

Police accused of political meddling

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The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) yesterday accused the police of sabotaging the pan-green camp's campaign activities to give the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) an edge in next Saturday's local elections and likened the situation to the White Terror.

In the last two days, police cracked down on pan-green camp campaign activities in Hsinchu and Keelung, saying the DPP had failed to apply for permission to canvass on the streets, the DPP said.

"The practice of canvassing on the street has been used in Taiwan for years. Since when does a candidate need to apply for road rights to stump for votes?" DPP Legislator Chen Ting-fei (陳亭斐) said.

DPP Kaohsiung City Councilor Chao Tien-lin (趙天麟) said police tried to prevent Hung Seng-yong (洪勝勇), a DPP candidate for the Keelung City Council, and his motorcade from making the rounds yesterday afternoon, saying Hung had not applied for permission.

Shortly prior to Hung's scheduled road show, his campaign headquarters received a phone call from Keelung police warning Hung that the activity would violate the Assembly and Parade Act (集會遊行法), Chao said.

This was the first time that Hung had been informed of the seven-day application period required for street campaigns in the city, Chao said, adding that neither Hung nor rival KMT candidates had been stopped by the police during street campaigning in recent weeks.

"We decided to ignore the warning and took to the streets. The police followed us the entire way and collected evidence by filming every person participating in Hung's campaign. If this isn't White Terror tactics, I don't know what is," Chao said.

The DPP and its supporters staged a sit-in protest in front of the Keelung Second Police Precinct to demand an explanation from the police chief.

The protest ended at around 8pm after Keelung Second Police Precinct chief Chen I-feng (陳伊峰) met the protesters and said that the police had not been "collecting evidence."

He said the police were doing their duty to ensure the safety of the candidates, as yesterday marked the first day of the official campaign period in the run-up to next Saturday's election.

Heated clashes also erupted between KMT and DPP supporters on Tuesday night in Hsinchu when the police blocked off streets while President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) accompanied the KMT's Hsinchu County commissioner candidate, Chiu Ching-chun (邱敬群), on a visit to a night market in Jhubei City (竹北市), obstructing a DPP campaign group led by former premier Frank Hsieh (謝長廷).

Scuffles broke out between supporters from the two camps after the DPP supporters

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protested against the police blocking the streets for Ma, who doubles as KMT chairman.

Hsieh was promoting the DPP's Hsinchu County commissioner candidate, Peng Shao-chin (彭紹麟), at a campaign event in the area.

On his blog, Hsieh said he was pushed and shoved by police as he tried to cross a street to shake hands with voters.

The police insisted no one was allowed through because the president was coming, Hsieh wrote.

"I have walked on these streets for 30 years during election seasons. I merely wanted to cross the road to shake hands with residents, but the police refused to let us through ... All roads had to be cleared to make way for Ma," Hsieh wrote. "It is regrettable that 22 years after the end of martial law, Taiwan's freedom is being destroyed by Ma's KMT."

Hsieh said it was unnecessary for the police to clear the streets for Ma because he was appearing in his capacity as KMT chairman, not as the president.

DPP Chairperson Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) accused the police of overstepping their bounds and said their behavior could lead to more violent clashes when China's Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait Chairman Chen Yunlin (陳雲林) visits Taichung next month.

The KMT, meanwhile, pointed the finger at Hsieh, urging him not to provoke conflict.

"Hsieh's provocative approach reminded voters of his old tactics in the presidential election ... We urge Hsieh not to turn the local elections into an extension of the presidential election," KMT spokesman Lee Chien-jung (李顯宗) said yesterday at KMT headquarters.

Hsieh should rather use his energy to compete with former premier Su Tseng-chang (蘇貞昌) if he intends to run in the 2012 presidential election, Lee said.

Meanwhile, a reporter with online news outlet Taiwan Independent Media, Clyde Kan (簡錫堦), said he was considering filing a lawsuit against two police officers who he said tried to take him to the police station for no apparent reason.

He also said they twisted his arms before Ma was scheduled to visit Jhubei City with Chiu.

Kan told the Taipei Times in a telephone interview that he was playing a hand-held videogame as he awaited the arrival of Hsieh and Peng.

"A police car stopped, two plainclothes officers came out and asked to check my national ID card. I declined and told them they had no right to check my ID because I was just standing there doing nothing," Kan said. "They responded by grabbing my hands and wanted to put me in the squad car and take me to the police station."

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Kan said he told the officers that he is a journalist and wanted to show them his press pass, but they told him not to move.

One of Kan's colleagues recorded the argument between Kan and the police on video and posted it on the company's Web site. The video shows the officers repeatedly trying to cover the camera with their hands while saying they had the right to detain Kan for up to three hours to check his identity and interrogate him.

The officers finally released Kan when former DPP legislator Kao Chien-chih (高建志) showed up and asked what was going on.

"It was too much — the police don't know to respect a citizen's basic rights," Kan said.

"They twisted my arms when they tried to force me into the car. I will speak with my attorney to see if I should file a lawsuit against them," Kan said.

In related news, at the request of the Presidential Office, the National Security Bureau (NSB) yesterday apologized over a controversy in which NSB special agents wore candidate campaign vests while on duty.

The special agents were spotted wearing Chiu campaign vests and baseball caps while working in Ma's security detail during the campaign events on Tuesday night.

The DPP accused the NSB of abusing its authority.

NSB official Yang Hsiao-hua (楊少華) said he had asked the agents to wear the campaign outfits as a disguise to help them blend into the crowd while providing security.

"We just wanted to do our jobs well, but I admit that we did not realize that it would result in a misunderstanding," NSB Chief Chi Tai-lai (齊泰來) said.

In response to the DPP's criticism of the security measures that were used to protect Ma, Lee said that Hsieh had also enjoyed tight security when he served as premier in the former DPP government.

"Former president Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) also enjoyed round-the-clock security even during the election campaign. The DPP should not forget about the high-level security measures its politicians enjoyed when they were in power," Lee said.

"It is irresponsible to be provocative and then blame the police for doing their duty," Lee said.

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