

MAC head turns on China over tourism

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A Beijing official's claim that Chinese tourists were avoiding Kaohsiung because certain people in the city were aligning themselves with Tibetan and Uighur separatist forces demonstrated ignorance and "hurt the feelings of Taiwan's people," Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) Chairwoman Lai Shin-yuan (賴幸媛) said yesterday.

Lai was referring to comments that China's Taiwan Affairs Office Spokeswoman Fan Liqing (范麗青) made on Wednesday in response to media inquiries about the falling number of Chinese tourists visiting Kaohsiung.

Chinese tourists began cutting the city from their itinerary after the Dalai Lama visited southern Taiwan in the wake of Typhoon Morakot and the city government rejected demands to prevent a documentary about Uighur activist Rebiya Kadeer from being screened at the Kaohsiung Film Festival.

"It is natural that Chinese tourists would express their displeasure, because there are forces in Kaohsiung City who align themselves with separatist forces supporting Tibetan and Uighur independence, which creates trouble and runs counter to the core interests of the mainland," Fan said on Wednesday. "It hurts the feelings of their mainland compatriots."

Fan's remarks were the first time a Chinese official had referred to tourists boycotting Kaohsiung.

Fielding questions from Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) legislators during a meeting of the legislature's Internal Administration Committee, Lai said Fan was making "groundless accusations."

"It shows she has little understanding of Taiwan's democracy. She hurt the feelings of Taiwan's people," Lai said.

At a separate setting yesterday, the Presidential Office encouraged Chinese tourists to visit Kaohsiung, but stopped short of denouncing Beijing for its apparent boycott of the city.

Presidential Office Spokesman Wang Yu-chi (王郁琦) said Kaohsiung residents were as friendly and hospitable as any other Taiwanese and that the city had many worthwhile attractions.

Wang said Chinese tourists should not miss the opportunity to visit Kaohsiung.

The Kaohsiung City Government, meanwhile, urged the central government to take note of the Chinese tourist boycott of the city.

Kaohsiung Information Office director-general Hsu Li-ming (許立明) said China was using tourists as a bargaining chip to achieve political goals.

Hsu said Taiwan considered democracy and human rights important, which was why the city

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government did not interfere with the organization of the Kaohsiung Film Festival, which opens today.

Kaohsiung Mayor Chen Chu (陳菊) said that the city welcomed visitors from any country, “even tourists from China.”

“I hope other countries won’t impose restrictions on the places their tourists can visit just because [some countries] have different values,” Chen said.

Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) Legislator Huang Chao-shun (黃朝峻), who represents a constituency in the city, said both China and the Kaohsiung City Government were to blame for the boycott.

Huang said the city government had been “provocative” in its handling of the Dalai Lama’s visit and the screening of the documentary, *The 10 Conditions of Love*, by director Jeff Daniels.

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