chen Shui-bian of? That is why they did not comment on the shooting," Lu said.

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President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) has the right and the obligation to reopen the investigation into the shooting, Lu said.

Only a few DPP members have paid attention to reinvestigating the shooting, compared with their efforts to achieve transitional justice, which should also include plans to uncover the truth behind the shooting that has divided Taiwan, Lu said.

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