

Hundreds sit-in to protest cross-strait policy

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Hundreds of protesters yesterday started a sit-in outside the legislature, fueled by mounting anger over the government's cross-strait policies and the expected passage of a controversial trade agreement with China later this week.

Waving green Taiwanese independence flags and signs emblazoned with the slogan "the Chinese Nationalist Party [KMT] is selling out Taiwan," a dozen organizations filled the streets around the legislature, calling on lawmakers to reflect popular opinion and protect the nation's sovereignty.

KMT lawmakers and the administration of President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) have failed to stand up for Taiwanese interests in the face of growing Chinese pressure, both economically and politically, demonstrators said.

"We don't believe Ma's remarks that only good things will come out of our interactions with China," protester Chen Shu-chiong (陳樹雄) said. "Taiwan will have to pay a price for these policies, sooner or later."

The protest, organized by the Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU) and pro-independence groups, mostly targeted the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA), which will be reviewed in an extraordinary legislative session starting today.

The KMT caucus said in a press conference yesterday it expected to pass the ECFA through a legislative vote tomorrow, setting the stage for the tariff-reducing agreement to come into effect early next year.

For the seventh time yesterday, the legislature voted down a Democratic Progressive Party sponsored bill that would have subjected the ECFA to a nationwide vote. Opposition parties have cited polls showing support for a referendum on the ECFA at more than 60 percent.

"This is an important national policy that will have an impact on employment and salaries, with political and economic implications. Why can't we hold a referendum?" TSU Chairman Huang Kun-huei (黃昆輝) asked. "By pretending not to be hearing the voice of the people, the government is taking the path to authoritarianism."

Volunteers and staff from the TSU handed out petitions for a third attempt to hold an ECFA referendum. Two previous efforts were rejected by the Referendum Review Committee.

Shih Ya-fang (謝雅芳), head of the Taiwan United Nations Alliance's Tokyo chapter, said she was disappointed at the government's decision to forsake a formal UN bid this year in favor of "meaningful" participation in its specialized agencies, adding that this was "belittling" to Taiwan.

Organizers said about 2,000 protesters were at the rally.

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