

Minor clashes as CKS hall renamed

NEW ERA: Amid isolated umbrella fencing, mud slinging and shouting matches, the president and victims of the KMT's authoritarian rule unveiled a new plaque at the hall

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Amid demonstrations staged by people in favor of and opposing the name change, the Chiang Kai-shek (CKS) Memorial Hall was officially renamed the National Taiwan Democracy Memorial Hall yesterday.

The new plaque was unveiled by President Chen Shui-bian, who said the move symbolized an end to the country's authoritarian past.

"We're gathering here ... to bid goodbye to the old age and to show that we Taiwanese are all standing firmly behind the universal values of freedom, democracy and human rights," Chen said.

He also explained the significance of the date.

"Fifty-eight years ago, on this date, May 19, the Chinese Nationalist Party [KMT] regime ... officially declared martial law in Taiwan, which lasted 38 years," Chen said.

Meanwhile, in the outer regions of the hall's grounds, hundreds of supporters of and opponents to the name change held demonstrations.

Scattered brawls were reported and TV footage showed a Chen supporter and several protesters hitting each other with umbrellas before police intervened.



A policeman holds up a coat to cover the private parts of an old man who dropped his pants and shouted "Chen Shui-bian has no balls" to protest the renaming of Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall to National Taiwan Democracy Memorial Hall during a name change ceremony yesterday.

Barbed wire barricades were erected and ETTV reported that 700 police officers had been deployed at the scene. Law enforcement authorities declined to confirm those numbers.

A group of people in favor of the name change parading on their way to welcome Chen before the ceremony were shouted at and attacked by opponents and mud was thrown at a truck leading the parade.

Police quickly put an end to the altercation.

After the ceremony, opponents of the name change attempted to damage the new name plaque. Scuffles and verbal clashes again broke out and police intervened.

Minutes after Chen's speech, survivors of the 228 Incident gathered around the hall, to cheers from Chen supporters and jeers by his detractors.

The 228 Incident refers to the uprising that began on Feb. 27, 1947, against the KMT regime. Tens of thousands of Taiwanese were subsequently killed by the KMT in a security crackdown.



A member of the 908 Taiwan Republic Campaign yesterday tries to pull the bars from a window in the wall surrounding the National Taiwan Democracy Memorial Hall during an event the campaign called "Tear down the feudal wall and open up a democratic space." The event coincided with the ceremony changing the hall's name from Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall.

After the official unveiling of the plaque, Chen, Premier Su Tseng-chang and Minister of Education Tu Cheng-sheng visited an exhibition of pictures and documents from the martial law period inside the memorial hall.

A group of former political prisoners and their families welcomed the president in the hall.

"I welcome the name change, it's a small step toward justice," said Wu Sheng-jun, a former political prisoner.

Wu was arrested in 1950 and imprisoned for 12 years for conspiracy because of complaints about the government he made while chatting with friends. "Someone just reported on me," he said.

"When the KMT arrived in Taiwan, my friends and I came all the way back from Japan just to welcome them ... I couldn't believe, then, that I was being jailed just because I had complained about the government," Wu said.

He said he disagreed with claims by pan-blue camp politicians that the name change was a move to stir up ethnic tension.

"Many Mainlanders were also victims of Chiang Kai-shek's authoritarian regime, two out of five political prisoners were Mainlanders. We all suffered under Chiang," he said.

To avoid causing damage to the structure of the memorial hall, the metal plaques, which bear the carving "National Taiwan Democracy Memorial Hall" -- in Chinese and English -- were put in the garden surrounding the building.

In a bid to prevent it from being altered, in March the Taipei City Government classified the 27-year-old memorial hall and its surrounding walls as a temporary historical site.

The Cultural Heritage Protection Law stipulates that a temporary historical site cannot be altered or damaged in any way.

The Taipei City Government said the decorations used during the unveiling ceremony were in violation of the Cultural Heritage Protection Law.

"There were many [violations], such as nails on the structure and banners covering the building. All these altered the original appearance of the historical structure," Taipei City Government director of information Yang Hsiao-tung said. "We'll ask the Ministry of Education to restore it [the memorial hall] to its original state."

Taipei's KMT Mayor Hau Lung-bin, yesterday condemned the move, which he deemed "illegal."

"The government set a bad example by damaging the legal system and deceiving the

public ... We demand the removal of the plaque," he told the reporters, referring to the amendment to the Organic Statute of Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall and a proposed statute concerning the organization of the Taiwan Democracy Hall.

KMT caucus whip Hsu Shao-ping told a press conference yesterday that the two bills have yet to be put on the legislative agenda.

Under these circumstances, changing the name of the hall and unveiling the new plaques were illegal, she said, threatening to block the two bills in the legislature.

"I will never allow them to be passed. Without them being passed, everything related to the Taiwan Democracy Memorial Hall would be invalidated," she said.

The Taiwan Solidarity Union yesterday panned the government for a different reason, accusing the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) of "fooling the public."

The name change was "ironic" because the DPP still doesn't dare to remove Chiang's statue from the hall, said TSU Secretary-General Chien Cheng-shan, referring to the gigantic statue of the dictator sitting under the hall's roof.

