

## ***Beijing rulers fearful of the people***

By Paul Lin

*'By opposing referendums, Beijing is opposing a model of democracy, not Taiwan's independence. It is concerned that referendums in Taiwan may stimulate the Chinese public's demands for democracy.'*

Today, the people of Hong Kong are set to hold the biggest street demonstration since the territory's handover to China in 1997. According to a report in the Hsin Pao newspaper, the government has conducted a survey on the matter. The authorities were shocked to find out that 18 percent of the territory's residents said they would participate in the demonstration.

Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao's trip to Hong Kong was moved ahead a day in order to avoid the demonstration and the embarrassment. Wen will not get to see the Hong Kong people's anger against Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa and his government. The organizers estimate that 100,000 people will show up for today's demonstration, but the authorities have made preparations for 200,000.

The demonstration is primarily aimed at the legislation mandated by Article 23 of the territory's Basic Law. Tung's government has stubbornly insisted on enacting the law, ignoring the opinions of residents and displaying an extremely thuggish and arrogant attitude. On top of this, the government has -- by its obstinacy and incompetence over the past six years -- caused Hong Kong to sink to the status of the worst-off among the "four Asian dragons."

The political system arranged by China in 1997 ensured that the government can do whatever it wants. The people cannot express their opinions at the ballot box. Some media institutions have also been bought off by China. Having no other choice, the people can only vote with their feet. The US has expressed concern about Hong Kong, but China has invariably rebutted it as "interference in domestic affairs."

Also, some clowns in Hong Kong have ferociously lashed out at the US. Tsang Hin-chi, a standing committee member of the National People's Congress, warned the US about China's "strength." Martin Lee, the former Democratic Party chairman who has worked to publicize Hong Kong's situation and sought help from the international

community, was rebuked by Tung and accused by pro-Communist people of being a collaborator.

The seeds of the Hong Kong people's current predicament were sowed 20 years ago, when China and the UK started negotiations on the territory's future. At the time, the people were deprived of any opportunity to state their opinions. Beijing rejected the participation of residents' representatives in the negotiation, on the grounds that it opposed a "three-legged stool." Nor did Beijing allow the people to express their wishes through a referendum. The so-called "China experts" in Britain dared not oppose Beijing.

As a result, the opinions of the people were ignored. Six million Hong Kong residents were handed over to China's authoritarian regime along with the land. It was a powerful countercurrent against the tide of democracy, followed by an interlude in which China decided to build a nuclear power plant in Daya Bay, which is adjacent to Hong Kong. One million Hong Kong people joined a signature drive to oppose the plant, but Beijing simply ignored it.

No matter how many residents oppose Article 23, the government has always used various despicable ploys to label them a minority opinion. This is because Hong Kong does not have a democratic political system. And of course the government will not allow a referendum on the matter.

Margaret Ng, a member of the Legislative Council, asked Tung: How many residents will have to take to the streets to make him stop the legislation? Tung refused to answer the question -- what is he going to do if the number he mentions actually takes to the streets?

But don't expect the authorities to stop the legislation even if 1 million people take to the streets. It may even suppress the opposition harder. But if the people of Hong Kong do not rise and protest, they will lose all opportunities to make improvements and allow themselves to be trampled upon at will.

This reminds one of the referendum issue in Taiwan. If the people of Taiwan are deprived of their rights because of China's opposition, then their nation's destiny will be just like Hong Kong's. Ultimately, not only major public policies but Taiwan's very future could be determined through referendums. No one must be allowed to depict referendums as solely concerned with "Taiwan independence."

According to some opinion polls, a majority of the public supports the pan-blue camp. In that case, unification with China may also have the support of the majority of the people. By opposing referendums, Beijing is opposing a model of democracy, not Taiwan's independence. It is concerned that referendums in Taiwan may stimulate the Chinese public's demands for democracy. This is why Beijing is opposing even referendums on public policies that do not involve Taiwan's future status.

In fact, Taiwan's presidential elections, the first of which was held in 1996, have some characteristics of a referendum -- with each person casting one vote. That was why Beijing fired missiles to oppose the democratic elections. If Taiwanese fears of rising tensions in the Taiwan Strait had been justifiable, then they should have canceled the 1996 presidential elections. Otherwise, why oppose a referendum now?

