

Student protester commits suicide

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Dai Lin, a member of the Northern Taiwan Anti-Curriculum Changes Alliance, holds up a black umbrella at his home in New Taipei City in an undated photograph to represent the government's opaque "black box" changes to the high-school curriculum guidelines.

Photo taken from Lin Kuan-hua's Facebook account

A student who had campaigned against the Ministry of Education's controversial adjustments to high-school curriculum guidelines was found dead yesterday in an apparent suicide at his family's residence in New Taipei City.

Dai Lin (戴林), a member of the Northern Taiwan Anti-Curriculum Changes Alliance, was found dead by emergency workers who were summoned by his mother after her son failed to respond to calls outside his bedroom, the New Taipei City Fire Department said. After police arrived and broke down the door, they saw Lin lying in bed with a pan of charcoal lighted on a nearby desk, in an apparent suicide.

Yesterday was his 20th birthday.

Lin was a second-year student at the continuing studies division of the New Taipei Municipal Juang Jing Vocational High School. He applied for a leave of absence last month so he could devote more time to the anti-curriculum changes campaign.

Lin had been a prominent activist within the Northern Taiwan Anti-Curriculum Changes Alliance. While alliance members refused requests to confirm his exact role, Lin periodically served as one of the group's spokespeople, with alliance convener Chu Chen (朱陳) and other members deferring to him throughout a press conference earlier this month at the Legislative Yuan.

He was among the students who were arrested on Thursday night last week for breaking into the ministry's compound to protest changes to the curriculum guidelines. Protesters have urged

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the ministry to withdraw the changes — which are to take effect tomorrow — because of their “China-centric” focus and questionable approval process.

In a final Facebook post, Lin wrote: “Wish me happy birthday. 8 5 12 16. I have only one wish: Minister [of Education Wu Se-hwa (吳思華)] withdraw the curriculum guidelines.”

Lin’s friends later “decoded” the numbers 8-5-12-16 as corresponding to the letters for “h-e-l-p” in the English alphabet.

New Taipei City Department of Education Commissioner Lin Teng-chiao (林騰朝) said that Dai Lin had suffered from long-term “emotional problems.”

His mother had stayed with him until 2am yesterday, while his school’s military instructor waited nearby, the commissioner said, adding that it was “unfortunate” that Dai Lin had chosen to end his life in the early morning while his family was sleeping.

Juang Jing Vocational High School principal Lin Shu-kuei (林樹奎) was quoted in the Chinese-language United Daily News as saying that Dai Lin had been emotionally unstable since the start of last semester and had received counseling from teachers.

His mother, according to the Chinese-language Apple Daily, said that Dai Lin had been “depressed” since being released on bail last week for entering the ministry building.

“I very much regret that I was not able to stop this,” she said in a statement, denying that her son had been pressured or threatened by ministry officials.

Separately yesterday, a tearful Democratic Progressive Party Legislator Chen Chi-mai (陳其邁) made public screenshots of a conversation on the messaging app Line, which suggested that Dai Lin had planned his suicide as a way to stop the implementation of the curriculum guidelines.

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In the conversation between Dai Lin and a friend on June 1, which Chen displayed at a political commentary show yesterday afternoon, Dai Lin told his friend he had an idea that could “very possibly stop the curriculum guideline adjustments,” adding that he would exercise his plan on July 30.

“When I do it, the media and the public opinion would go crazy about it,” Dai Lin said in the Line conversation.

When his friend asked what he planned to do, he replied: “I cannot say it, there are just some things that you can only do, but not say.”

“Don’t worry. What I am going to do will give you some force to stop the curriculum guideline adjustments,” he added.

The friend replied: “I know what you are going to do,” and “Please don’t die.”

“You think too much,” Dai Lin said.

“Mistakes committed by the government should not be shouldered by students,” Chen, in tears, said after showing the screenshots. “If the Ministry of Education was sincere about communicating with the students, why would this happen?”

Additional reporting by Weng Yu-huang

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