

Miaoli farmers plead for action

Written by Taipei Times
Thursday, 01 July 2010 08:43 -

More than 100 residents from Miaoli County's Jhunan Township (竹南) and their supporters staged demonstrations again in front of the Executive Yuan and the Presidential Office yesterday, urging the central government to intervene in the county government's takeover of their land.

"Help us! We're about to become homeless," Huang Shu-e (黃淑娥), a resident of Jhunan's Dapu (大埔), a farming village, told the crowd in front of the Presidential Office.

Holding up a picture of four police officers hauling her away from her rice paddy on Monday, Huang broke down in tears.

"What crime have I committed? [Miaoli County Commissioner] Liu Cheng-hung (劉成雄) is taking away our land. Is it a crime to defend our land?" she asked.

Huang said she has been a farmer all her life. She owns a 4,800m² plot on which she not only plants rice but has also built a three-story house.

"Now they're taking over my land, along with my house, and are going to compensate me with NT\$2 million [US\$62,000]. What can I do with NT\$2 million?" Huang said.

She said she wouldn't get rich farming, but at least she wouldn't have a problem making a living on the farm.

"When the county government takes away my land and my house, I'll have to get a mortgage to buy another house and find a job to pay the mortgage," she said. "What job can I find when I'm almost 50 years old?"

Huang's land is among the 28 hectares that the government is expropriating to expand Jhunan Science Park.

LAND TITLES

Although many Dapu farmers have refused to hand their land titles to the county government, the government insists it completed the legal process required for acquiring as well as transferring land ownership earlier this year.

On June 9, the county government unexpectedly sent in excavators to dig up some of the rice paddies in Dapu. On Wednesday last week, the farmers and their supporters staged demonstrations in front of the Presidential Office and the Control Yuan and received a promise from the Presidential Office that it would look into the issue and give them an answer within a week.

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However, the county government flattened most of rice paddies in the village on Monday.

Hsieh Chien-hsiang (許建祥), an elderly farmer from the Erchongpu (二重埔) community in Jhudong Township (竹東), Hsinchu County, which is facing a similar problem, was at the rally to voice his support for fellow farmers.

“Why do we need so many factories, especially when we have such a low food self-sufficiency rate?” Hsieh asked. “If one day, the import of food supplies and crops are blocked, how will we feed our children and grandchildren?”

After getting promises from Presidential Office and the Executive Yuan to “look further into the issue,” the demonstrators moved to Huashan 1914 Creative Park, where President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) was attending a conference on environmental protection, hoping that the president would listen to them.

Though demonstrators shouted as Ma walked out of the venue, he left without acknowledging them.

The county government will proceed with the construction as scheduled, said Chiang Sung-mao (蔣崇毛), director of Miaoli County’s Economic Development Department.

‘NO CONTROVERSY’

“We’ve completed all the legal process, there’s no controversy, we’re acting according to the law,” he said by telephone.

The latest wave of farmers’ protest highlights the difficulty faced by local technology firms in acquiring land to build factories.

Chimei Innolux Corp, the nation’s biggest LCD panel maker, yesterday said it would bid for the land to build new factories in Miaoli only after the county government has solved the land acquisition dispute, according to company spokesman Eddie Chen (陳國治).

Chimei’s rival, AU Optronics Corp, also faced a similar problem and was forced to put on hold the construction of a new advanced factory in central Taiwan.

Source: [Taipei Times - 2010/07/01](#)