The US has expressed "concern" because it now needs China's help in the war against terrorism. The US is not opposing the people's basic rights. In light of the Chinese government's thuggish behavior, Taiwan absolutely must not give up on this principle. But it should also maintain necessary coordination with the US.

Referendums can be held on any appropriate issue at any appropriate time. Let Beijing get used to them, just like it's gotten used to Taiwan's democratic elections.

**Paul Lin is a political commentator based in New York.**



## ***Basic rights***



Members of the Taiwan chapter of the Global Coalition Against Article 23 Legislation stage a demonstration in front of the Mainland Affairs Council yesterday to ask the council to express its opposition to the anti-subversion section of Hong Kong's Basic Law.



## ***Referendums need clear definitions***

**By Ku Er-teh**

The referendum issue has increased tensions between the ruling and opposition camps and has made cross-strait relations tense as well. Even the US has stepped in to apply pressure.

Whether we speak of plebiscites on major issues affecting the nation's sovereignty or territory, or of referendums for amending the Constitution, or directly consulting the public on policy issues -- in either case we are affirming that ultimately sovereignty lies in the hands of the public.

A referendum is the public's ultimate weapon. It can express the general will of the public and it also serves as a weapon for the public to use against the political elite. If there is incompetence or corruption among the political elite, or if they don't decide on policies that are beneficial to the people, or if they make decisions that run counter to the people's interests, then the public can express its will through a referendum and exercise political power.

If a referendum is held on a question of domestic policy, it might not involve international or external factors, but referendums related to sovereign territory and foreign policy would do so.

For this reason, many people fear that a referendum on joining the World Health Organization will lead to even greater pressure from China and the US. This kind of threat or warning is often directed at the political elite. This also reveals a bizarre phenomenon -- referendums are first and foremost an expression of the public will and should not be manipulated by the political elite.

But the setting of the agenda is frequently done by the political elite. This is why there are always considerations of the political elite's own interests involved in referendum issues.

The public usually plays the role of a receptor of information and opinion. Members of the political elite advocating different proposals attempt to lobby the public, thereby forcing the public to make a choice among a small number of elite candidates. A referendum is designed to help the public break free of this passive role and allow citizens to make their own choice. To achieve this, it is necessary to have a population of citizens who think clearly and carefully.

Every citizen may not have the specialized knowledge and skills of the elite, but a civil society believes that citizens can cultivate the skills to judge between suggestions from the elite as well as participate in political discussions. This ability to think clearly and carefully requires that society create a public forum for objective discussions of opinion. Only then will citizens develop a policymaking ability.

Whether or not a given issue is put to a referendum, the political elite should always consult with the general public about it. Why carry out a referendum? What repercussions might there be? These questions should be the focus of discussion in public forums between members of the political elite and among the public. They should not be answered by the political elite alone in a provocative or threatening way.

Referendums can be a way of training citizens to think clearly and carefully. Whether or not this can be accomplished, the political elite must respect the will of the people.

The weapon of referendums should be in the hands of the people and should not be a tool that political figures can use at their discretion.

If President Chen Shui-bian really intends to build a referendum system, he should proceed systematically and not raise the stakes to the level of calling a plebiscite on the issue of sovereignty first off.

From Chen's approval of referendums before he was elected, to his opposition after he took office to a referendum on the independence issue, to his current call once again for referendums -- it is difficult to determine what he thinks about referendums.

Perhaps what he most needs is to clarify in his own mind and then explain to the people.

**Ku Er-teh is a freelance writer.**



## *China extends its tentacles to Morocco*

**DIPLOMATIC ISOLATION: Taiwan's delegation to a women's summit in Marrakech says Beijing succeeded in preventing them from clearing customs in Morocco**

By Monique Chu

STAFF REPORTER

Three members of Taiwan's delegation to the Global Summit of Women yesterday protested against what they said was Beijing's interference in their attendance at the two-day meeting in Marrakech after being denied entry by Moroccan authorities.

"We've learned from the security staff in Morocco that it's the People's Republic of China [PRC] that has disrupted our attendance," Lee Cher-jean, deputy head of the Government Information Office, told a press conference yesterday afternoon.

Lee, who led the four-member delegation to the summit, said the team was denied entry upon arrival at the airport in Marrakech on Friday when the local authorities claimed the delegation's visas were invalid.

