

Rights advocates call for probe on electronic IDs

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Taiwan Association for Human Rights secretary-general Chiu E-ling, center, and social activists hold a news conference at the Legislative Yuan in Taipei yesterday to urge the Control Yuan to investigate a government plan to issue electronic ID cards.

Photo: Peter Lo, Taipei Times

The Taiwan Association for Human Rights (TAHR) and the Judicial Reform Foundation (JRF) yesterday called on the Control Yuan to investigate a government plan to start issuing national electronic identification cards (eID) next year, saying they constitute invasion of privacy.

The Ministry of the Interior had pushed the eID scheme without any legal basis or assessing its impact on personal privacy, and keeping the public in the dark about the NT\$3.3 billion (US\$105.7 million) tender for the project, association secretary-general Chiu E-ling (邱毅) said.

The eID would become a tool for the government to track all aspects of people's daily lives, spurring tighter control and pervasive monitoring of society, and undermining national security if eID data are hacked or leaked, Chiu said.

The ministry expects to start issuing the new ID, which has an embedded electronic chip for storing digital personal information, in October next year.

The government did not hold a public hearing to discuss and monitor the program, Chiu said, adding that officials in charge had worked to cover up many questionable and contentious aspects of the scheme.

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“The Constitution upholds the right to personal privacy and against unauthorized collection of personal data,” foundation executive and attorney Lin Yu-teng (林裕騰) said. “However, the government is working to gather all personal information and embed it in a chip on a card.”

“This card will be the ‘Trojan horse’ that intrudes on every citizen’s private data. It would be disastrous to national security and impede people’s right to protection and ownership of their personal data,” he said.

The Council of Grand Justices’ Interpretation No. 603 states that the right to privacy is an indispensable fundamental right and is protected by Article 22 of the Constitution, ensuring protection of the right to private information and preventing a person’s intimate life from being infringed upon by others, Lin said.

As the ministry has disregarded people’s rights under the Constitution, the foundation will launch a lawsuit to defend people’s right to privacy and offer legal assistance to those who refuse the new IDs.

While the Household Registration Act (戶籍法) states that ID cards are a requirement for citizens, “it does not say that an embedded electronic chip on an ID is needed, hence, there is no legal basis for such a scheme,” Chiu said.

The ministry yesterday released a statement saying that the new digital card has a legal framework for protection of personal information and strict conditions are in place to limit data use.

Compared with the paper version, it “will offer even better protection of personal information and uphold the right of self-determination of information,” it said.

“The new eID will have the same functions as the current ID for identifying an individual and will contain even less information. It will have a more advanced anti-counterfeiting feature and the electronic chip data will have the added protection of needing a password to access information,” it said.

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