

## It's not Ma's words, it's his deeds

Written by Taipei Times Editorial  
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Opinion polls continue to show low support for President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九). Many media outlets and political commentators have accused him of ingratiating himself with the public, but shirking responsibility in an empty political show.

The Presidential Office's spokesperson rejects such claims, saying the government is working hard and that the criticism is "unacceptable." Ma and his cohorts obviously don't understand where all the complaints are coming from.

If Ma wanted to understand, it would be easy. Let's look at how the government handled the Typhoon Morakot disaster last August and how it handled Thursday's earthquake.

When Morakot hit, the government's disaster relief center didn't know what was going on. Top officials went on with their daily lives, Ma told local fire brigades to send life boats — not what was needed in the disaster area — and the military didn't mobilize any troops. No one knew how to deal with the situation in the annihilated Siaolin Village (沙林村), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs turned down offers of foreign aid, disaster relief and reconstruction was delayed and when visiting the disaster area several days later, an annoyed Ma met victim complaints with a testy: "I'm here now, aren't I?"

So it is not very surprising that public discontent boiled over.

Then, when a magnitude 6.4 earthquake struck Jiasian Township (嘉山鄉), Kaohsiung County, on Thursday morning, followed by a magnitude 5.7 aftershock in the afternoon, causing panic, the military organized a relief effort in just 18 minutes. Premier Wu Den-yih (吳登益) quickly called local governments for an update and the disaster prevention center promptly kicked into gear, with Ma visiting the area after only a few hours, demanding that hillsides be reinforced to prevent landslides before the next heavy rainfall.

The result?

Neither local residents nor the media had any major criticism of the government's handling of the situation.

Why the difference in the government's approach?

During the Morakot disaster, the government treated the situation lightly and in a haphazard manner, reacting in the wrong way to public complaints and saying the wrong things. It was the first time we saw the Ma administration — which claimed to be "prepared and ready" — in action and it was the turning point for Ma's popularity.

After those lessons, the government didn't dare treat Thursday's earthquake lightly; every concerned agency snapped to attention and did what it was supposed to do, showing that the government's disaster prevention efforts are finally back on track.

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Ma has reacted to his dropping popularity and the KMT's consecutive defeats at the ballot box by replacing the Presidential Office spokesperson, members of the Cabinet and certain people in high-ranking party positions with people from his presidential campaign team, and has responded quickly to public and media criticism to avoid misunderstandings that are perceived as truths.

This is the wrong reaction.

The government doesn't suffer from a lack of publicity; what it lacks is the correct policies and their forceful implementation in order to provide tangible improvements to the lives of the public. The economy may look brighter, but with employment still hovering just under 6 percent and no sign of dropping, and with industry moving abroad, it hasn't yet recovered. Many unemployed have no income. Households are suffering and the misery index remains high, so why should the public give the government the thumbs-up or vote for the ruling party?

Only when Ma understands that the public cares less about what politicians say than what they do, will he see that the criticism is fair. If he doesn't, he will meet with more defeats further down the road.

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