

Chen transferred to penitentiary

Written by Taipei Times

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Former president Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) was moved yesterday from a detention center to a nearby penitentiary to formally begin serving his sentence after the Supreme Court upheld his conviction on wide-ranging graft charges.

The transfer followed a decision last month by the Supreme Court to uphold Chen's convictions in two high-profile bribery cases involving a land deal in Longtan (龍潭), Taoyuan County, and the appointment of a chairwoman to the company that manages the Taipei 101 building.

The Supreme Court sentenced Chen to a total of 19 years in prison for the two bribery charges on Nov. 11 in the first final verdict in a string of corruption cases implicating him and his wife, Wu Shu-jen (吳淑珍).

Chen is the nation's first former president to be imprisoned for graft.

Looking relaxed and alert, Chen, 60, was taken by a police van from the Taipei Detention Center in Tucheng (土城), Taipei County, to Taipei Prison in Taoyuan County's Gueishan Township (龜山), escorted by numerous police officers in patrol cars and on motorbikes.

Reports have indicated that Chen will be allowed fewer visitors than at the detention center and that he has to share a cell with another inmate.

Shortly before the transfer, he had an emotional meeting with his son, Chen Chih-chung (陳智雄).

Dozens of supporters gathered outside the detention center, protesting Chen Shui-bian's innocence.

"A-bian isn't guilty!" the crowd chanted, affectionately referring to the former president by his nickname.

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Some also held up placards stating Taiwan is an independent country, in support of Chen Shui-bian's political cause.

"He was very much worried about the health of my mother," Chen Chih-chung said after emerging from the meeting with his father. "He also asked me to continue to fight for the goal of 'one country on each side' [of the Taiwan Strait.]"

Chen Shui-bian's wheelchair-bound wife has also been sentenced to 19 years in jail for corruption, but it remains unclear if she will actually serve the sentence, given her frail health. Wu has been paralyzed from the waist down since 1985, when she was hit by a truck immediately after a hotly contested political campaign in Tainan County.

It was also unclear when she would begin serving her time. Judicial authorities have said that they will decide after receiving her conviction documents at which prison in the Kaohsiung area she should be confined or whether to grant her probation on medical grounds.

Chen Chih-chung himself is embarking on a political career after he was elected on Saturday last week as a Kaohsiung city councilor.

Chen Shui-bian, who has been detained since late 2008, says his prosecution is a vendetta carried out by the current administration in retaliation for his pro-independence stance during his 2000-2008 term.

His office issued a statement yesterday blasting his conviction as "politically motivated" and accusing the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) administration of interfering in the court proceedings. The office also announced the establishment of a panel to continue promoting Taiwan's de jure independence and insisting on the former president's innocence.

American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) Chairman Raymond Burghardt declined to comment on the matter in his capacity as a US official when he was approached by reporters after his visit with

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Legislative Speaker Wang Jin-pyng (王金平) at the legislature.

But when asked to comment as a friend of the former president, Burghardt said: “As someone who has been his friend, if that [the accusation against him] was true, that he had done what they [the court] said he did, then I thought our friendship has been betrayed.”

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