

Violence must never be tolerated

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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Three men accused of throwing red paint on Lam Wing-kei (梁榮基), a former manager of Hong Kong's Causeway Bay Books, at a coffee shop in Taipei were released on bail on Thursday, and a separate individual posted a threat against Lam on the Mainland Affairs Council's Facebook page.

Although someone had earlier warned Lam that the name of his new bookstore in Taipei was similar to one registered to another store (suggesting that this was a motive for the attack), it was discovered that the competing bookstore was likely a shell company registered to an entity in China.

These actions are just the latest in a series of attacks targeting pro-democracy Hong Kongers in Taiwan over the past few years. On Sept. 29 last year, Hong Kong singer and democracy campaigner Denise Ho (何韻詩) was attacked with red paint while speaking at a rally in support of Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement, and on Jan. 7, 2017, Hong Kong lawmakers Edward Yiu (區國權), Nathan Law (羅冠聰) and Eddie Chu (朱凱迪), as well as Hong Kong activist Joshua Wong (黃之鋒), were the targets of an attempted assault at Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport. Members of the China Unification Promotion Party (CUPP) have been charged over both attacks.

Five CUPP members were also indicted for a Sept. 24, 2017, attack on student protesters at National Taiwan University. The students had been protesting the use of the school's sports field to host the "Sing! China: Shanghai-Taipei Music Festival" when they were attacked by CUPP members wielding metal rods.

Pro-China groups such as the CUPP have clearly grown comfortable with using violence and intimidation to assert their views regarding the nation's sovereignty. This cannot be tolerated. The government must send a clear message that Taiwan's democracy will not be used as a tool to destroy that very freedom.

At face value, crimes like splashing paint on someone, issuing threats online or even physically assaulting someone are not considered major crimes in the nation's courts, nor do they carry hefty punishments. For this reason suspects in these cases should be investigated under the Anti-infiltration Act (反渗透法). Those involved in such acts almost certainly have ties to China, and it would be surprising if investigators were unable to trace their funding back to sources across

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the Strait.

People like Lam have left Hong Kong because China has not respected the territory's autonomy guaranteed under the "one country, two systems" formula, and the democracy and freedoms promised to residents there have been all but stripped away. Coming under threat in Taiwan — where they had believed they would be free — is surely a traumatic experience. This psychological trauma must be factored into any judicial ruling levied against those found threatening political refugees in Taiwan.

Many democracies have laws to protect people from hate-based and politically motivated crimes. In Canada, the Criminal Code prohibits hateful speech or actions based on race, color, ancestry, place of origin, religion, creed, political opinion, marital status, family status, physical or mental disability, sex, sexual orientation or age. Depending on the nature of the crime, these offenses are punishable with fines, probation or imprisonment.

If the Anti-infiltration Act cannot be applied, then the government must consider enacting hate laws that would strictly penalize people who threaten or assault others based on their political views. When protesters supporting Hong Kong's democracy movement confronted those condemning it on the streets of Toronto and Vancouver last year, both factions mostly kept to opposite sides of the street.

Differing political views are an important part of a healthy democracy, but violence based on those views is never acceptable. Taiwan must prevent such violence to protect its democracy.

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