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The Deng Nan-jung Memorial Hall yesterday marked the 20th anniversary of the death of democracy movement pioneer Deng Nan-jung with a renewed pledge to push for freedom and human rights.

On April 7, 1989, Deng, then editor-in-chief of Freedom Era Weekly, set himself on fire as heavily armed police attempted to break into his office following his 71 days of self-imposed isolation after he was charged with sedition for the anti-government views expressed in his magazine, which published a draft “Republic of Taiwan constitution” in 1988.

The site of that office was later named Deng Nan-jung Memorial Hall in commemoration of his bravery in calling for “100 percent freedom of expression.”

At the commemoration yesterday, cellist Ouyang Hui-ru played folk music and poet Lee Min-yung read a poem in memory of Deng.

Kenneth Chiu, chairman of the Deng Liberty Foundation, said the foundation would continue to advocate freedom, democracy and human rights with Deng’s spirit in mind, and that he hoped the memorial hall would one day be an internationally known human rights museum.

Born in Taiwan in 1947 to a Mainlander family, Deng clearly and publicly voiced his support for Taiwanese independence on numerous occasions in the 1980s — a time when such statements could bring charges of sedition.

A libertarian, Deng believed in freedom of expression and established Freedom Era Weekly in 1984 in pursuit of what he called “100 percent freedom of expression.”

Many young Internet users yesterday remembered him by changing their screen names to a well-known quote by Deng.

A number of people online appeared with screen names like “My name is Nathan, I support independence for Taiwan” or “My name is Kai, I support independence for Taiwan” on social networks such as Plurk.com, MSN Live Messenger or Gtalk in a coordinated action to memorialize Deng.

In 1987, Deng made a widely known statement when delivering a speech at a rally in Taipei: “My name is Deng Nan-jung, I support independence for Taiwan.”

The statement could have gotten him into trouble because the issue of independence was taboo under Martial Law. However, Deng insisted on openly declaring his political ideology because he believed that freedom of expression was a fundamental right for all people.

Nathan, an Internet user who initiated the action on Plurk.com on Friday, said that he was inspired to do so after watching a documentary on Deng and reading a blog entry by an Internet user last year that criticized the public for forgetting the price that Taiwan had paid for freedom of speech.

Without advertising the action through the mass media, the number of people who joined Nathan's online memorial had passed 100 as of yesterday afternoon.

"When you know that you enjoy the freedom you have right now because someone sacrificed his life for it, you don't have any excuse to not join in," said Huang Man-ting, a university student. "Someone may think it's a stupid project, but at least you should learn to show your friends your political ideology and tell your friends what you believe in."

While most people chose to join the action using only their online nicknames, Huang is one of the few people who did so with her real name on Plurk.com, MSN and Gtalk.

"The coordination is meaningless if you use your nickname. If Deng fought for 100 percent freedom of speech, we cannot discount it," she said. "The KMT is still so arrogant because they know most Taiwanese are too afraid of getting into trouble."

The action will continue until Tuesday, which marks the 20th anniversary of Deng's death.