

China begins M503 route tests

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The Civil Aeronautics Administration (CAA) said that China started testing its proposed M503 flight route at 11am yesterday, adding that Beijing had informed Taiwan about the test in advance, while the Ministry of National Defense (MND) and the Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) said they were closely monitoring the situation.

The test was carried out by Chinese aircraft following the route to test the accuracy of guidance given by navigational facilities, it added.

“We have information on how China planned to test the M503 flight route in the Shanghai flight information region [FIR] and have relayed the information to related agencies through existing mechanisms,” the administration said.

Separately, MND spokesperson David Lo (洛建國) said that the military closely monitored the test, and could respond immediately in the case of an emergency.

MAC Deputy Minister Wu Mei-hung (吳美紅) said that China had Taiwan’s consent before the test.

China had said that it would start using the route on March 5.

However, Taipei said that the move was “unilateral” and “unacceptable,” because Beijing had not discussed safety issues with Taipei per customary practice among members of the International Civil Aviation Organization.

Although the new route is within the purview of the Shanghai FIR, it sparked security concerns in Taiwan as it is just 7.8km from the median line of the Taiwan Strait.

Taiwan on March 2 said that the M503 flight route would become official only after China conducted flight tests, adding that China has agreed to move the final flight path 6 nautical

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miles (11.1km) to the west of the original route and to use the route solely for one-way flights from north to south.

Beijing has said that the flight paths were “necessary for economic and social development, as well as flight security,” citing congestion of its A470 path as the main reason for plotting M503.

Meanwhile, Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) spokesman Cheng Yun-peng (鄭雲鵬) said that even though the council said China conducted the trial flight of the M503 route with the Taiwanese government’s approval, China can always make threats and get its way.

“China was able to force Taiwan to go along with its unilateral move to open new flight routes without first negotiating them with Taiwan, which is a breach of the spirit of international civil aviation conventions,” he said.

“The DPP has lodged a formal protest against China for forcing the Taiwanese government to accept its deal,” he said.

“The DPP insists that all cross-strait agreements should be concluded bilaterally, especially where international conventions are relevant,” he added.

Also, the DPP asked the MND to expound on dangers the route could pose to national security, he said.

Additional reporting by Chen Wei-han and Loa lok-sin

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