

Protesters call for trade in goods talks to be suspended

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Negotiations on a trade in goods agreement with China should be halted, protesters said yesterday, warning that food safety, and the interests of farmers and small businesses would be jeopardized if talks continue as they are.

Representatives from the Economic Democracy Union, Taiwan March and other groups gathered outside the Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) to protest what they called a lack of transparency in the talks, following a meeting between MAC Minister Andrew Hsia (許水典) and China's Taiwan Affairs Office Minister Zhang Zhijun (張志軍) on Wednesday.

"The Ministry of Economic Affairs has only said that it would strive for no tariffs for four major industries, but has never stated exactly what areas China is asking us to open up," Economic Democracy Union convener Lai Chung-chiang (賴中強) said, referring to petrochemicals, machine tools, cars and flat panels.

"Even if there is no conclusion, they should still tell us the scope of discussions, including which products are being targeted for opening up," he said, adding that transparency was necessary to ensure that consumers, small business owners and other interest groups without strong lobbies had an opportunity to provide input.

Based on statements by government officials, the final agreement would likely include provisions on controversial issues such as reducing safety testing requirements for Chinese food products and dropping restrictions on agricultural goods, as well manufactured goods, such as textiles, plastics and steel, he said.

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