

# Taiwan MPs scuffle over Chinese student enrolment

(AFP)

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TAIPEI — Dozens of Taiwanese lawmakers scuffled in parliament on Wednesday over a controversial bill to open local universities to Chinese students.

Several opposition legislators manhandled Chao Li-yun of the ruling Kuomintang (KMT) party to stop her chairing a review of the bill and struggled with others who tried to come to her rescue, television footage showed.

A conference table was overturned and two lawmakers stood atop the podium shouting at each other in chaotic scenes that lasted about 20 minutes, local media said.

Chao was later hospitalised after collapsing on the scene while several female opposition lawmakers told reporters they were also injured.

Taiwan aims to admit Chinese students for the first time as early as this year to help ease a shortage of students caused by the island's dwindling birth rate and a tendency for Taiwanese students to enrol at mainland universities.

The DPP warns that an influx of young people from the mainland could pose a threat to national security and worsen unemployment.

The government "is selling out everything to China. We won't allow selling out education to China," said lawmaker Kuan Bi-ling of the opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP).

But the KMT condemned the unruly behaviour -- the second major incident of its kind in the past two years -- and demanded the opposition admit responsibility, said its parliamentary whip Lin Yi-shih.

According to forecasts, more than a third of Taiwan's 164 universities will be shut down by 2021 because they cannot enrol enough students.

Taiwanese students have been enrolling at mainland universities for years, attracted by relatively low tuition fees. An estimated 7,000 are currently studying in China.

China and Taiwan split in 1949 after a civil war but Beijing still considers the island part of its territory to be taken back by force if necessary.

Ties have improved since President Ma Ying-jeou of the KMT took office in 2008 on a China-friendly platform.