

Japan association name-change lauded

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Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) lawmakers yesterday lauded the Interchange Association, Japan's decision to change its name to the Japan-Taiwan Exchange Association, saying that the move would clarify Taiwan-Japan ties and be a milestone in relations between the two nations.

Japan ended formal recognition of Taiwan in 1972 and subsequently established the non-official Interchange Association, Japan, to act as its de facto embassy in Taipei.

After Japan severed diplomatic ties with Taiwan in 1972 due to political concerns there was no official channel established to handle Taiwan-Japan relations, DPP Legislator Hsiao Bi-khim (蕭碧霞) said, adding that the changing of the name allowed for further clarification of the function and role of the association.

The change is an important and positive move, DPP Legislator Lo Chih-cheng (羅智強) said, adding that it is a step toward a more normal and correct environment for Taiwan-Japan ties.

Nine out of 10 people would not have been able to recognize the association from its original name, Lo said, adding that its Taiwanese counterpart should also change its name to the Taiwan-Japan Exchange Association.

The move is a great thing, DPP Legislator Pasuya Yao (姚寶元) said, adding that if Taiwan was able to rectify the names of its governmental offices on foreign soil, it would highlight the significance of US president-elect Donald Trump's reference to President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) as the "President of Taiwan."

We hope the Ministry of Foreign Affairs seeks to obtain international recognition of "Taiwanese identification," Yao said.

While expressing respect for the name change, People First Party Legislator Lee Hung-chun (李鴻元) said he did not see it as an olive branch that would further Taiwan-Japan, adding that it

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was Japan's right to name its associations as it sees fit.

We hope that such a move does not antagonize China and that the international community would also adjust its views toward Taiwan, Lee said, adding that he hopes cross-strait negotiations could dissolve prejudices on both sides.

Meanwhile, former minister of foreign affairs Chen Chien-jen (陳建生) said that usually both the nation which has set up an association and the nation in which the association is set up in have to reach an agreement when the name of a foreign establishment is changed.

The Japanese would have asked the ministry its opinions over the matter and for the change to have been passed signifies that the ministry agreed with the change, Chen said.

At the initial phase after Japan and the People's Republic of China (PRC) established diplomatic ties, Japan was very sensitive and cautious in handling relations with Taipei, Chen said, adding that Japan often avoided mentioning "Taiwan."

With the US setting a precedent in accepting the name "Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the United States," other nations have also begun accepting the format Chen said, adding that it shows that Taiwan's relations with other nations are improving, Chen said.

Compared with other nations, "Japan's reaction was slow," Chen said, adding that the proposed name change signifies that the Japanese government thinks such an act does not contravene its understanding of the "one China" policy and that China would not be angry over the situation.

The changing of the name is a small elevation in Taiwan-Japan ties, but Tsai's administration should nonetheless seek to define its role — for the greater interest of the nation — in terms of cross strait and Taiwan-US relations, Chen said, adding that comparatively, Japan was not very important.

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