

ECFA to continue despite poll outcome

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Premier Wu Den-yih (吳登毅) said yesterday there was no need to revise the government's cross-strait policies despite the party's lackluster performance in Saturday's local elections.

Wu made the remarks when asked for comment on whether the poll results would affect the government's plans for an economic cooperation framework agreement (ECFA) with China or its other cross-strait policies.

"There is no need to fine-tune our cross-strait policy," Wu said, adding that the government would pursue policies in line with the principles of "putting Taiwan first" and "benefiting the public."

An ECFA can be signed as long as three conditions are met: The nation needs it, the public supports it and there is legislative oversight, he said, adding that the ECFA will proceed as scheduled — meaning that it should be inked at the fifth round of cross-strait talks early next year.

"That's the plan for now, but we need more public support," Wu said. "Surveys conducted recently showed that approval rates were between 50 and 56 percent. If the rate goes above 60 percent and the disapproval rate falls below 20 percent that will be better for signing the ECFA."

The government has not dispelled the public's misunderstandings concerning the ECFA, Wu said, adding that it would step up its efforts.

"In southern Taiwan, there are people saying that the government has allowed [imports of] many agricultural products from the mainland since [President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) took office], but that's not true ... Also, on labor matters, there is a false rumor about [Taiwan importing] mainland workers [after signing an ECFA]," Wu said.

At a separate setting yesterday, Ma vowed to forge ahead with the ECFA, but promised to keep the legislature informed and make the negotiations and content as transparent as possible.

Ma said his administration would work to convince the public that not signing an ECFA would be detrimental to the nation.

"Our policy is to take a Taiwan-centric approach," he said. "We will further the interests of Taiwanese. Cross-strait negotiations will benefit both sides if they are conducted under the principle of equality and dignity."

Ma made the remarks while meeting winners of this year's National Outstanding Manager Awards at the Presidential Office yesterday morning.

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With the fourth round of high-level, cross-strait talks scheduled to take place in Taichung later this month, Ma said there would not be any “politically sensitive language” in the agreements to be signed because they were “very technical” in nature.

The talks between Straits Exchange Foundation Chairman Chiang Pin-kung (蔣經國) and his Chinese counterpart, Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait Chairman Chen Yunlin (陳雲林), will address four issues: fishing industry cooperation, quality checks of agricultural products, cooperation on inspection and certification, and preventing double taxation.

Ma said he has asked government agencies to make the four agreements as transparent as possible. Citing the financial memorandum of understanding (MOU) recently signed with Beijing, Ma said the public would know that it is not political as soon as the Financial Supervisory Commission makes public the content. In order to maintain the principles of equality and dignity, Ma said both sides had used less sensitive titles to dodge the sovereignty issue.

“Because the public is very concerned about this, we are very sensitive in handling the matter,” he said.

As the two sides will “exchange opinions” on an ECFA during the Chiang-Chen meeting, Ma said the government would report to the legislature before the ECFA is signed and send the agreements to the legislature for approval after they are signed.

“Thus there will be discussion and the information will be transparent,” he said. “If not, the public could misunderstand and we would have greater difficulty pushing this policy.”

Calling the ECFA necessary, Ma said it was not easy to sign free-trade agreements with the nation’s major trading partners because they were not diplomatic allies.

“But if we can make a breakthrough in an ECFA with the mainland, other countries may be more willing to negotiate with us and this is very important for Taiwan,” he said. “If we don’t overcome such obstacles, it will have a negative impact on Taiwan’s trading business. This is a problem that no party in power can avoid.”

On Chinese agricultural products, Ma said the government had not allowed imports of new products over the past 19 months, nor would they do so if the country signed an ECFA or “anything else,” he said.

At a separate setting yesterday, KMT Legislator Huang Chao-shun (黃朝峻) said the KMT risked another blow in future elections unless the government revises its cross-strait policies.

“The ECFA, cross-strait policies and US beef [imports] caused the KMT to fail in [Saturday’s] elections. Voters taught the KMT a lesson. If it does not change, they will teach it another lesson,” she said.

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Meanwhile, at the legislature, Minister of Economic Affairs Shih Yen-hsiang (謝長廷) agreed with KMT Legislator Lai Shyh-bao's (賴幸雄) proposal that a TV debate be held to inform the public about the ECFA.

Lai said the ECFA lacked public support mainly because the ministry had not succeeded in promoting the advantages of the pact. He suggested a TV debate could help.

Shih said many people in farming regions remained unconvinced that the ECFA would not result in imports of Chinese workers and agricultural products, despite repeated assurances from the ministry.

Some underground radio shows are misleading people about the ECFA, Shih said, adding that a TV debate "could be planned" as Lai suggested.

In related news, Legislative Speaker Wang Jin-pyng (王金平) said that Taiwan must try to sign free-trade pacts with the US, Japan, Singapore, the EU and Southeastern Asian countries after inking an ECFA, as this would ease public misgivings about relying too much on China.

Wu also said that a minor Cabinet reshuffle was planned for Dec. 20.

Wu dismissed allegations that the reshuffle was related to the elections, but said: "It would be suitable for excellent county commissioners and city mayors to continue to serve the public in the Executive Yuan or at state-run enterprises once they retire as local government heads."

Source: [Taipei Times 2009/12/08](#)