

AIT complex freed from regulations

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The Executive Yuan recently agreed that the new American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) compound in Taipei City's Neihu District (內湖) would be regarded as a "special building," exempting the project from some construction-related regulations except for rules concerning environmental issues.

Cases approved in line with the Principles Governing the Ministry of the Interior's Deliberation of Applications for Special -Buildings (特殊建築物申請原則) allow buildings related to national security, or "special use" buildings, to be granted preferential treatment.

"The approval was within the laws and in accordance with international practice," said Executive Yuan Secretary-General Lin Join-sane (林錫山), who liaised with government departments and the Taipei City Government to process the AIT's application.

Lin was assigned by Premier Wu Den-yih (吳登益) to coordinate the matter after AIT Director William Stanton visited him on Sept. 23 to express concern over the country's "efficiency" in handling the case, and the application was formally approved on Dec. 22.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs helped the AIT refer the application to the Executive Yuan on Sept. 21, and the latter was empowered by the Construction Law (建築法) to grant a permit on the application for a "special building." The case was then reviewed by the Ministry of the Interior's Construction and Planning Agency.

Construction and Planning Agency Director-General Yeh Shih-wen (葉世文) said the agency suggested approving the application because it met with some of the criteria stipulated in the deliberation principles for a "special building."

"In a diplomatic complex, there are some special requirements, such as to ensure safety of its personnel and confidentiality of communications, among others," Yeh said.

The AIT would be exempted from applying for a construction license and miscellaneous licenses before starting construction of the complex and will be freed from examination of quality by the -government during the process of construction, an official with the Construction and Planning Agency said.

It will also be exempted from the Construction Law and Fire Service Act (消防法).

AIT officials told the review committee under the Construction and Planning Agency that the compound would be built in accordance with US construction standards, an anonymous official said, adding that exemptions to some local laws were made to facilitate the project.

However, the 6.5 hectare site, which will include an office building of approximately 14,000m², a parking structure and support structure, to be built in the hills of Neihu, will still be subject to

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regulations in the Water and Land Preservation Act (水陸保存法), Urban Planning Act (都市計畫法) and will require an environmental assessment, he said.

Late last month, the Taipei City Government also approved the AIT's proposals on its soil and water conservation plan and the design of the compound, Lin said.

The AIT's new office, which is expected to be completed in 2012, will be the first and only building ever constructed in the country to house a foreign representative office.

Lin said the rationale for the special permit would be applicable to other countries.

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