"They said the unit [the General Consulate of Morocco in Hong Kong] that had issued the visas had not been authorized to do so by [Morocco's] top authorities," she said.

The team was traveling with valid travel documents along with formal invitations from Irene Natividad, the summit chairwoman, Lee said.

Rosa Yang, chairwoman of the Business and Professional Women's Club in Taipei, was also denied entry despite the fact that she was traveling with a US passport and does not require a visa to enter Morocco, Lee said.

The team, after spending about 12 hours at the airport, was forced to leave for Amsterdam the next morning.

After arriving in Amsterdam, Yang returned to Morocco and was successful in entering the country, although she didn't say how she secured her entry.

She made her way to the meeting, held by a Washington-based non-governmental

organization, to distribute a protest letter to summit organizers and participants about Beijing's interference, Lee said.

Yang told the Taipei Times yesterday that she stood up during the meeting to speak for Taiwan's delegation.

"I've already made this issue known to some 100 participants at the meeting and have already issued letters to attendants here. They found China's moves unbelievable," Yang said from Morocco.

Yang declined to disclose further details.



Lee Cher-jean, deputy head of the Government Information Office, explains how her delegation was blocked from attending the Global Summit of Women during a press conference at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs yesterday.

Lee said she would issue a protest letter to the Moroccan government in her capacity as head of the delegation.

She made the comments in a briefing at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with ministry spokesman Richard Shih as well the other two team members, Yang Huang Maysing, vice chair of the ministry's Research and Planning Board, and Kristy Hsu, chairwoman of the Women and Science Committee, National Union of Women's Associations.

Shih declined to clarify whether the ministry would stage a similar protest to Morocco, but added Beijing should shoulder responsibility for the delegation's thwarted attendance.

Yang Haung said China's aggression was counterproductive.

"The more China endeavors to sabotage us internationally, the more anti-China sentiments develop among the public in Taiwan. I have no clue why China has failed to understand this point," she said.

Lee said, "China's continuous sabotage is indicative of the fact that Beijing is far from

being a mature participant in international society."

According to Lee, China has not dispatched a participant to the two-day meeting, which included a pre-summit round table for female ministers from more than 20 countries.

Yang Huang said meeting organizers should apologize to Taiwan's delegation, although Lee said the team was unable to ask summit organizers about their being stranded at the Marrakech airport.

According to Yang Huang, South Korean participants in the summit assured her that Seoul would not allow a repeat of the episode when the summit is held there next year.



## ***Top DPP official reaffirms call for national plebiscite***

**TWO BIRDS, ONE STONE: Lee Ying-yuan said that with 70 percent of the public backing plans for a referendum, it's time to move forward with reform**

CNA, TAIPEI

The DPP responsibly advocates holding a referendum before next year's presidential election on a number of policies and issues concerning the people, a DPP official said yesterday.

DPP Deputy Secretary-General Lee Ying-yuan said the DPP will see to it that a referendum is held before March next year to let the people vote on issues including the reform of the legislature, Taiwan's bid to join the World Health Organization as an observer, and the fate of the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant.

Noting that about 70 percent of the people in the country support holding referendums on major public policies, Lee said he believes that supporting referendums is equal to supporting reform.

On the issue of legislative reform, Lee noted that the DPP feels that the electoral system should be changed from the existing "single vote in multi-member districts" system -- which means one vote per citizen to choose several representatives in a constituency -- to a system of one seat in one constituency, but two ballots for each voter -- one for a candidate and one for a political party.

The number of seats in the legislature should be cut to between 150 and 160, which would be a little more than half the current 225, Lee added.

The DPP also thinks that legislators' terms of office should be extended from the current three years to four years, so that they are in sync with the term of the president, Lee said.

He went on to say that the DPP will also push for a repeal of the policy of selecting legislators among overseas Chinese and Taiwanese representatives recommended by various political parties.

Meanwhile, the KMT's legislative caucus said that once referendum legislation is completed, the KMT will first push for a public vote to cut the number of legislators by half, to about 113 seats.

Members of the PFP legislative caucus seconded the KMT's announcement shortly afterward, saying that it has been the PFP's standing policy to see a "leaner and meaner" legislature.



