

## Ma freeing Chen chance to increase popularity

Written by Parris Chang 蕭蕭

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Former vice president Annette Lu (呂秀蓮) began a hunger strike on Sunday in support of former president Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁), who has been in prison since 2008 and suffers from multiple mental and physical disorders.

Speaking at a news conference before the hunger strike began, Lu accused the government of interfering in Chen's trial and conviction, and violating judicial due process.

Lu served under Chen, who has been in jail for more than six years while his health deteriorated.

Chen's imprisonment has further polarized Taiwan.

### HUNGER STRIKE

As Lu is almost 70 years old, her hunger strike in support of Chen has been a major news story across all of the nation's newspaper and television outlets, and was also covered by international media.

A medical team appointed by the government suggested that Chen be released for home care, but the Ministry of Justice refused to do so and also postponed appropriate treatment for Chen.

According to Article 58 of Taiwan's Prison Act (監獄行刑法): "If an inmate suffering from diseases cannot receive appropriate treatment in prison, it may be taken into account to release him on bail for medical treatment, to transfer him to specific prisons or hospitals with permission of the supervisory authority."

### NEGLECTED

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Lu believes that the ministry has neglected its duties and that there might be more prisoners who need medical treatment.

According to medical examinations, Chen has suffered from serious sleep apnea, severe depression, prostatitis and delusions.

Taiwan's strong economy and political system, which places a high value on democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights, have offered a strong counterpoint to China, which has long followed a strategy of isolating Taiwan diplomatically, but growing economic ties have brought the two nations closer together politically.

However, the growing perception that President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) government has become too close to Beijing has seen a precipitous drop in his popularity.

## PRESSURE

Public sympathy for the pro-democracy demonstrations in Hong Kong has increased political pressure on Ma, in addition to criticism of the harsh treatment of Chen, which many legal experts say violates provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political rights, and the UN Convention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

As she began her hunger strike, Lu was accompanied by Chen's son and his sisters, as well as Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Secretary-General Joseph Wu (吳敦義), former minister of national defense Tsai Ming-shian (蔡明善), members of the Legislative Yuan, city councilors of Taipei and New Taipei City, Chiayi Mayor Twu Shiing-jer (吳錫珍) and many leaders of non-governmental organizations.

Lu declared in front of the National Taiwan Museum that she would remain on her hunger strike until the government decides to release Chen.

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If Ma is wise, he should take a first step toward reconciliation with Taiwanese by granting Chen's medical parole as soon as possible, as the expanded medical team recommended on Monday.

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