

Soft stance on ID cards is misplaced

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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The government's response to China's new residency permit cards for Taiwanese shows that it is taking the issue too lightly and fails to grasp the possible political ramifications.

As of Monday last week, 22,000 Taiwanese had applied for the cards, which were launched on Sept. 1, China's Taiwan Affairs Office spokesman An Fengshan (安鳳山) said on Wednesday last week.

Card holders have access to the same public services as Chinese citizens, An said, adding that cards are meant to make life in China more convenient for Taiwanese and are not compulsory. However, local media quoted unnamed sources as saying that Beijing aims for 80 percent of China-based Taiwanese businesspeople to have a card by the end of this year.

The Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics in March cited Straits Exchange Foundation data from 2014 as showing that 850,000 Taiwanese businesspeople lived in China. Eighty percent of that figure is not a small number, and it excludes people like Taiwanese studying in China.

The card no doubt is another ploy by Beijing to belittle Taiwan's sovereignty.

The new card carries an 18-digit code almost identical to that on Chinese identification cards and card holder data are stored in the same system as those of Chinese citizens, so the measure is an obvious attempt to tell the international community that Taiwan is part of China.

However, those who sing China's chorus and call opponents to the measure paranoid or ungrateful toward China for a goodwill gesture that makes life easier for Taiwanese there should be happy to know that President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) appears to share their opinion.

"The residency permit card is merely a card, a thing to make daily life more convenient... it does not represent our recognition of the agency that issues the card, nor of the political entity that the agency represents," Tsai said on Aug. 17.

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If only things were as simple as Tsai suggested.

There is always more to Beijing's measures than meets the eye and Chinese authorities make no secret of their intention to annex Taiwan.

Tsai with her statement might have aimed to show goodwill to China. However, her conciliatory approach will not reduce Beijing's aggressiveness toward Taiwan. Instead, it risks cementing China's legal claim in the eyes of other countries that it holds authority over Taiwanese and that Taiwan's government is subordinate to Beijing.

Tsai's stance is reflected in the Mainland Affairs Council's hesitation to draw up concrete countermeasures, prompting the New Power Party to accuse it of "near incompetence."

Tsai and national security officials should heed the results of a poll published yesterday by the Cross-Strait Policy Association, which showed that the majority of respondents agreed that holders of the new Chinese residency cards should report to and be regulated by the Taiwanese government.

In the face of China's incessant scheming to bring Taiwan into its fold, Tsai's government must demonstrate more resolution and take more effective steps to safeguard the nation's sovereignty.

Any passivity on the part of the government will be perceived by the public and the international community as a sign of consent to Beijing's rule.

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