

Groups call for probe into professors' language ban

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Taipei City Councilor Miao Po-ya of the Social Democratic Party, right, speaks at a news conference held in Taipei yesterday by the Taiwan Association of University Professors and the Taiwan Forever Society in response to National Taiwan University professor Jerome Geaun's remark that speaking Hoklo is similar to smoking cigarettes.

Photo: CNA

Academics and legal experts yesterday asked the Control Yuan to investigate alleged breaches of the National Languages Development Act (國語發展法) at National Taiwan University (NTU), after two professors instituted a rule that school meetings must be conducted in Mandarin only.

The issue had been raised repeatedly and complaints had been filed against biology professor Shih Hsiu-hui (謝秀惠) and agricultural economics professor Jerome Geaun, but NTU governing officials did not take corrective measures, Taiwan Association of University Professors (TAUP) deputy chairman Chen Li-fu (陳立夫) said.

"The two NTU professors ruled to ban the speaking of Hoklo [commonly known as Taiwanese] and all other mother tongues, and use Mandarin exclusively at meetings. It is illegal... They are bullying people who speak other mother tongues and denying them their rights," Chen said at yesterday's media briefing.

Attorney Huang Di-ying (黃迪盈), who is chairman of the Taiwan Forever Society, asked the Control Yuan to investigate the matter, which could lead to the impeachment of NTU officials if they were to be found to have breached the act.

NTU receives government funding, so its budget as paid for by taxpayers, Huang said.

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"Therefore NTU, as a public-supported institution, must adhere to the law, and the Control Yuan has the authority to ... investigate officials in the nation's education system."

The incident in question took place at an NTU Cooperative Shop board meeting on July 30, when student representative Sun Phok-ju (孫福聚) spoke in Hoklo, but was ordered to stop by Shih, the chairwoman, who said that Geaun had proposed a motion for the meeting to be conducted in Mandarin only.

Geaun was at the June 30 meeting and justified his motion by comparing speaking Hoklo to smoking cigarettes.

"You have the liberty to smoke, but you cannot infringe on other people's liberty," which is why there are non-smoking areas, he said.

At an earlier meeting, Shih had demanded that people only use the "official language" and said that people using any other language would not be allowed to speak and would not be recorded in the meeting's minutes, Sun said on Aug. 15.

"I talked about our rights to speak our mother tongue, and mentioned the National Languages Development Act, but it was no use. Shih would not allow us, even though we had people at the meeting who were willing to act as translators," Sun said. "When I tried to explain, Shih told me to shut up, and said I had no right to speak at the meeting."

NTU Taigi Bun Sia, a student club that promotes the use of Hoklo, together with seven other school clubs and organizations earlier this month issued a joint statement to protest the two professors' alleged actions.

The statement called on school officials to invalidate the proposed motion, and demanded that the professors make a public apology.

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So far, NTU has not taken corrective measures, only issuing a statement to remind people of the need to respect all languages, Chen said.

The school is trying to sweep the matter under the rug by shielding the two professors and claiming that NTU can deal the issue on its own, he said.

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