

Activists give the 'Taiwan Republic' flag a rousing cheer

STAFF WRITER , WITH AP

Shouting "Taiwan Republic! Taiwan Republic!" thousands of independence supporters yesterday held a flag-raising ceremony using the group's version of a Taiwanese national flag.

The crowd gathered in front of the Presidential Office building, sang their version of the national anthem, waved flags and chanted slogans in favor of formalizing a "Taiwan Republic."

The event started yesterday with five representatives each reciting the "Taiwan Republic Campaign" statement in five languages, namely Mandarin, Minanhua, English, Japanese and German.



Supporters of the 908 Taiwan Republic Campaign give the thumbs-up and chant slogans on Ketagalan Boulevard in Taipei yesterday during a Taiwan independence rally.

The statement stressed the need to abolish the Republic of China (ROC) Constitution, terminate the ROC system of government, promote a new constitution for the Taiwan Republic and implement a new Taiwan Republic system of government.

The crowd then sang Taiwan the Green, a poem written by John Jyigiokk, a professor at the Tainan Theological College and Seminary. It was set to music by Taiwanese composer Hsiao Tyzen in 1988.

The song conveys the message that Taiwanese will realize the dream of building an independent nation and has significant meaning for those who advocate Taiwan's democratization, according to the event's sponsor, the 908 Taiwan Republic Campaign.

Taiwanese independence supporters regard the ROC national anthem as a song of the

Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT).

The crowd also expressed their support for President Chen Shui-bian and their disdain for former Democratic Progressive Party chairman Shih Ming-teh, who is leading an anti-Chen protest starting today.

"Shih Ming-teh is a dishonest man," said Albert Shaw, a 75-year-old retired school teacher.



Freedom House gives Taiwan highest rankings on civil rights and liberty

By Jimmy Chuang

STAFF REPORTER

Taiwan received the highest ranking for its political rights and civil liberties from Freedom House in its special report, "Worst of the Worst: The World's Most Repressive Societies 2006," which was released on Wednesday.

The special report was an excerpt from the upcoming 2006 edition of Freedom in the World, in which the US-based Freedom House surveyed the progress and decline of political rights and civil liberties in 192 nations and 14 select related and disputed territories.

The survey rates each country and territory on a scale of one to seven with "one" representing the most free and "seven" the least free.

Taiwan received a "one" in both categories, while China was categorized "seven" for political rights and "six" for civil liberties.

"Taiwan being recognized as the 'most free' country in terms of political rights and civil liberties is an affirmation of Taiwan's democracy," said Government Information Office Minister and Cabinet Spokesman Cheng Wen-tsang. "The glory belongs to all

Taiwanese citizens."

Cheng said that Taiwanese citizens should be proud of themselves because the Freedom House continued to recognize Taiwan's democracy through its surveys while China continued to be categorized as a "not free" country, along with Belarus, Equatorial Guinea, Haiti and Laos.

"The gap between China and us has further deepened. We should be proud of our democratic achievements and cherish what we have," Cheng said.

Freedom House is a nongovernment organization that supports the expansion of freedom in the world.



EU model cannot be applied to Taiwan

By Huang Tien-lin

Pro-China commentators who hold up the economies of Hong Kong and Singapore as examples of why the government should further open up to China have found a new theme in Ireland, Finland and the Netherlands, and their histories of success are constantly plugged in the pro-unification media.

The comparison seems appropriate at first. The three countries are not city-state economies like Hong Kong and Singapore. Those advocating closer cross-strait economic ties argue that since these developed states, whose size and population are similar to those of Taiwan, can succeed, why can't Taiwan succeed too?

Following this logic, Premier Su Tseng-chang offered the experiences of the three countries as a theoretical foundation for opening up to China during the recent Conference on Sustaining Taiwan's Economic Development. But anyone who knows anything about the EU knows that the circumstances of those countries have no parallel in Taiwan.

Why? First, the prerequisite for joining the EU is that a member state must be independent and recognized and respected by all others. However, Taiwan's sovereignty is still disputed by China.

Second, the EU can allow countries big and small to co-exist because bigger countries such as Germany, Italy, France and Spain counterbalance each other so that smaller countries can exert influence. In terms of size, there is a wide discrepancy between Taiwan and China. If they do not stand on an equal footing, bigger countries will only swallow up smaller ones, with the smaller economies either marginalized or becoming satellites of the bigger economy.

Third, Ireland, Finland and the Netherlands have a strong national identity. Their citizens would not easily accept their country being marginalized for the sake of business interests. In Taiwan, the question of national identity remains unresolved, and this is one reason for its rapid marginalization by China.

Fourth, Ireland, Finland and the Netherlands have different languages and religious beliefs, thus permitting a natural distance from one another and insulating them from economic attraction. Taiwan does not have this natural shield to insulate it from China.

Clearly, the experiences of the Netherlands, Ireland and Finland do not apply to

Taiwan because of the current state of the cross-strait relationship. It is understandable that pro-China media would promote this concept, but I do not understand why Su is following suit. Perhaps his knowledge of macroeconomics is limited, or perhaps he is being pushed. The latter is more likely.

Taiwan's accumulated China-bound investment -- currently worth US\$300 billion -- was 86 percent of the nation's GDP last year, while South Korea's and Japan's China-bound investment accounted for a mere 1.7 percent and 1 percent of GDP respectively.

China's influence over local business interests is growing. Fortunately, the assets of Taiwanese banks are not under Chinese control. If the banks are allowed to move to China, the situation will be unsalvageable.

This is what William Kirby, a professor at Harvard University, meant when he said that Taiwan is already under Beijing's control, and one of the few things that Taiwan is still able to decide is the manner in which it wants to open itself up to China.

Taiwan's dependence on China grows every year, while its growth rate continues to decrease. It seems there is no way to stop the flow of capital and manpower to China. The government seems to be unable to stop the trend, so it is not a question of when or how Taiwan will become dependent on China; the process has started, and the pace is increasing.

Huang Tien-lin is a former national policy adviser to the president. Translated by Daniel Cheng