

Chinese 'political interference' behind jailings, Chen Shui-bian's office says

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The office of former president Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) yesterday accused the government of putting Chen and his wife behind bars because of "political interference from China," three days before the former first lady is expected to report to Taichung Prison.

The office told a press conference that Beijing wanted to "split the DPP [Democratic Progressive Party]" and divide Taiwan's ethnic groups, adding that Taipei appeared to be playing along.

"From Chen's arrest, lawsuit and jail sentence, traces of China's involvement in the judicial process are clearly evident," it said. "[Beijing] has marked Chen and his immediate family as important targets."

Chen, who was found guilty by the Supreme Court of bribery and money laundering, is serving a 17-and-a-half-year sentence at Taipei Prison.

Chen's wife, Wu Shu-jen (吳淑珍), was a co-defendant in the case and received the same sentence, although she has yet to begin her jail term, pending a health report.

Chen's office said protests were planned for Friday, when Wu is to report to the Kaohsiung District Prosecutors' Office, where she will be accompanied to Taichung Prison's Pei Teh Hospital for a health evaluation.

If it is determined that the former first lady is well enough to serve time, she will begin serving her sentence at Taichung Prison immediately after the evaluation. Otherwise, she will be sent back home until it is determined when the sentence can start.

"We will respect the final decision made by prosecutors," office director Jack Chen (陳建生) said. "However, we hope [DPP] officials and lawmakers can continue to support our case and see if the Ministry of Justice can give us some leeway."

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DPP lawmakers have contended in the past week that Wu is too frail and weak to serve her sentence in a jail cell — although prison officials say such worries are unfounded.

DPP Legislator Tsai Huang-liang (蔡煌良), accompanied by pro-independence groups, visited Chen Shui-bian yesterday, where he said the former president was still alert and staying abreast of political developments.

Blasting President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) over the recent diplomatic row with the Philippines, Chen Shui-bian reportedly told Tsai that if he had been president, he would have had a “direct line to the Filipino president.”

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