# Government actions over Chen widen political gulf

Written by Mei-chin Chen 陳美津
Friday, 26 April 2013 08:07

In the wee hours of the morning of April 19th, former president Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) was transferred from Taipei Veterans General Hospital in Taipei to Taichung Prison's Pei Teh Hospital.

The matter prompted Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) members to block proceedings in the Legislative Yuan, while overseas Taiwanese groups and human rights activists lodged strong protests. Why did the case cause such an uproar?

There are two reasons: First, the way it was handled by the Ministry of Justice, and second, the fact that the new facilities are totally inadequate for treatment of the multiple medical and psychological issues from which Chen is suffering.

The sudden transfer, in the early hours of the morning, as well as that neither the family, nor the medical team treating him were notified by the ministry, were gregarious violations of Chen's human rights and show the callous disregard of President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) government for Chen's welfare and his medical condition.

The ministry's argument that it wanted to avoid crowds trying to block the transfer is reminiscent of the martial law era and has no place in a modern, democratic and open society which values transparency in government.

The move also disregards the medical advice given by doctors at the Taipei Veterans General Hospital.

Just a couple of weeks earlier, one of Chen's attending physicians, Chou Yuan-hua (周元華), a renowned and respected psychiatrist, recommended that Chen be allowed to receive treatment in a home environment or in a hospital with a specialized psychiatry ward, where he could receive adequate medical care. This hospital should be located close to his home so he can have close contact with his family, Chou said.

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Another highly regarded doctor, Lai Chi-wan (□□□), said in a letter to the Liberty Times (the Taipei Times' sister newspaper) published on Tuesday that the sudden transfer constituted a serious violation of medical ethical standards.

He said that when a patient is transferred from one hospital to another, the patient and his or her family should be briefed in advance to ensure a smooth transfer that causes the least trauma to the patient, and that medical records and information are transferred between the doctors of the first hospital and those at the receiving hospital. According to Lai, none of this happened. The team at the Veterans was caught by total surprise, while Pei Teh Hospital did not have a team in place.

In the subsequent flow of propaganda emanating from the justice ministry, the Ma regime tried to imply that Chen was given "special privileges and perks as a former president."

In documents with pictures it tried to portray the new environment as idyllic, with a hospital room seven times bigger than the cell he had in Taipei Prison, and access to open space with a lawn, as well as ample family visiting privileges.

All of this is meaningless if the medical care is inadequate. As Chen himself told DPP Chairman Su Tseng-chang (□□□) — who rushed to Taichung after learning of the transfer — the ample space is secondary, and what he needs is good medical care and medical facilities so he can recover.

The sad conclusion one must draw from the episode is that the Ma government's refusal to listen to medical opinion is in contravention of Ma's own pledges to adhere to international human rights standards.

The handling of the case also shows little inclination to bring about much-needed political reconciliation within Taiwan. Ma touts his cross-strait rapprochement, but is seriously widening the political gulf separating people in Taiwan.

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