## *Taiwan already independent, Cabinet says*

By Ko Shu-ling

STAFF REPORTER

There is no need to hold a referendum on the nation's sovereignty because Taiwan is already an independent sovereign state, Cabinet Spokesman Lin Chia-lung said yesterday.

"If we have to hold a referendum on the nation's sovereignty, it'll only be on whether Taiwan wants to unite with China, not whether Taiwan wants to unite with China or declare independence, because we're already an independent sovereignty," Lin said.

The government will hold a referendum on sovereignty only when China has the intention to use military force against the nation or local politicians propose to unite with China, Lin said.

"While we hope the issue of the referendum will focus on public policies, the guideline to holding a referendum on the nation's sovereignty is based on the 'five-no's' pledge made by President Chen Shui-bian in his inaugural address in 2000," Lin said.

The so-called "five no's" are: no to declaring independence, no to changing Taiwan's formal name, no to enshrining "state-to-state" in the Constitution, no to endorsing a referendum on formal independence and no to abolishing the National Reunification Council or the National Reunification Guidelines.

The pledge, however, has one condition: that the Chinese Communist Party regime does not use or intend to use military force against Taiwan.

The Cabinet has sent the draft bill of the initiative and referendum law to the legislature for review and approval. Lawmakers, however, are deadlock over what issue a referendum should cover.

In addition to the Cabinet's proposal, there are at least five other versions awaiting review at the legislature.

Responding to KMT and PFP lawmakers' proposal to enact a referendum law by this month and hold the nation's first referendum next month, Lin said that the government needs between three to six months' time to prepare for the holding of a referendum.

"As it's serious and inviolable to exercise the right of referendum, we don't think it's appropriate to rush it," Lin said, adding that the result of the referendum is as important as the process.

According to Lin, it would cost the government between NT\$100 million and NT\$200 million to hold a referendum. The money could come from either the Cabinet's emergency fund or the annual budget of the government agency proposing the holding of a referendum.

Responding to public pressure, opposition lawmakers have launched a signature drive to request the legislature hold an additional special session to review referendum bills after the legislature agreed on June 21 to a DPP proposal to hold a special session to review six bills aimed at reviving the economy.

Although the Cabinet welcomes the opposition's proposal, Lin said that the Cabinet hopes the legislature gives priority to review the six economic bills during the additional four-day session that begins on Friday.

"Our stance on the matter is clear. We don't care when or whether the additional special session is held because we respect the final result of the cross-party negotiations," Lin said. "We'd really hate to see the review and final approval of the six economic bills be interfered or even crowded out during this special session if another special session request is eventually granted."

Lin said the Cabinet will express its wish to Legislative Speaker Wang Jin-pyng.



## ***Wu warns Beijing to mind own business***

By Lin Chieh-yu

STAFF REPORTER

Deputy Secretary-General of the Presidential Office Joseph Wu yesterday warned Beijing not to apply pressure to referendum plans, saying that interfering with the presidential election will only benefit the DPP and not harm President Chen Shui-bian.

"According to our information, Beijing seems to have learned its lesson from Taiwan's last two presidential elections and may do nothing during the coming presidential campaign," Wu told reporters.

"However, if China shows its anger over Taiwan's referendum policy and threatens Taiwanese, as it has done in previous presidential campaigns, we can only say, thanks for assisting us," Wu said.

Wu also said that although China is one of the major variables that affect a presidential election in Taiwan, many US think tanks and government institutes predict that Beijing will stay silent to avoid infuriating the public.

In 1996, Beijing attempted to scupper former president Lee Teng-hui's election campaign by launching missile exercises. In 2000, China Premier Zhu Rongji warned Taiwanese not to support a pro-independence candidate.

Both times China's intervention failed.

"This time, according to our intelligence data, China will neither improve relations with President Chen, which will benefit Chen's campaign, nor adopt tough action to avoid enraging voters," Wu said. "We believe that Beijing will do nothing and just watch."

As to the referendum issue, Wu said that although recent reforms over the past decade have been seen by some as moves toward independence, they have in fact helped to enhance Taiwanese confidence.

"Just as the realization of presidential elections, the amendments of the Constitution and the full legislative election have done, the referendum will be another inevitable step toward promoting Taiwanese democracy."

Wu also said that Chen will not launch a national referendum on the independence-reunification issue during his presidency, saying that Chen's inauguration speech was clear on that pledge.

