

Renewed call to pardon Chen Shui-bian rejected

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Kaohsiung Mayor Chen Chu, center, yesterday speaks to the media after visiting former president Chen Shui-bian with vice president-elect Chen Chien-jen in Kaohsiung.

Photo: Chang Chung-i, Taipei Times

The Presidential Office has rejected a renewed call from local governments to pardon former president Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁), saying there are still ongoing criminal cases involving Chen.

“Presidential pardon is an issue that will only be considered after a final verdict has been reached. However, a number of criminal cases against Chen are still going on,” the Presidential Office said in a statement released yesterday.

The office issued the statement shortly after the Kaohsiung City Council passed a motion proposed by the council’s Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) caucus urging President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) to grant a pardon to Chen before his term ends on May 20, which it said could facilitate rapprochement between the pan-blue and pan-green camps.

The motion was signed by 39 city councilors, four of whom are not members of the DPP.

Kaohsiung City Council Speaker Kang Yu-cheng (康宇成) of the DPP said the motion is a catalyst for “blue-green reconciliation.”

The Tainan City Council passed a similar motion proposed by two independent and two DPP city councilors on Wednesday last week, which garnered the support of 34 of the 56 participating city councilors.

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On Monday last week, the Foundation of Medical Professionals Alliance in Taiwan also called for a presidential pardon for Chen, saying that the former president's illnesses, including sleep apnea, suspected Parkinson's disease and osteoporosis, could put his life at risk.

Speaking on the sidelines of a Kaohsiung City Council meeting yesterday, Kaohsiung Mayor Chen Chu (陳菊), a DPP member, said she approved of the motion, calling on Ma to make an effort to assuage Taiwan's political confrontations and break through the blue-green divide.

"I believe the motion submitted by the DPP caucus urging Ma to pardon Chen Shui-bian can help achieve social harmony... Ma's willingness to handle the matter as a president will be extremely conducive to Taiwan's development," Chen Chu said.

Later yesterday, Chen Chu and former minister of health Lee Ming-liang (李明璋) accompanied vice president-elect Chen Chien-jen (陳建生) on a visit to Chen Shui-bian in Kaohsiung, where the former president is living.

Chen Shui-bian, who was in office from 2000 to 2008, has served more than six years of a 20-year prison term for several convictions on corruption charges.

Medical parole granted to the former president has been extended five times since he was first granted compassionate release in January last year. The former president's health is re-evaluated every three months, with his sixth parole set to expire on May 4.

Meanwhile, Chen Shui-bian's son, Chen Chih-chung (陳智中), yesterday posted a message on Facebook, thanking the public, the medical alliance and the Tainan and Kaohsiung city councils for showing concern for his father's health.

"Restoring my father's health, reputation and freedom is always on the minds of my grandmother and my other relatives," Chen Chih-chung said.

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Additional reporting by Tsai Wen-chu and CNA.

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