

Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) Secretary-General King Pu-tsung (蔣經國) yesterday defended the party's proposal to introduce special guards in the legislature to maintain order, saying the system would prevent fistfights and other clashes among legislators from damaging the nation's reputation.

"There are too many violent clashes in the legislature, which damages the nation's reputation abroad ... We looked into effective measures used in the US and Europe, and the proposal is still under discussion," King said yesterday in Chiayi County.

King said the proposal was presented last week by KMT think tank member Stephen Chen (陳雲), a former representative to the US. In the US, a Sergeant at Arms and Doorkeepers maintain order in the Senate.

President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九), who doubles as KMT chairman, supports the idea of having special guards replace the legislature's use of the police to intervene when violent clashes occur, and asked the think tank and the party to study the possibility of establishing such a mechanism in the legislature, King said.

"In a democratic society, the minority should abide by the majority. Legislators from the opposition parties should not occupy the podium even if negotiations break down," he said.

King was referring to repeated violent clashes in the legislature — the most recent on Monday — when the KMT legislative caucus pushed through a disputed amendment to the Local Government Act (地方自治法) during an extra legislative session amid fistfights, yelling, shouting and pushing.

Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) legislators occupied the podium in an attempt to block Legislative Speaker Wang Jin-pyng (王金平) from entering the building, while the KMT mobilized its legislators to escort Wang to the speaker's podium.

King condemned the opposition for using violence on the legislative floor, and said the KMT's latest TV commercial, which featured the fistfights and violent clashes, highlighted the opposition party's "irrationality" and use of violence.

King said the KMT was still studying the proposal and would address the legislature on the issue.

DPP caucus whip Lee Chun-yee (李俊毅) said yesterday that King's proposal suggested he didn't trust Wang and said that King could want to weaken Wang's authority.

DPP Policy Committee chief executive Ker Chien-ming (柯建銘) said the idea of setting up a law enforcement system "would belittle the legislature's autonomy."

Wang and Premier Wu Den-yih (吳登毅) were non-committal about the idea yesterday.

Wang told reporters that discussing special guards without first gaining a consensus on whether to entitle the speaker to use police power to maintain order within the legislature was like “putting the cart before the horse.”

Wang said that any special guard would have to take orders from the speaker or follow resolutions passed by the legislature rather than acting upon his own discretion.

The legislature is an autonomous institution where self-discipline is exercised, Wang said, adding: “Once the speaker is given the right to call upon the police to maintain order on the floor, there will be people available to enforce the speakers’ orders.”

Wang has said several times before that coercive power would not end legislative boycotts.

“The situation we have is different from other countries. [When scuffles break out,] there are not just two or three people involved, but dozens,” Wang said.

Wang, however, said he would be happy to see a statutory rule allowing the use of police power on the legislative floor, saying that it could be used “just in case.”

Wang dismissed speculation by the DPP that King proposed the idea to weaken his power as speaker, saying those who suggested so “have an overzealous imagination.”

Approached by reporters in Nantou County, Wu said the proposal was “based on good intentions” and “had nothing to do with authoritarianism” as alleged by the DPP.

Wu said that he respected the legislature’s position on whether to implement the system.

“The precondition would be that lawmakers reach a consensus on this,” he said.

KMT Legislator Lo Shu-lei (羅淑蕾) agreed with Wang, saying that lawmakers should first deliberate an amendment to the Legislators’ Conduct Act (立法委員行為法) on the speaker’s rights to call in the police.

KMT legislative caucus whip Lu Hsueh-chang (呂學樟) said that the caucus was open to public discussion on the issue, but he preferred thorough debates on all controversial issues on the legislative floor rather than using police power in the process of legislation.

Later last night after a gathering between Ma and KMT lawmakers, KMT Legislator Chang Ching-chung (張景淳) told reporters that Wang had given Ma and the legislators copies of a research paper on legislative law enforcement systems in various countries.

Ma did not give his opinion on the issue, Chang said.

KMT's King supports legislative guards

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