

Freedom in Taiwan has regressed: DPP chairman

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Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Chairman Su Tseng-chang speaks at an event in New Taipei City's Chinshan District commemorating democracy activist Deng Nan-jung, who killed himself by self-immolation in his Taipei office in 1989 in protest against charges of sedition for his calls on the government to protect freedom expression.

Photo: Yu Chao-fu, Taipei Times

Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Chairman Su Tseng-chang (蘇貞昌) yesterday said that freedom in Taiwan has regressed since "a repressive government" had returned to power.

Su made the remarks at a ceremony in honor of Deng Nan-jung (鄧南仲), the late democracy advocate who set himself on fire 24 years ago and died in defense of "100 percent freedom of expression."

The event took place at Deng's tomb in New Taipei City's (新北市) Jinbaoshan Cemetery in the morning.

Su said it was a hard journey for Taiwanese to win the right of freedom of speech and it was made possible by people like Deng, who sacrificed himself.

Saying that 24 years ago there was no freedom in Taiwan under the then-authoritarian Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) government, Su said people who had suffered from political repression or harassment knew that "certain words are said at home, not outside, or you could disappear or be caught anytime."

However, Deng did not keep his mouth closed due to fear or threats, instead he spoke out, Su said.

Deng spoke out not only with his mouth, but also by publishing his writings, he said.

He added that although Deng's magazine Freedom Era Weekly (自由時代週刊) was banned, and permission for publishing the weekly was suspended again and again, he reapplied repeatedly and never gave up his intention in pursue democracy and freedom for the country.

Deng requested the authoritarian government to lift martial law, mark Feb. 28 an official memorial day for the 228 Massacre, and asked for a total freedom of expression, Su said.

He added that the KMT's seizure, investigation, detention and imprisonment of Deng was intended to challenge his determination.

However, the KMT did not succeed, and it charged him with treason.

"Twenty-four years later, as we enjoy democracy and freedom of expression, we should not forget Deng's spirit and the difficult road we have traveled," Su said.

"After we have democracy, people voted for the then-authoritarian governors and allowed them to retain their power," Su said.

Now they used more delicate and sophisticated ways to oppress freedom and democracy, Su said.

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Freedom in Taiwan has been regressing since the KMT returned to power in 2008, and the US-based Freedom House has also said that freedom of the press in Taiwan has regressed, Su said.

Government propaganda is brainwashing people by saying that everything in China is good, while everything Taiwanese is bad, Su said.

Dealing with the situation, "people should appreciate what we own and learn to make right judgements," Su added.

Born in Taiwan in 1947 to a family from China, Deng on numerous occasions in the 1980s overtly articulated his support for Taiwanese independence, at a time when a charge of sedition was in place to indict proponents of independence.

He established Freedom Era Weekly in 1984.

On April 7, 1989, he set himself on fire as heavily armed police attempted to break into his Taipei office, where he had barricaded himself for 71 days after he was charged with sedition for his magazine's anti-government stance and for publishing a draft "Republic of Taiwan constitution" in 1988.

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