

Ma could cave in to PRC: opposition

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The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and the Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU) yesterday questioned the government's promise not to allow Chinese agricultural products to enter the country on the eve of the first round of official negotiations on an economic cooperation framework agreement (ECFA) today in Beijing.

TSU Chairman Huang Kun-huei (黃昆輝) cited a study by the Chinese Ministry of Commerce, which said Taiwan still bars 2,194 Chinese items from entering Taiwan — 1,360 industrial products and 834 agricultural products.

“These unreasonable limits have had a negative impact on cross-strait trading practices and have undermined further integration,” Huang cited the report as saying.

Huang said the report showed it would be impossible for Taiwan to benefit unilaterally from the pact and questioned whether President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) might soon back down and allow certain Chinese agricultural products to enter the country under pressure from Beijing.

“Could Ma promise never to allow Chinese agricultural products and labor from entering the country?” Huang said, adding that even if Beijing agreed to open the Chinese market to Taiwan without requiring reciprocal measures, it would be a “trap” to allow Taiwan to become overdependent on China economically.

DPP Legislator Huang Wei-cher (黃偉哲) said he was afraid the country would soon lift bans on Chinese agricultural products.

“The Chinese report is a serious warning and a slap in the face for Ma,” he said.

DPP spokesman Tsai Chi-Chang (蔡智昌) said the Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) belittled itself by saying that ECFA negotiations were a deal between “two regions.”

“Taiwan is a sovereign country, not a region of China. No wonder the public thinks the government cannot adequately represent the country in negotiations with Beijing when government officials belittle their own country this way.”

The MAC yesterday defined the legal status of the ECFA as a trade relationship between “two regions.”

MAC Deputy Minister Liu Te-shun (劉德勝) said that under the Act Governing Relations between the Peoples of the Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area (臺灣關係法), the relationship between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait is “region to region.”

“The legislature passed the law in 1992 and since then such a legal status has never been changed no matter who is in power, including former presidents Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) and Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) or [President] Ma Ying-jeou,” Liu said.

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“Such a theory is not something new invented by President Ma and that is why the trade pact is called a cross-strait economic framework agreement,” he said.

Liu made the remarks after being asked by the Taipei Times at a press conference yesterday morning to clarify Ma’s comments describing cross-strait ties as being “between two regions.”

Liu also said the administration did not want to specify a timeframe for the signing of a free-trade agreement (FTA) with China within an ECFA.

He did not say why, only emphasizing that cross-strait ties were “special.”

The proposed accord would proceed in a piecemeal manner, Liu said, except for items included in the “early harvest” measures.

The rest would not require a timetable, Liu said.

“In future, we will propose more items meeting our needs via this platform when necessary,” he said. “There is no need to set a 10-year timeframe.”

The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) 1994 stipulates that the working party of any interim agreement must make appropriate recommendations on the proposed timeframe and on measures required to complete the formation of the free-trade area or customs union.

Article XXIV of the GATT 1994 also states that the contracting party, believing that 10 years would be insufficient, shall provide a full explanation to the Council for Trade in Goods of the need for a longer period.

The economic framework agreement signed between ASEAN countries and China also clearly states that the trade pact is to establish an ASEAN-China FTA, within 10 years.

Liu said the government never said an ECFA would be modeled on the ASEAN-China economic framework agreement, adding that more than 200 similar trade deals have been made globally and that each one is different.

“Because of the special situation [in the Taiwan Strait], we will try to find the most appropriate model for the two sides in accordance with our needs ... one that is acceptable to both,” he said.

“It is more important to -determine the best deal for both sides via negotiations than by setting a timeframe,” he said.

With Taipei and Beijing set to begin the first round of official negotiations on an ECFA in Beijing today, Liu said both sides would not touch on the detailed content of the planned pact, including “early harvest” measures.

They hoped, however, to begin such talks as soon as possible, possibly at the beginning of

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next month, he said, adding that the administration would negotiate with the public interest in mind.

Regarding Ma's promise not to allow the import of more agricultural products from China, Liu said it would not be specified in an ECFA because the accord is a framework agreement.

Straits Exchange Foundation -Secretary-General Kao Koong-lian (高孔廉), who is leading the country's negotiation team in Beijing, said it is both an economic and social issue to open the market to more Chinese agricultural products and that the two sides would not see it as a purely economic issue when negotiating the ECFA.

Kao, however, reiterated Ma's pledge to bar workers, as well as additional agricultural products, from China.

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