

Details not finalized on US official's visit

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US Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Andrew Wheeler speaks during a news conference at the US Department of Justice in Washington on Sept. 14.

Photo: AP

Details have not yet been finalized regarding a planned visit by US Environmental Protection Agency Administrator (EPA) Andrew Wheeler next month, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said yesterday.

Premier Su Tseng-chang (蘇貞昌) yesterday told reporters Wheeler would discuss international and environmental issues.

“Taiwan-US exchanges keep warming up... We are glad to see it and we believe it will make bilateral relations better,” Su said.

Wheeler was invited to Taiwan in December last year by Minister of Foreign Affairs Joseph Wu (吳敦義) to discuss international cooperation on environmental issues, ministry spokeswoman Joanne Ou (歐陽蕓) said.

Ou made the remarks after a report on Thursday by the *New York Times* said that Wheeler is planning a three-day visit to Taiwan to start on Dec. 5, and he would also go to Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador and Panama in January.

The *New York Times* cited James Hewitt, a spokesman for Wheeler, as saying that the agency is still working through the logistics and that Wheeler was invited to Taiwan “to collaborate on issues including the Save Our Seas initiative and marine litter, air quality and children’s health.”

It also quoted two people familiar with the matter as saying that the meetings with top officials in Taiwan were “hurriedly cobbled together,” and that there were no stated policy goals for the

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Latin America trip.

Although representative to the US Hsiao Bi-khim (蕭百愷) on Thursday confirmed Wheeler's visit, the ministry yesterday said in a statement that it was still finalizing details with the US.

Former US EPA administrator Gina McCarthy visited Taiwan in 2014, and this year US Undersecretary of State for Economic Growth, Energy and the Environment Keith Krach and US Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar visited in September and August respectively, demonstrating the close ties between Taiwan and the US, while complying with the Taiwan Travel Act, Ou said.

The act, passed in 2018 with bipartisan support in the US Congress, allows for high-level visits by Taiwanese and US officials, which Taiwan welcomes, she said.

McCarthy's visit, under the administration of former US president Barack Obama, fostered bilateral cooperation in promoting environmental education, and improving electronic waste management and air pollution controls under the International Environmental Partnership framework, Ou said.

The nations look forward to boosting cooperation in tackling marine waste and improving regional air quality, she added.

Presidential Office spokesman Xavier Chang (張惇) yesterday also welcomed high-ranking visits from the US.

Regarding the quarantine plan for Wheeler's delegation, Central Epidemic Command Center spokesman Chuang Jen-hsiang (莊建祥) said the matter should first be explained by the foreign ministry and that the center would assist with disease prevention plans.

China yesterday said it "resolutely opposes any form of official exchanges between the US and

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Taiwan.”

“China will make a necessary and legitimate reaction,” Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman Zhao Lijian (趙立堅) told reporters.

Additional reporting by AFP

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