

Groups appeal for clarification of Lee Ming-che's status

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Members of the Taiwan Association for Human Rights, including secretary-general Chiu Ee-ling, second left, hold flowers at a news conference in Taipei yesterday.

Photo: Chang Chia-ming, Taipei Times

Worried that detained human rights advocate Lee Ming-che (李明哲) might have been sentenced in secret, civic groups and legislators yesterday urged the government to take immediate action to protect Lee's right to appeal.

Yesterday marked the 197th day since Lee went missing after a trip to China in March. Beijing later said he was being detained on charges of subversion of state power.

After a video was released of Lee confessing his crimes in court on Sept. 11, his situation has again become unknown, the groups said.

The video showed that Lee was prosecuted on Aug. 8, and according to China's Criminal Law, the court must reach a verdict within two months after accepting a case, Taiwan Association for Human Rights secretary-general Chiu Ee-ling (邱毅) told a news conference yesterday.

Accounting for China's national holidays, the deadline should be on Monday, he said.

As several human rights advocates have been sentenced in China without a public announcement, the groups are worried that his case would be handled the same way and Lee will lose his right to appeal, Judicial Reform Foundation executive secretary Hsiao I-min (蕭英敏) said.

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"We urge the government to clarify whether there is already a ruling in Lee's case, and if the court has already sentenced him, to determine if he will have the right to appeal," he said.

"If the case is not yet closed, the government should ask when the court will reach a verdict and whether Lee's family and concerned groups can attend the court session," he added.

The Beijing-appointed defense lawyer in the video gave up his right to defend Lee based on "jurisdiction" and "exclusion of illegally obtained evidence," Hsiao said, adding that the prosecutor presented 70 confession documents as evidence of Lee's guilt.

Five of the six accounts on which Lee is being prosecuted took place in Taiwan, over which China's courts do not have jurisdiction, so if Lee is sentenced for his actions in Taiwan and has no right to appeal, the case would affect the rights of all Taiwanese, Hsiao said.

Beijing is using Lee's case to intimidate Taiwanese, sending a message that "even if you use the Internet in Taiwan to spread the message of democracy and freedom, you might be sentenced to prison when you come to China," Democratic Progressive Party Legislator Yu Mei-nu (游錫堃) said.

"The government needs to clearly express its view on this case," New Power Party Legislator Hsu Yung-ming (許毓興) added.

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