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AP

Tuesday - the last day for legal prostitution in Taipei

Authorities in the Taiwanese capital, Taipei, are shutting the doors on the city's legal brothels.

As from midnight (1600 GMT), business licences are being withdrawn from the 128 sex workers who are registered to operate in them.

When the plan to revoke the prostitutes' work permits was first raised in 1997, it provoked huge protests by sex workers.

After a 17-month battle, the city government agreed to a two-year grace period.

It offered loans to prostitutes who switched to other lines of work and paid monthly allowances for those taking vocational training.

"It is our policy to end legal prostitution," Chang Mei-mei, director of Taipei's social workers' office, said on Tuesday.

**Illegal sex trade**

As of Monday, only 42 of the registered sex workers were still providing services, while others had either found new jobs or lost contact with the city government.

However, Mrs Chang said they were worried some of the women would continue practising the trade illegally in Taipei or outside



Licensed prostitute Miss Kuan was involved in the protests

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the city.

This view was shared by prostitute Kuan Hsiu-chin, who said many of the women would carry on after their licences were revoked.

"The economic pressure would be too great to be dealt with," she said.

### Clean-up campaign

Former Taipei Mayor Chen Shui-ban, now Taiwan's president, revoked licences for prostitutes in September 1997 as part of a campaign against crime and obscenity in the city.

During the two-year grace period, the Taipei city government guaranteed a monthly allowance of 7,750 Taiwan dollars (\$237) to help the sex workers find other jobs.

About 200 licensed prostitutes operate elsewhere in Taiwan, although it is thought about 100,000 are engaged in the illegal sex trade nationwide.

Prostitution was legalised in Taiwan in 1959.



As mayor, Mr Chen wanted the brothels shut

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