

Bail for paint suspects lambasted

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Former Causeway Bay Books manager Lam Wing-kei, center, shows red paint in his hair at a forum in Taipei yesterday.

Photo: Liu Hsin-de, Taipei Times

The bail set for suspects who allegedly threw red paint at former Causeway Bay Books manager Lam Wing-kei (林榮基) was tantamount to encouraging such acts of violence, academics said yesterday.

After the incident in Taipei on Tuesday, the three suspects were released the following day by the Taipei District Court after posting bail of NT\$6,000 to NT\$20,000 (US\$199 to US\$665), although the Taipei District Prosecutors' Office appealed the decision.

At a forum held by the Asia-Pacific Elite Interchange Association yesterday, Taiwan Thinktank consultant Tung Li-wen (鄧立文) said that paint throwing is not the same as a regular civil or criminal case, so the mild penalties were “fuel for the formidable Chinese forces in Taiwan.”

Paint-throwing attacks are often orchestrated based on political motives, not personal feuds, and they can easily create a sense of fear in society, Tung said, adding that such cases should be handled according to the National Security Act (國家安全法) and the Anti-infiltration Act (反滲透法).

It is not the first time that pro-Beijing forces have attacked Hong Kongers visiting Taiwan, Tung said, citing a 2017 attack on democracy activist Joshua Wong (黃之鋒), and an incident involving singer and democracy advocate Denise Ho (何韻詩) last year.

Taiwan must be a pure land for democracy and freedom before it can have the strength to back Hong Kong, Tung said.

New School for Democracy board chairman Tseng Chien-yuan (曾建元) told the forum that many people worry Lam's attack was a result of cooperation between Taiwanese gangs and the

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Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which he called “the biggest gang in China.”

They even posted threats against Lam on the Mainland Affairs Council’s Facebook page, Tseng said.

“It is outright war they have waged against the nation, freedom of speech and constitutional democracy,” he said.

Lam, who founded Causeway Bay Books in Hong Kong in 1994 and sold works critical of Chinese leaders, fled to Taiwan in April last year amid fears of persecution, and plans to open a bookstore in Taipei today after raising nearly NT\$6 million via a fundraising Web site from September to November last year.

The bookstore in Hong Kong was forced to shut down after China intervened through violent means before it was purchased by Beijing’s agents in Hong Kong, Lam told the forum yesterday.

“China never made it clear [why it wanted the store to close], but I am perfectly aware,” Lam said. “It did not want any books that it did not like or could undermine its regime to be sold.”

Reopening the bookstore in Taipei is more than a move to counter the CCP, but also to inspire Taiwan to contemplate more deeply the instabilities within itself, he said.

In the face of Chinese oppression, there were still 5 million people who voted this year for a presidential candidate willing to stand beside China, Lam said, adding that such unpredictability has long been rooted in Taiwan.

“What were those voters thinking? How many of them believe they can be both Taiwanese and Chinese?” he asked.

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Lam said that he feared for his safety upon hearing about the suspects being released on bail.

He is avoiding dark alleys, Lam added.

The government should act swiftly to pass legislative amendments that target agents of the CCP in Taiwan to prevent its infiltration, he said.

Separately yesterday, the Central Investigation Bureau said that a Chinese national living in Singapore is the likely source of an online message threatening to kill Lam.

Investigators said that the account, which also left a threatening message on the American Institute in Taiwan's Facebook page, was registered to a Singapore telephone number.

The bureau said it would contact Singapore's local representative office to ask Singaporean law enforcement agencies to follow up on the case.

Additional reporting by CNA

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