

## KMT vice chair's China trip draws fire

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Chinese Nationalist Party Vice Chairman Andrew Hsia yesterday speaks to reporters at Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport.

**Photo: CNA**

Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) Vice Chairman Andrew Hsia (洪耀星) yesterday left with a delegation for a trip to China, drawing fire for visiting at a time when Beijing has been conducting intensive military drills to pressure Taiwan.

Before boarding, he told reporters that the delegation would be visiting Taiwanese communities and students in China, and possibly meet with Chinese officials.

The Mainland Affairs Council on Tuesday night said that it was not the right time for political party members to visit China, as Beijing has been conducting military exercises since Thursday last week.

President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文), chairperson of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), told a party meeting yesterday that the trip has not only disappointed Taiwanese, but could send a wrong message to the international community.

Hsia yesterday insisted that he was doing the right thing by looking after the needs of Taiwanese in China.

“This trip had already been planned, and we cannot halt it because of the Chinese military exercise going on right now,” he said.

“I know there are objections against this visit, but we have an open society and respect different opinions... Some say this is not the right time, but if I can achieve results, then it is the right time,” he said.

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“We will meet with the Taiwanese business community in China, as well as Taiwanese workers and students, who are facing hardships right now. So this is a good time to enhance dialogue and communication with them,” he said.

Delegation members include KMT Mainland Affairs Department head Lin Chu-chia (林錫山), deputy head Teng Tai-hsien (滕泰先) and Kao Su-po (高素波), director of the party's main think tank, among others.

“The trip has no political intentions,” with all scheduled stops and activities decided by KMT top officials, a news release said. “The delegation will not visit Beijing, and has no plans to discuss political issues with Chinese government representatives.”

However, according to a KMT insider who spoke to the Chinese-language Liberty Times (the sister paper of the Taipei Times), the delegation originally planned to visit Beijing and meet with Taiwan Affairs Office Minister Liu Jieyi (劉傑宜) and Zhang Zhijun (張志君), the top Chinese official in charge of Taiwan relations, but it was scrapped after the itinerary was leaked.

Asked if he would meet with top Chinese officials, Hsia said: “We are guests in China and will follow the activities arranged by our hosts.”

If the hosts want us to meet important Chinese figures, “we will not reject such an arrangement,” he added.

According to the KMT insider, “it was an invitation for the delegation to visit by the Beijing leadership, and the original theme focused on new opportunities across the Taiwan Strait and the KMT's role in history, but [KMT] officials added to the main agenda how to dilute anti-China sentiment in Taiwan and explain the KMT's current US-friendly stance.”

Hsia told reporters that “all delegation members have more than 10 years of related experience and we will not succumb to ‘united front’ tactics with just one visit to China.”

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The trip has also sparked protests among some KMT councilors and younger party members, who have started a petition called “Stop the Visit, Listen to Public Opinion.”

KMT New Taipei City councilor candidate Lu Chia-kai (盧建榮) slammed the visit as “lacking legitimacy and good reason.”

“Hsia should clearly state his position before departure to mitigate public worries. This exchange could affect the future of our nation, as China is conducting military exercises around Taiwan right now... If war breaks out, it is the youth, the younger generation, who will have to go to battle.”

The petition, launched by KMT Chiayi County Councilor Tsao Chia-hao (蔡啟芳), says: “Taiwan has been facing Chinese military drills for days and the possibility that they could intrude on Republic of China territory. The visit, with its stated aim of helping Taiwanese communities in China, lacks a rationale for people to support the party’s decision.”

Additional reporting by CNA

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