

## Judge who ruled to free Chen to preside over his new trial

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In a random draw yesterday, the Taipei District Court selected Judge Chou Chan-chun (周昌春) to preside over legal proceedings for the fourth round of indictments issued against former president Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) and others.

Chou was the judge who previously ordered Chen's release from detention. However, last December, a panel of judges replaced Chou with Tsai Shou-hsun (蔡守訓). The change at the time prompted allegations of procedural flaws and political interference.

Chen's office then petitioned the Council of Grand Justices for an interpretation on whether the switch of judges was constitutional. The council ruled that the switch did not violate the Constitution.

Tsai repeatedly ruled to keep Chen in detention, and on Sept. 11 sentenced him and his wife, Wu Shu-jen (吳淑珍), to life in prison, as well as a total fine of NT\$500 million (US\$15.5 million).

Because of the prior controversy surrounding the switching of judges, the Taiwan High Court and the Taipei District Court has recently begun manually drawing the names of judges in front of the media to emphasize that the process is transparent and random. Before the incident, the courts used a computer to randomly select judges without media in attendance.

Although Chou ruled to release Chen from prison, he no longer has the power to rule on whether to extend Chen's detention because the decision is up to the Taiwan High Court, where corruption and embezzlement charges against the former president are undergoing a second round of legal proceedings.

There was a one-in-three chance of Chou being randomly selected to preside over charges issued by prosecutors last Thursday. The other two judges on the panel, also made through a draw of lots, are Lin Po-hung (林豐喜) and Ho Chiao-mei (何朝梅).

The prosecutors' indictment last Thursday said the former first couple took bribes totaling NT\$610 million from the Cathay and Yuanta financial groups to facilitate the groups' acquisitions of other Taiwanese banks to form new financial holding companies.

Others on the indictment list include Chen's son, and daughter-in-law Chen Chih-chung (陳智雄), his wife Huang Jui-ching (黃季瑩), Wu's elder brother Wu Ching-mao (吳清毛), Wu Ching-mao's wife, Chen Chun-ying (陳春英), and Yuanta Group founder Rudy Ma (馬英九).

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