

US lists Taiwanese as political prisoner

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Human rights activist Lee Ming-che's (李明哲) name has been added to the US Congressional-Executive Commission on China's (CECC) database of political prisoners, a first step toward US efforts to help win his release.

The commission informed Lee Ming-che's wife, Lee Ching-yu (李晶瑜), of its decision via a formal letter, sources said yesterday.

The letter said Lee Ming-che could be put on another list of priority political prisoners that the US Congress might submit to US President Donald Trump ahead of a state visit to China, sources said.

Lee Ming-che, who was reported missing after traveling to Zhuhai in Guangdong Province from Macau on March 19, is identified by the database as a political prisoner detained by Chinese authorities.

On March 29, China's Taiwan Affairs Office acknowledged that he had been detained by "relevant authorities" for "involvement in activities that threaten China's national security."

However, it was not until May 26 that the Chinese government announced that he was being held on suspicion of the "subversion of state power."

Last month, Lee Ching-yu traveled to Washington so she could testify before the US House of Representatives' Foreign Affairs Committee subcommittee hearing on "Disappeared, Jailed, and Tortured in China," alongside three Chinese women whose husbands are detained Chinese human rights lawyers.

Taiwan Association for China Human Rights secretary-general Chiu Ling-yao (邱靈瑤) yesterday said that "Lee Ming-che's being put down in a [CECC] record suggests a good possibility of him being included in a list of human rights cases to be presented during a US-China summit in China."

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The US government has cited the Taiwan Relations Act for its involvement in Lee's case, and a US Department of State official said that any harassment or threats made against Lee Ching-yu, or the others who testified at the congressional hearing about the imprisonment of Lee Ming-che and Chinese human rights lawyers would be considered "a violation of US sovereignty," Chiu said.

"The US Congress has never made such a strong move in dealing with the detention of a Taiwanese," Chiu said.

"Public and international attention is needed when rescuing political prisoners, and the scariest thing [for prisoners] is that no one cares about them," she said, calling for renewed public attention on Lee Ming-che's arrest.

The commission, created by the US-China Relations Act of 2000, is responsible for "monitoring the acts of China which reflect compliance with or violation of certain human rights," and it annually reports to the US president and the Congress.

The commission is responsible for advising the president, members of Congress and senior US officials on human rights issues in China prior to diplomatic visits, in addition to compiling annual reports on rights issues in China.

In addition, the commission is responsible for compiling a list of political prisoners whose release US officials are to advocate at diplomatic talks with their Chinese counterparts.

Last year, Senator Marco Rubio, the commission's chairman, and US Representative Christopher Smith, its co-chairman, sent a letter to the then-US president Barack Obama urging him to authorize the compilation of a list of Chinese political prisoners and raise human rights as a major topic of discussion when he met Chinese President Xi Jinping (习近平).

Lee Ming-che is the first non-Chinese citizen the commission has ever named as a Chinese

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