

Kaohsiung to screen controversial film

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Despite pressure from Beijing and local tourism operators, the Kaohsiung City Government yesterday said a documentary on prominent Uighur independence activist Rebiya Kadeer would be screened at the upcoming Kaohsiung Film Festival as planned.

“The selection of the films at the festival was made by the film committee, an independent commission, months ago. We respect its decision,” said Hung Chih-kun (洪志君), director of Kaohsiung City Mayor Chen Chu’s (陳菊) office.

The city government held a meeting yesterday to discuss the matter after Chen returned from a business trip to Japan.

“On the principle of respecting art, creativity and freedom of speech, the documentary will be screened as scheduled,” Chen said yesterday, adding that the city government would work with the tourism industry to attract more tourists to the city.

The screening of the film, however, will be brought forward to Tuesday and Wednesday.

The director-general of the city government’s Information Office, Hsu Li-ming (許立明), said the pending screening had caused great controversy, and that it would be unfair to the other 78 films to screen the film during the festival.

“The Kaohsiung Film Festival does not begin until Oct. 16 and we do not want the protests to drag on until then, we will show the film in advance,” he said.

Representatives of the tourism industry in Kaohsiung had called on the city government to remove the documentary *The 10 Conditions of Love* from the film festival, citing low hotel occupancy rates in the city as the result of Chinese tourist groups canceling hotel and restaurant reservations and trips.

According to Lin Kun-shan (林坤山), the chief of the city’s tourism bureau, however, the occupancy rate of hotels has dropped nationwide because of the recession and the devastation wrought by Typhoon Morakot.

“From January to August this year, the rate declined by 10 percent in Taipei City and Hualien County compared with the same period last year. In Kaohsiung City, it dropped by between 3 percent and 5 percent,” Lin said.

Hung said the city government had talked to representatives from the tourism industry on Friday and decided to stick to its decision to screen the documentary at the festival.

“Kaohsiung is a city that enshrines human rights and art should be above politics,” Hung said.

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The Executive Yuan maintained a neutral stance on the issue yesterday after remarks by Premier Wu Den-yih (吳登益) the previous day were deemed as opposing the screening of the film.

On Friday, when fielding a question from Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) Legislator Chu Feng-chih (傅豐慈) about the potential decline in the numbers of Chinese tourists because of the screening, Wu made an analogy that drew criticism.

“[It’s an issue of] how to get along with people. You want me to shop more in your store, but you do things that make me feel uncomfortable. Then I will not go to your store,” Wu said.

Executive Yuan Spokesman Su Jun-pin (蘇俊平) downplayed Wu’s comments yesterday by saying that Wu was describing Taiwan’s predicament of dealing with cross-strait relations and relations with the international community.

“The Executive Yuan’s position is that the government will not interfere, regardless of the predicament,” Su said.

“We are a country that has independent sovereignty and freedom of speech. It is out of the question that the government could interfere with or prohibit the screening of a film,” Su said.

At a separate setting yesterday, Freddy Lim (林正盛), president of civic group Guts United Taiwan, said the group had sent a letter inviting Kadeer to visit Taiwan.

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