

Chen hopes for quick ruling from Grand Justices

Written by Taipei Times

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Former president Chen Shui-bian's court-appointed attorney yesterday said the former president was hoping for a speedy response from the Council of Grand Justices to a request for a constitutional interpretation on the transfer of his case to Presiding Judge Tsai Shou-hsun.

Speaking to reporters during a recess in the former president's trial, Tseng Te-rong said Chen had expressed concern about when the Council of Grand Justices would hand down its decision on whether switching judges in his case was constitutional.

Tseng said Chen told him he hoped the interpretation would be announced before the district court delivered its verdict, as any decision after that would be too late to have a significant effect, adding that "prompt justice is the only form of justice."

In January, Chen's office asked the council to rule on the legitimacy of his pre-trial detention and the switching of judges from Chou Chan-chun to Tsai Shou-hsun, who now presides over Chen's embezzlement and corruption trials.

When Chou was presiding over Chen's case last year, he twice ruled against detaining Chen, saying that Chen had no way to flee because as a former president he was constantly under the protection of special agents.

However, when the case was handed over to Tsai, he repeatedly ruled to keep the former president behind bars, arguing that Chen might collude with witnesses or try to abscond.

In December, a panel of judges ordered that Chou be replaced by Tsai, who would also preside over four additional cases filed against the former president. The switch was controversial, causing skeptics to question whether the decision to merge the trials was procedurally flawed and politically motivated.

The former president and his attorneys appeared in court yesterday as former Presidential Office secretary Chen Hsin-yi and former Presidential Office director Lin Teh-hsun were questioned about the former president's use of the presidential "state affairs fund."

Chen Hsin-yi testified that the former president's bookkeeper, Chen Chen-hui, had instructed her to put cash in the former first family's safe, in amounts of between NT\$5 million (US\$150,000) and NT\$10 million at different times. Chen Hsin-yi said she was told the money was "for the president's use."

She also said that in July the former president asked her to file an application for a passport for him "most urgently." She said the reason was because the former president had been invited to visit overseas.

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Also yesterday, former first lady Wu Shu-jen was questioned yesterday by the Supreme Prosecutors Office's Special Investigation Panel (SIP) as a defendant for the first time.

The purpose of the session was to determine the value of the former first lady's jewelry, as well as the flow of money in the former first family's overseas accounts, local media reported.

Her lawyer Chen Kuo-hua accompanied her during questioning, but declined to comment on the case, saying only that the former first lady's physical condition was fine.

Meanwhile, pro--independence groups yesterday said they would hold a rally on July 25 in support of the former president.

The groups said the purpose of the rally was to ask the Taipei District Court to release Chen Shui-bian and respect his rights.

The district court is scheduled to decide whether to keep Chen Shui-bian in detention on July 14, the groups said in a statement. They called on the public to support the former president outside the court that day and welcome him if he were released.

If the court decided to continue to detain him, they would hold a sit-in in front of the Presidential Office, the groups said. The July 25 rally would go ahead if Chen's detention was extended, it said.

The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) has proposed a signature drive to support Chen Shui-bian and has asked the court that he be released immediately.

DPP Chairperson Tsai Ing-wen said yesterday the party was in contact with prominent individuals to sign the petition.

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