

DPP gives ministry three days to pull 'racist' comic

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Cartoon characters Fa Sao, left, and Yi-ge are seen in Taipei on Monday standing in front of a display board. PHOTO: CNA

A comic strip published by the Ministry of Economic Affairs (MOEA) to promote a proposed economic cooperation framework agreement (ECFA) with China is marred by racist, derogatory and “extremely offensive” content, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) said yesterday.

The party threatened to report the ministry to the Control Yuan unless it suspended the comic strip within three days.

On Monday, the ministry unveiled a four-frame comic strip featuring a male character named Yi-ge and his female counterpart Fa Sao as part of its efforts to advertise the ECFA.

A ministry press release said the purpose of the comic strip was to “allow people of all ages to easily and clearly understand the purpose and content of the ECFA.”

The comics portray Yi-ge as a 45-year old Hoklo-speaking man from Tainan City who works as a salesman in an unspecified traditional industry. According to his profile, Yi-ge is a vocational school graduate who speaks “Taiwanese Mandarin” and knows very little about the proposed ECFA. He is content being a follower in all things, but when it comes to protecting himself, he “goes all-out.”

“For example, if he were ever accidentally short-changed by a clerk at a breakfast restaurant, he would do almost anything to get the money back, even if it is just NT\$5,” the description says, adding that he was the kind of person who talks tough but never takes action.

His profile also says that he lacks the sensitivity for danger, lives life in a carefree manner and never cares to improve himself because he has a steady job. He has had some conversations with his colleagues about the ECFA and even though he knows nothing about the subject, he is worried about losing his job once the pact is signed.

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One of Yi-ge's acquaintances is Fa Sao, a 40-year-old Hakka from Hsinchu who works as a supervisor at an import-export company. She is described as an active, self-motivated and highly capable married woman who is fluent in English, Mandarin, Hoklo and Japanese. She is always hungry for knowledge and eager to learn more about money-management. Her profile suggests she keeps herself well-informed and is a keen observer of market trends. Fa Sao was recently promoted to company spokesman. Her knowledge of cross-strait trade has prompted her to learn all about the ECFA.

"The comic strip is extremely offensive and derogatory. It describes those who oppose the ECFA as stupid and unaware of current events. This is glaring racial and class discrimination," DPP Spokesman Cheng Wen-tsang said.

Cheng said the comic strip was full of echoes of Kuo Kuan-ying, the former Government Information Office staffer who was impeached on Tuesday for writing prejudicial essays against Taiwan and Taiwanese.

Cheng said if the ministry did not suspend distribution of the comic strip within three days, the DPP would file a malfeasance charge with the Control Yuan against the ministry.

When reached by the Taipei Times, MOEA Deputy Minister John Deng said it was "absolutely not" the ministry's intention to discriminate against anyone from any social stratum.

Deng said the two characters were the result of long, painstaking efforts by public relations experts to reflect the make-up of the general public.

The purpose of the comic was to explain a complicated issue in a simple and easily understood way so that people of all ages can understand the proposed agreement and was not meant to vilify anyone, he said.

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