

The proposed economic cooperation framework agreement (ECFA) between Taiwan and China would pave the way for eventual unification, Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) legislators said yesterday, adding that the agreement would be “more political than economic.”

The comments followed Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao's (温家宝) speech to the National People's Congress on Sunday, in which he attempted to calm fears that the controversial pact would flood Taiwan with cheap Chinese imports and cost thousands of farmers and workers their jobs.

Wen said China would “let the people of Taiwan benefit” from tariff concessions and early harvest programs, adding that “relevant arrangements” in the trade pact would help reassure Taiwanese farmers.

However, DPP lawmakers questioned Wen's sincerity and said it was unlikely that Taiwan would be able to reap any benefits from the trade pact, either economically or politically.

DPP Legislator William Lai (赖幸媛) called Wen's comments lies.

“If one of the main principles of the trade pact is for both parties to be treated as equals, how does saying this even make sense?” he said.

“This shows that his comments are basically a smokescreen for [China's] unification goal,” Lai said.

“Minister of Economic Affairs Shih Yen-shiang (施颜清) has been more honest, saying that if China gives Taiwan benefits including tariff concessions, it would only be a matter of time before it asks for the same in return,” DPP Legislator Yeh Yi-ching (叶宜津) said.

Government officials maintain that signing the pact would open the way for Taiwan to sign free-trade agreements (FTAs) with other countries and increase the nation's economic competitiveness.

President Ma Ying-jeou (马英九) said on Sunday that Taiwan risked becoming an “international orphan,” adding that the absence of FTAs with major economies was contributing to the nation's economic isolation.

However, Lai said the main reason the nation did not manage to sign FTAs with other major economies was China, which has repeatedly blocked other countries from signing agreements with Taiwan.

“Who is causing Taiwan's current problems in international relations?” Lai asked. “It is all the result of China's actions. What Beijing is doing is destroying Taiwan's international space and pushing it [to accept] the ECFA proposal.”

Wen Jiabao a 'liar,' ECFA a tool: DPP

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Meanwhile, the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) caucus praised Wen, saying his remarks showed that China “completely” understood the feelings of Taiwanese farmers.

KMT caucus secretary-general Lin Hung-chih (林滄敏) told a press conference at the legislature that the government promised not to open the local market to more Chinese produce if an ECFA was inked.

Lin said the KMT caucus would carry out its gatekeeping duties once the ECFA was signed, adding that Taiwan could lose its competitive edge if it failed to sign the pact.

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