

Ma visits former president Lee, KMT's Lien Chan

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President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) visited former president Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) yesterday to wish him a happy Lunar New Year.

During the 50-minute visit, Ma and Lee discussed energy conservation and water resources, said Presidential Office Spokesman Wang Yu-chi (王郁琦), adding that Lee also expressed concern about medical care, asking the government to attach importance to the development of related industries.

Ma's plan to sign an economic cooperation framework agreement (ECFA) with China, however, was not discussed, Wang said.

Lee urged the government to pay close attention the problem of inflows of hot money, Wang said.

Vice President Vincent Siew (宋楚瑜) paid a separate visit to Lee yesterday morning.

Earlier in the day, Ma visited former vice president and Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) chairman Lien Chan (連戰) after making a trip to Taipei's Ciyou Temple (慈佑廟) in Songshan District (松山), one of the oldest temples dedicated to the goddess Matsu.

Ma prayed for a safe and promising year for the country and distributed red envelopes with chocolate gold coins to temple visitors. He also promoted the ECFA plan.

"Taiwan's aim in signing an ECFA with [China] is to boost business for everyone and enhance the country's competitiveness," Ma said.

As the economy has shown signs of recovery, tackling unemployment would be one of the government's priorities, he said.

Ma said Taiwan should sign an ECFA as soon as possible because many Taiwanese firms operating in China will lose their competitive edge in that market as ASEAN-made products, which face zero tariffs as of this year, grab a bigger market share.

ASEAN-China trade agreements will hurt Taiwanese firms and result in more unemployment in this country, Ma said, adding that signing an ECFA would be good for the nation's future and create jobs.

The government will pay attention to ECFA's impact on farmers and workers and will spend NT\$95 billion (US\$ 2.96 billion) in 10 years to help those sectors.

Critics, however, have warned the pact would jeopardize Taiwan's sovereignty, make it economically dependent on China and lead to an influx of Chinese capital and goods.

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