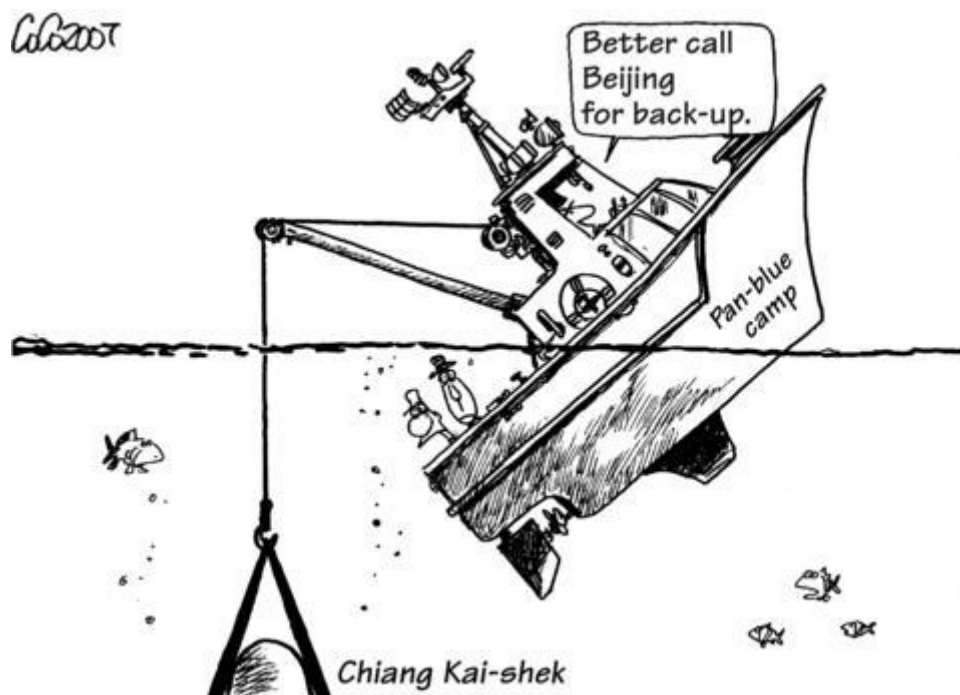
"Changing the title of CKS Memorial Hall [to Taiwan Democracy Hall] is not enough," he said. "We need to make the Taiwan Democracy Memorial Hall a democracy hall in reality as well as in name."

"The important mission of the Taiwan Democracy Memorial Hall is to help our coming generations understand Taiwan's democratization process and commemorate all those who made a contribution to it," he said.

DPP Chairman Yu Shyi-kun, on the other hand, said he was happy to see the name change, as it represented the "fulfillment of transitional justice."

He expressed disappointment, however, at the KMT's continuing opposition to the change and its failure to use the opportunity to reflect upon its history of authoritarian governance.





Cross-strait complexity increases

Last month marked the 20th anniversary of the lifting of the ban on visits to China. Between 1949 and 1987, Taiwanese were completely segregated from the people of China. It was obviously tragic and, indeed, painful for those who had left their families and friends behind after the civil war. Therefore, the initial opening up which allowed these people to return to their homes and families in China for visits and reunions was primarily for humanitarian reasons.

However, the opening up that began 20 years ago came too late to prevent a tragic occurrence -- the creation of an entire generation of Mainlanders in Taiwan who had become trapped in a unique time capsule. For those who fled to Taiwan with the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) government, most could not find it in their hearts to truly identify Taiwan as their home. For decades, the KMT government brainwashed them into believing that it would lead them in retaking China and returning to their real homes.

When they finally realized that would not happen, it was too late. They had been kept

apart from their homes in China for so long that when they finally returned they discovered home was not what it used to be.

This history created not only personal tragedy for these people, but has been, and continues to be, the root of a fundamental political divide. To a large extent, the endless rivalry and confrontation between the pan-green and pan-blue camps reflects the fundamental conflict between Mainlanders and ethnic Taiwanese.

There were optimists who felt confident that with the weathering of the first generation of Mainlanders, ethnic divisions would ease. However, one should keep in mind that as ethnic Taiwanese became increasingly aware of their majority status and ethnicity during a backdrop of political liberalization and democratization, some Mainlanders and their offspring felt increasingly alienated and threatened, which in turn pushed them closer to each other and further away from ethnic Taiwanese.

Cross-strait exchanges continue to achieve new milestones. Now the Taiwanese shuttle between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait regularly. Taiwanese businesses have spent billions of dollars in China over the past decades in investments. It is estimated that as many as 1 million Taiwanese work in China on a regular basis. The number of cross-strait marriages is leading to a series of new social and political issues and a new generation of children with parents from different sides of the Taiwan Strait.

Under these circumstances, the reasons cited by proponents of further liberalization in cross-strait relations have long gone beyond the simple "humanitarian" grounds for the initial opening 20 years ago.

The motives now include business, political and social factors. With so many interests and ideologies constituting the cross-strait relationship, the government requires a firm policy that weighs economic interests against the need to maintain the nation's de facto independence and the threat posed by China's missiles and "Anti-Secession" Law.