

M503 protest ends in scuffles, fines

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Members of the Taiwan Solidarity Union's (TSU) youth organization TSU Youth are detained after a protest at the presidential residence in Taipei yesterday.

Photo: Fang Pin-chao, Taipei Times

Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU) members in the early hours of yesterday staged a protest outside the presidential residence ahead of China's scheduled inauguration of the controversial M503 flight route today.

Protesters shouted: "Withdraw the M503 flight route" and "President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九), step down."

Loud screams broke the quiet night near the presidential residence when several men and women holding protest signs arrived by van and motorcycle, and ran toward the entrance gate on Chongqing S Road in Taipei.

Security guards were immediately alerted, with several plainclothes officers rushing to the site of the protest and quickly confronting the participants.

However, as officers tried to gain control of the situation in front of the gate, another group of protesters arrived at the northeastern corner of the presidential residence, spreading red paint on a wall.

More officers rushed from across the street, wielding metal shields and batons.

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“We are here to demand that Ma decline to accept China’s inauguration of the M503 flight route, because it is a trap for Taiwan, and Ma is selling out Taiwan’s interests,” TSU Youth director Chang Chao-lin (張朝麟) said as he was dragged away by security personnel.

“We call on all Taiwanese to stand up, we should all stand up in protest against Ma,” he added.

Besides clashes with the protesters, there were also minor verbal disputes between military police officers and journalists, as officers initially tried to prohibit journalists from taking pictures of the paint-splattered wall.

A total of 13 protesters were later taken to the nearby Zhongzheng Second Police Precinct Office for interrogation.

Deputy Precinct Chief Yu Tseng-hsiang (余宗祥) said the protesters who threw red paint at the presidential residence would be charged with violating the Waste Disposal Act (廢棄物清理法).

Each was fined NT\$6,000 for the waste disposal violations. Eight protesters also faced charges of interfering with public functions over the clash, a police officer said.

Presidential Office spokesman Charles Chen (陳昌華) condemned the protest as an “act of violence.”

“The Republic of China is a democracy, and Taiwan is a society with the rule of law,” he said. “Any political appeal should be made based on the rule of law, and not surpass the boundary of being peaceful and rational.”

The protesters were released after questioning, and vowed to take further actions if the government does not respond positively to their demands.

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