

Parties condemn 'harassment' of Taiwan student

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Lawmakers across party lines yesterday urged the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to lodge a protest against China over reports that a Taiwanese student in South Korea was harassed by a group of Chinese students for displaying a Republic of China (ROC) flag.

Local media reported yesterday that the Taiwanese student, surnamed Lin (林), at South Korea's Silla University in Busan, received first prize in a Korean-language speech contest. However, after the contest, Lin was chased and besieged by a group of Chinese contestants who were angry over Lin showing an ROC flag during the speech, they said.

Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) Legislator Justin Chou (周錫宜) said Taipei should complain to the host and the Beijing government, and investigate whether officials at the Taiwanese representative office in South Korea were guilty of dereliction of duty in handling the matter.

"It was regretful that this happened ahead of the upcoming cross-strait talks. The government should lodge a protest [with Chinese authorities] during the cross-strait talks," Chou said.

Describing the incident as "outrageous," KMT Legislator Shyu Jong-shyong demanded the administration condemn the Beijing government and its people for their unfriendly behavior.

The government also has to voice its protest with the Seoul government if it failed to protect the Taiwanese student, Shyu said.

"There was nothing wrong with displaying our national flag or whatever the Taiwanese student said in her speech. Freedom of expression is a right that we enjoy. The Chinese might not like it, but they can't stop us from upholding this value," Shyu said.

KMT Legislator Yang Chiung-ying (楊昌穎) said Beijing should apologize although she believed that it was an isolated incident.

"Displaying the national flag was normal behavior as it represents the country. Any normal person would do the same thing," Yang said.

Ministry Spokesman Henry Chen (陳建仁) said the Busan representative office would look into the matter, adding that the organizers had said there was no report of violence and that the media might have exaggerated it.

The ministry is in contact with Lin to clarify what happened, Chen said.

"We will do what needs to be done," Chen said. "However, we must have a clear picture of the incident before taking any action such as lodging a protest."

Meanwhile, Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) lawmakers blamed the incident on President

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Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) "diplomatic truce," which they said was a form of self-denigration and humiliation designed to please Beijing.

DPP Legislator Tsai Huang--liang (黃煌煒) said what happened in Busan was a "typical example" of the failure of Ma's diplomatic policy.

"If our own government doesn't even care about safeguarding the nation's sovereignty, why should the citizens of any other country respect Taiwan? What the Chinese students did was indirectly permitted by Ma," he said.

DPP Legislator Chen Ting-fei (陳亭妃) said despite the so-called truce, tensions between people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait were worse than ever "because Chinese hostility toward Taiwan has spread from the government down to the individual level."

"Ma's weak stand when confronted with China has made Chinese students overseas feel it's perfectly fine to oppress Taiwanese students in non-political venues," she said.

"Ma kept saying the cross-strait détente will help bridge understanding between the two sides, but the reality is, it has only made the Chinese think we are easy pickings," she said.

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