

Advisers' trips to Beijing criticized

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The Presidential Office said yesterday it was inappropriate for presidential advisers to attend Beijing's celebrations marking 60 years of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) rule in China, but stopped short of denouncing or threatening to punish them.

Presidential Office Spokesman Wang Yu-chi (王郁琦) said that he had been informed that the three presidential advisers in question were indeed in Beijing, but they "should not be there to attend the celebration events."

"The timing of their visits may be debatable, but it is indeed inappropriate if they did attend the celebration activities," Wang said.

"Things will be cleared up when they return and we will seek to gain a better understanding of the matter, but until then, it is not an issue over which they should resign" he said.

Wang was responding to questions about a report published by the Chinese-language Liberty Times (the Taipei Times' sister newspaper) that three of President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) national policy advisers had gone to Beijing to attend the People's Republic of China national day celebrations yesterday.

The newspaper named the three as Kinpo Group chairman Rock Hsu (許, Hsu Wen-bin (許文彬)) and Tsai Hsueh-ni (蔡雪尼).

Wang said that the three, who offer their services free of charge, were not legally bound to inform the Presidential Office of their schedules in advance.

While one of them wrote to the Presidential Office to inform it of his visit to Beijing, Wang said they were not aware of the travel plans of the other two ahead of time.

After learning yesterday morning from the media that the three were in Beijing, Wang said officials telephoned the trio and asked them not to attend the celebrations, adding that the office did not know whether they were there to attend the celebrations to begin with.

When asked whether the advisers would be relieved of their positions if it turned out they had gone to Beijing for the festivities, Wang said he could not answer until it was clear what had happened.

He dismissed the idea of setting clear guidelines for similar situations, saying it would require further assessment.

A high-ranking official who spoke on condition of anonymity said four presidential advisers had been invited to attend yesterday's celebrations, including Chinese National Federation of Industries (中華全國工商業聯合會) chairman Preston Chen (陳雲卿).

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The official said Hsu Wen-bin had written to the Presidential Office to inform it of his trip to China.

While the office had received the letter, the official said Ma had not been informed of it, adding that the Presidential Office staff had handled the matter “a bit too slowly.”

Presidential Office Secretary-General Liao Liou-yi (廖力宜) personally telephoned the four presidential advisers yesterday to talk them out of attending, to which the advisers promised to honor Liao's request, the official said.

The four officials were among more than 150 “Taiwanese compatriots” who had flown to Beijing at the invitation of the Chinese government.

Meanwhile, Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) Chairwoman Lai Shin-yuan (賴清德) told a legislative committee yesterday that Rock Hsu, who doubles as Straits Exchange Foundation vice chairman, was in Beijing but did not attend the celebrations.

Lai said that there was no law against someone like Rock Hsu attending the events, but he must take public perception into consideration.

Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) Secretary-General Kao Koong-lian (高孔廉) said at the legislature that Hsu had been invited in his capacity as the chairman of an electronics company and was not representing the foundation.

Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) Legislator Wu Yu-sheng (吳育生) urged the trio to resign if they attended the celebrations, saying it was “absurd” for presidential advisers to do so, a call that was echoed by KMT Legislator Chang Hsien-yao (張顯耀) of the Foreign and National Defense Committee.

“It is very inappropriate [for them to take part in the events] as presidential advisers of the Republic of China,” Chang said. “It is inappropriate for anyone serving as a government official or government representative.”

Chang said the events could muddle the national identity of the advisers.

Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Spokesman Chao Tien-lin (趙天麟) said Ma must shoulder the responsibility for the three advisers' actions.

“Although there is no legal issue regarding their attendance, they are, after all, presidential advisers. But the fact that they are in Beijing, taking part in an event that features Chinese military strength while China still has more than 1,000 missiles pointed at Taiwan” is offensive, he said.

Democratic Progressive Party Legislator Tsai Huang-liang (蔡煌良) said: “Even though they are advisers to the president, the four cannot tell the difference between friend and foe.”

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KMT caucus secretary-general Lu Hsueh-chang (呂秀蓮), however, said it was acceptable for advisers to participate in such events as individuals.

“Taiwan is a democracy. I think it is OK for people to join national day celebrations or festivals of other countries,” Lu said.

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