

After coming under a great deal of pressure, the government has resumed its flagging push for transitional justice.

The National Human Rights Museum Organic Act (國家人權博物館組織法) on Nov. 28 passed its third legislative reading, while the Act on Promoting Transitional Justice (促進轉型正義法) passed its third reading on Dec. 5.

In addition, the National Archives in a news release said that it has set up a “political archive area” in response to the government’s push for transitional justice, making 100,000 pages of political files publicly available online.

Opening and making an inventory of political files is a necessary step. The authorities should use this as an opportunity to carry out a comprehensive review of the past policy of keeping files classified.

In addition to files at the National Archives Administration, there is another batch of political archives that has been transferred to the Academia Historica from the Presidential Office.

These files have existed for more than 30 — and sometimes even 40 — years, but some of them have still not been made available to the public.

Such archives include files related to the Taiwan Independence Party’s activities in Japan, pro-independence advocate Peng Ming-min’s (彭明敏) and others’ actions in the US and the overseas activities of dangwai (黨外, outside the party) organizations, as well as questioning and suggestions in relation to the 1979 Kaohsiung incident. There are even files related to the 1981 death of academic Chen Wen-cheng (陳文成).

The Academia Historica had previously submitted a written request to the Presidential Office requesting declassification of the files, but the Presidential Office’s Second Bureau on July 16, 2009 — during then-president Ma Ying-jeou’s (馬英九) presidency — ordered it not to declassify

Make files blocked by Ma public

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the documents before Jan. 23, 2019, when the issue would be reviewed again.

The reason behind the decision is unknown, but it reveals the conservative nature of the Ma administration and its unwillingness to face historical truths.

President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) and her administration say that the basis of transitional justice must be the opening of political files — so is there anything to learn from the Ma administration on the matter?

Since Tsai on several occasions has reiterated her administration's determination to make an inventory of and open political files, the Presidential Office should do so for the documents that were blocked by the Ma administration.

The government would be setting a good example of how to make political archives publicly available by publishing these files online.

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