

No 'rights' to celebrate

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
Saturday, 02 February 2019 00:07

The Lunar New Year is traditionally a time for family reunions and celebrations, which made the news this week that Lee Ching-yu (李慶餘) has been barred once again by Chinese authorities from visiting her husband, Lee Ming-che (李明哲), for several months a hard blow for his family, friends and supporters.

In keeping with Chinese Communist Party tradition, wives and other relatives of those the Chinese government has imprisoned or detained without trial need to be punished as well, through enforced isolation, loss of jobs or schooling, and a myriad of other petty, vindictive measures.

As Lee Ching-yu lives in Taiwan, Chinese authorities cannot abuse her the way they have Li Wenzu (李文足), wife of rights lawyer Wang Quanzhang (王全章), who on Monday was sentenced to four-and-a-half years in prison for subversion, or did for years to Yuan Weijing (袁衛晶), wife of blind activist Chen Guangcheng (陳光誠), and Liu Xia (劉霞), wife of Nobel Peace Prize laureate Liu Xiaobo (劉曉波), to name but a few.

All they can do is block her from seeing her husband, who was sentenced in 2017 to five years on subversion charges based on activities he carried out in Taiwan.

Chishan Prison informed Lee Ching-yu by letter that her right to see her husband had been suspended until April 22, because she had interfered with its law enforcement duties and hindered her husband's rehabilitation by making comments that "greatly deviated from the facts."

That is because she held a news conference in Taipei on Dec. 24 last year, at his insistence she said, to recount what he had told her on Dec. 18, the first time in months she had been allowed to see him.

The conditions of his confinement that she recounted are all-too familiar after other reports that have emerged from Chinese prisons, re-education and internment camps, or gulag systems around the world, so when it comes down to whose facts to believe, the Lees' or Chishan Prison's, the money is on the former.

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That the prison would complain that she is hindering her husband's "rehabilitation" when the real goal of Beijing's treatment of political prisoners is to break them physically and psychologically is just another example of the dystopian universe that is China today.

Unfortunately for the Lees, the next four years of his term are likely to follow the first, with more punitive measures against him and denials of visits for her.

Their only hope is to continue to raise his case with international organizations, lawmakers and governments, as Taiwanese authorities have been rendered impotent — not just by Beijing's refusal to recognize that President Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) Democratic Progressive Party government speaks for Taiwanese, but by its continued flouting of cross-strait agreements that it signed with previous Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) governments.

It is no good for the KMT to bleat about the Mainland Affairs Council not doing more for the Lees when the actions of its lawmakers, leaders and former officials undermine the council and Tsai's government at every turn.

As the KMT's newly elected municipal leaders and others campaign for more reliance on Chinese investment and Beijing's largesse to improve Taiwan's economy, they should be questioned about the Lees at every event and news conference.

They need to be reminded that their criticism of Tsai's government and policies are just the kind of democratic rights and privileges that Taiwanese now take for granted and that Lee Ming-che was imprisoned for promoting.

As Taiwan readies to celebrate the arrival of the Lunar New Year, spare a moment to think about the Lees and others for whom there will be no happy family reunions next week, or many, many weeks to come, for daring to challenge the CCP's rule or version of reality.

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2019/02/02](#)