

7th Chiang-Chen talks slated for August in Tianjin

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Taipei, The seventh round of top-level talks between Taiwan and mainland China will likely take place in China's northern metropolis of Tianjin in August, according to an official familiar with cross-Taiwan Strait affairs.

There have been no meetings between Chiang Pin-kung, chairman of Taiwan's intermediary Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF), and Chen Yunlin, president of the Beijing-based Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits (ARATS), since December, and now it is China's turn to host.

The talks have been tentatively scheduled for the second half of August.

Meetings between the SEF and ARATS heads have become part of institutionalized talks between Taiwan and China in the absence of official ties.

Liu Te-shun, deputy minister of the Mainland Affairs Council (MAC), confirmed Thursday that "August is highly possible" for the next Chiang-Chen rendezvous.

The MAC, the top planner of Taiwan's mainland policy, supervises the SEF's operations.

As to whether an investment protection agreement between the two sides will be forged during the seventh round of talks, Liu declined to elaborate, only saying that SEF and ARATS officials have met at least eight times over the past year on the matter, and they have intensified their opinion-exchanging recently.

The investment protection agreement, a deal that was expected to be clinched last December, fell through in part because of a lack of consensus over the deal's arbitration mechanism. Taiwan wanted the deal to stipulate that disputes would be settled by international arbiters, but China balked because it feared such a deal would tacitly acknowledge Taiwan's sovereignty.

On a cross-strait nuclear safety pact, another focus of the seventh Chiang-Chen meeting, Liu said the two sides have completed only one round of talks. Despite making some headway, the two sides need to further communicate on certain issues before concluding the pact, he added.

Follow-up issues relating to the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) that the two sides signed in 2010, such as trade in goods and services and a dispute resolution mechanism, are also expected to be on the table. (By Chen Hung-chin and Deborah Kuo) enditem/ly .