Taiwan to attend World Health Assembly

Organisation’s (WHO) assembly under the name Chinese Taipei, China must approve any WHA role for Taiwan before the island can be formally invited. A spokesman for China’s Taiwan Affairs Office would only say that Beijing had a ‘positive’ attitude toward the issue.

Beijing, backed by about 170 diplomatic allies including the world’s most powerful nations compared to Taiwan’s 25, normally blocks the island from joining international organisations that require statehood as a prerequisite. Relations between Taiwan and China have improved since the island’s President Ma Ying-jeou took office last May, with top negotiators on both sides holding meetings and signing a series of deals to boost trade ties.

Ma welcomed the decision to let Taiwan attend the health assembly, saying it was a question of basic human rights. “Joining WHO activities isn’t just a simple political matter. It’s more a matter of human rights and 25 million Taiwan people’s health human rights shouldn’t be ignored,” Ma stated.

Taiwan officials say their exclusion from the WHO and its annual assemblies has made it tough to handle major health issues such as SARS in 2003. The WHA is the supreme decision-making body for the WHO. It is held from 18–27 May 2009 in Geneva, attended by delegates from all 193 members.

(Edited by Claudia Schweizer, DIT)

Enrolment quotas missed in Japan

According to a survey by the Japanese newspaper Yomiuri Shimbun, more than half of private dental colleges and schools across Japan fell short of enrolment quotas for the academic year. Three schools even saw enrolment fall by 40 per cent, which numbers between 51 and 45 students. The number of people who took entrance examinations for private dental colleges or schools this year was 4,975, a sharp fall from over 10,000 in previous years.

According to major prep schools and other sources, the biggest reason for the fall in enrolment is a belief that the nation has a surplus of dentists. In 1990, there were 74,000 dentists, the number of which rose each year to 87,099 in 2006; yet, there was no rise in total dental care costs over this period. This led to excessive competition among dental clinics.

The fall in enrolment is expected to hurt finances at dental schools because of a decrease in income streams, such as students’ enrolment fees and initial payments for the freshmen year, which are usually between US$72,000 and US$10,000 per student.

The Japanese Association of Private Dental Schools plans to investigate possible counter-measures, out of fear that the shortage could lead to the collapse of the nation’s dental care system.

Observers say it will be difficult for colleges and schools to draw up effective counter-measures to reverse the situation any time soon. Commenting on the issue, Toshi-kazu Yasui, Vice Chairman of the Japanese Association of Private Dental Schools, told Yomiuri Shimbun, “We had anticipated some fall in enrolment but not anything like this. We’re going to have to explain to the public how important dental care is.”

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