

Bill to declassify political files finalized

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Documents related to the 228 Incident are pictured in an undated photograph posted by President Tsai Ing-wen on Facebook on Feb. 25 last year.

Photo: Screenshot from President Tsai Ing-wen's Facebook page

The Executive Yuan yesterday finalized a draft political archives act to declassify political files held by government agencies, political parties and affiliates that have been classified for at least 30 years.

The draft act is to complement the Act on Promoting Transitional Justice (促進轉型正義法), which was passed in December last year and was designed to facilitate efforts to uncover the truth about the nation's authoritarian era and promote transitional justice.

The proposal specifies rules to cover the transfer of political data to the government, the uses of such data and the extent to which such data are to be disclosed.

The National Development Council (NDC) would be in charge of collating, preserving and publicizing political files dating from Aug. 15, 1945, to Nov. 6, 1992, that are linked to the 228 Incident, the Martial Law era and the Period of National Mobilization against Communist Rebellion.

The draft states that political parties, their affiliates and businesses they operate that are in possession of political files determined by the Ill-gotten Party Assets Settlement Committee to be state-owned should transfer the files to the National Archives Administration (NAA) within a prescribed period.

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Files deemed by the NAA to serve the educational, research or exhibition purposes are to be used by the Ministry of Culture and relevant agencies, the draft states.

The bill also stipulates that government agencies should identify all the political files in their possession and deliver them to the NAA within six months of the act's promulgation. The time frame could be extended if agencies cannot fulfill the requirement, but not exceeding a year.

However, files at government agencies designated "permanently classified" under the Classified National Security Information Protection Act (保密國家安全資訊保護法) would be exempted from being transferred to the NAA.

The NAA should regularly review which files should be made available to the public and files that have been classified for at least 30 years should be unconditionally declassified, it states.

People arrested, investigated, prosecuted, warranted, tried or penalized for being implicated in events documented in files would be able to view, copy or make photocopies of files related to themselves, or their survivors could exercise the right in their stead.

The bill also states that the real names of whistle-blowers, witnesses, sources and civil servants implicated in a political event are to be made available for public viewing alongside the codes, code names and pseudonyms assigned to them.

The Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) criticized the bill, saying the legislation would become a weapon for the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) to crucify the KMT, as it would give the DPP *carte blanche* to comb through the KMT's archives.

However, NDC Deputy Minister Tseng Hsu-cheng (鄧錫銘) told a news conference at the Executive Yuan that the bill was not politically motivated.

The council had proposed the legislation to facilitate what it expected to be a lengthy task of

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collating such political files.

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