

Protesters demand referendum

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Braving the rain, a group of protesters yesterday marched from Taipei's Longshan Temple (龍山寺) to the Executive Yuan calling on the government not to prevent the rightful expression of popular will on a proposed cross-strait trade pact through a referendum.

The Executive Yuan's Referendum Review Committee is slated to convene a meeting on June 3 to decide whether a referendum question proposed by the Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU) conforms to the requirements of a referendum proposal.

The TSU has proposed the question: "Do you agree that the government should sign an economic cooperation framework agreement [ECFA] with China?"

The Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) government believes an ECFA is necessary to keep Taiwan from being economically marginalized as other countries sign free-trade agreements with China. It hopes to ink the deal with Beijing by the end of next month.

Critics say that workers and industries will suffer once cheaper Chinese products flood the market, that Taiwan's sovereignty will be undermined and that the deal makes Taiwan too economically dependent on China.

PROPOSAL

People Matters, the group that organized the march yesterday, asked the committee not to reject the proposal as it did last August after a similar drive by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), on the grounds that its referendum question was based on a hypothetical situation.

Cheng Li-chiun (鄭麗君), a member of the group, said the KMT government should not reject a referendum proposal that has garnered more than 100,000 signatures.

SIGNATURES

The Referendum Act (公職人員選舉罷免法) stipulates that for the first phase of a referendum drive, an individual or organization must collect signatures from 0.5 percent of the number of qualified voters in the last presidential election — which was around 80,000 people in this case.

Of the nearly 200,000 signatures the TSU has already collected, 110,000 petition forms were delivered to the Central Election Commission last month for review and then forwarded to the Referendum Review Committee for further deliberation.

The protesters called on the government to dismiss the Referendum Review Committee and accept the right to a referendum.

A separate rally against an ECFA was also held last night by the Taiwan Society.

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The rally featured stalls set up on Liberty Square selling “Made in Taiwan” produce and industrial products — part of a campaign to draw attention to the fact that an ECFA with China would jeopardize local industries and flood Taiwan with sub-standard products from China.

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