

DPP postpones its presidential primary

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Democratic Progressive Party Chairman Cho Jung-tai, left, walks past a crowd of reporters at the DPP's headquarters in Taipei yesterday as he prepares to chair a Central Executive Committee meeting.

Photo: Wang Yi-sung, Taipei Times

Top Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) officials have decided to delay the start of the party's presidential primary from Friday to May 22, with the time frame for a public opinion poll to be worked out later, DPP Secretary-General Luo Wen-chia (羅文chia) said yesterday after a meeting of the DPP Central Executive Committee.

Meanwhile, a five-member mediation panel would confer with President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) and her challenger, former premier William Lai (賴清德), to finalize the process to determine the DPP's candidate for next year's presidential election.

The proposal to delay the primary was raised at the meeting and passed without opposition, "so the committee members will all bear responsibility together," Luo said, adding that it would "foster unity within our party, without making changes or interrupting the primary process."

There have been serious concerns of a major crisis developing that could lead to the party splitting up, as Lai, who has insisted that there should be no change to the party's primary process, has mounted a strong challenge to Tsai for the nomination.

The panel and other key party officials have reportedly been negotiating a Tsai-Lai ticket, in

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which the former premier would be the vice presidential candidate.

“At the end of the meeting, DPP Chairman Cho Jung-tai (蔡丁國) called on party members to use the additional time to confer and coordinate between the two sides, not for further confrontation and fighting,” Luo said. “Strong-arm tactics will not achieved the desired result of coordination.”

Luo quoted Cho as saying: “We urge Tsai and Lai, our party’s two presidential candidate hopefuls, to keep their supporters from feuding and not to attack each other. All party officials must take a neutral stance and should no longer make public displays of support for either camp.”

Following the party’s announcement, Lai issued a statement titled: “No backing down from the arbitrary; Insistence on my original conviction; and Stay in the race all the way.”

He expressed regret over the delay, saying that “the committee is making changes for a second time. The move is a serious blow to the DPP and has invalidated our party’s founding value of democracy.”

Lai said that he disagreed with the delay, adding: “I was not consulted beforehand about this decision.”

“When I entered into the presidential primary process, I intended to gather wide support from all sides and to pick up the political burden for Taiwan,” he said.

“I knew at the time that there would be many difficulties ahead. Whether these come from within the party or from outside, I will face them with all my courage,” Lai added.

Primaries had been a mechanism that the DPP could be proud of, Lai said.

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“It is the biggest difference between us and other political parties, which only have one voice and no dissent,” he said. “However, now our party regards it as a fearful beast to be avoided, or compares it to two trains on a collision course.”

The primary process allows both camps to debate the party’s path, and brings out competing ideas and new concepts, Lai said, adding that afterward, “we can still find common ground for unity, to work together toward a better future and together take up the political responsibility for Taiwan.”

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