

China promoting unification at schools

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Teachers and students participating in the “100 schools, 1,000 students” exchange program in China’s Jiangsu Province pose in an undated photograph.

□ **Photo: Screen grab from the Taiwan International Youth Exchange Association Web site**

The government has uncovered a Chinese project aimed at promoting unification in Taiwan’s elementary and high schools to promote unification, a national security official said on condition of anonymity.

A total of 259 teachers and students from 18 schools in China’s Jiangsu Province last week visited 18 elementary, junior and senior-high schools in Taiwan as part of an exchange program, the source said, adding that some of the visitors stayed in local homes.

After Burkina Faso severed ties with Taiwan on Thursday, the government tightened the review process for visiting Chinese officials and people connected to them, the source said.

However, regular exchange activities are still reviewed by other ministries and do not require a review by the Ministry of the Interior, they added.

The visiting teachers and students only needed approval from the principals of the local schools, and some of their assistance, to conduct exchanges, the source added.

In a bid to hold a large-scale exchange event in Taiwan, the Chinese teachers and students were split into 18 groups and applied separately to the Ministry of Education for permission to conduct exchanges, the source said.

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Several Chinese officials had also been approved for visits, as they had applied separately with schedules seemingly unrelated to the exchange events, they added.

An annual forum on educational development in Taiwan and Jiangsu launched by the province in 2015 has since built a network involving 55 Taiwanese schools.

At last year's forum in Jiangsu, an official from China's Taiwan Affairs Office said that China hoped to help "students on both sides of the Taiwan Strait develop the correct view on the nation and history," adding that they would hold exchange events outside of the province.

China's Xinhua news agency has reported that the forum aims to build a framework for regular exchanges between 1,000 students from 100 schools in Taiwan and China by next year.

It would begin with individual schools signing bilateral agreements and would eventually develop into a long-term regional collaboration based on clear frameworks and regulations, the report said.

The forum held similar events in May last year after the education ministry approved visits by 227 teachers and students from 14 Chinese schools local schools to promote exchanges, the source said.

Officials last year found that 18 Taiwanese schools had signed agreements to conduct exchanges with Chinese schools, but only two — Taoyuan's Hsing-fu Junior High School and Da You Junior High School — had informed the education ministry, the source said.

The Taoyuan City Government was alarmed by the scope of this year's event and notified the central government, which then found that the education ministry had approved the visits, the source added.

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The government has drawn up a series of measures to address the issue, including requiring regulatory authorities to inspect the local schools involved, the source said.

According to Taiwan International Youth Exchange Association, the schools involved in this year's events are in Taipei, New Taipei City and Taoyuan, Hsinchu and Nantou counties.

They are Taipei Wego Private High School, Taipei Municipal Neihu High School, New Taipei Municipal Banqiao Junior High School, Sanxia Junior High School, Kuang Jen Catholic High School, New Taipei Municipal San Min High School, Banquet Senior High School, Taoyuan Municipal Guang Ming Junior High School, Linsen Elementary School, Toujhou Elementary School, Hsing-fu Junior High School, Da You Junior High School, Taoyuan Junior High School, Taoyuan Municipal New Li Senior High School, Chubei Elementary School, Emei Bilingual Junior High School and Kuosing Elementary School.

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