

The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) yesterday condemned China for intervening in the selection of films at the upcoming Kaohsiung Film Festival and voiced its support for the screening of a documentary on prominent Uighur independence activist Rebiya Kadeer.

“Film production, as a form of artistic expression, should be protected as part of freedom of expression without political intervention,” the party said in a press release. “The Taiwanese people have every right to freely choose which movies they would like to see without having to gain permission from the Chinese government in advance — and we will not tolerate the intervention of the Chinese government.”

The DPP’s remarks came in response to a call by the tourism industry in Kaohsiung for the screening of a documentary on World Uyghur Congress president Rebiya Kadeer titled *The 10 Conditions of Love* at the Kaohsiung Film Festival to be canceled. The festival takes place between Oct. 16 and Oct. 29.

Representatives from the tourism industry said the screening of the movie, along with the visit by Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama at the end of last month, could harm cross-strait relations and the tourism industry in the city, as Chinese tourist groups have canceled hotel and restaurant reservations and visits to the city.

Beijing claims US-based Kadeer is a terrorist and has accused her of inciting unrest in the Xinjiang region earlier this year. China protested Kadeer’s visit to Australia last month for a screening of the biopic at the Melbourne International Film Festival and Chinese directors boycotted the festival.

The DPP yesterday condemned Beijing for using cross-strait economic exchanges as a bargaining chip for political purposes, warning that such a move would only “disgust the Taiwanese” and would be harmful to the development of the cross-strait relationship.

DPP Legislator Kuan Bi-ling (關碧玲), who was elected by the Kaohsiung constituency and was behind the creation of the film festival in 2001 when she was Kaohsiung City Information Office director-general, said that in an ironic way Beijing’s intervention was a “good thing.”

“I think it’s a good thing because it helps Taiwanese realize that the Chinese leadership does not separate politics and economic exchanges, or differentiate between politics and culture,” she told the Taipei Times via telephone. “I hope it helps Taiwanese to understand something.”

Officials at the Kaohsiung City Information Office yesterday said that the city government was still reviewing the plan to screen the documentary.

Later, the city government said in a press release that, after a meeting with hotel operators and travel agencies earlier in the day, it was found that Chinese tourist groups had canceled

DPP condemns China over film festival

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their hotel reservations mainly because roads leading to popular tourist destinations, such as Alishan (阿里山), had been damaged by Typhoon Morakot and have not yet been repaired.

The rising number of swine flu cases was another reason why many tourists had canceled their trips, it added.

When contacted by the Taipei Times, Deputy Kaohsiung Mayor Lee Yung-te (李永德) said he could not comment on the issue as he had been in South Korea the past few days attending the Asian-Pacific City Summit. Kaohsiung Mayor Chen Chu (陳菊) is in Japan on a business trip and will not return until later today, he said.

John Chiang (江丙坤), a Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) lawmaker who doubles as the party's vice chairman, yesterday called on the Kaohsiung City Government to rethink its plan to screen the documentary, saying that it would negatively impact cross-strait relations.

"The Dalai Lama's visit impacted cross-strait relations, but relations can get back on track depending on efforts by both sides to clear away any dark clouds," Chiang said.

Chiang said that screening the film was a sensitive issue for Beijing and needed to be handled carefully.

Meanwhile, the KMT legislative caucus held a press conference at which they urged Chen and Lee to finalize whether the festival would air the film or not as soon as possible.

"We hope the DPP bears in mind that this concerns not only about politics, but economic development and people's livelihoods. Deciding to screen the film at the festival will put hoteliers in an even worse predicament," KMT Legislator Yang Chiung-ying (楊昌榮) said.

That the hotel occupancy rate in the city has hit a record low was worrying as Kaohsiung was expected to attract more tourists after it staged a successful World Games, KMT Legislator Justin Chou (周俊雄) said.

"It's likely that Chinese tourists will boycott trips to Kaohsiung because of the film festival," he said.

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