

Another lesson for Ma sent by Taiwan voters

Written by Taiwan News Editorial
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Saturday's set of four legislative by-elections sent another clear signal to President Ma Ying-jeou and the ruling rightist Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) most Taiwan citizens desire honest, effective, sincere and progressive government and are fed up with deception, incompetence and arrogance.

The loss of three of four legislative seats Saturday marked the latest in a series of electoral setbacks for Ma and the KMT that began with a victory by the opposition Democratic Progressive Party in a legislative by-election in Yunlin County and was followed by a strong DPP showing in the Dec. 5 local elections and a DPP sweep of three legislative by-elections Jan. 9.

Besides winning seven of 11 legislative by-elections, the DPP received over 45 percent of the votes in the 17 city and county mayoral elections Dec. 5, over 55 percent percent of the ballots cast in the three legislative elections January 9 and over 53 percent Saturday, reversing the landslide wins by the KMT in the January 2008 legislative polls in the same districts.

Even though these districts cover less than half of the Taiwan electorate and the KMT still dominates the Legislative Yuan with 75 seats compared to 33 for the DPP and five for independents, the KMT's consecutive defeats during the past six months reflects both widespread distrust and dissatisfaction with Ma's performance and a vote of "no-confidence" in most policies initiated by the KMT government, especially its blind push for an "economic cooperation framework agreement" with the authoritarian People's Republic of China.

Saturday's results also reflected the failure of several tactics adopted by Ma to rebuild eroding confidence in his government, as shown by the plunge of approval polls to the 20th percentile since the KMT administration's inept handling of Typhoon Morokot last August.

A litany of errors

Neither a Cabinet reshuffle or the appointment of his right-hand man, King Pu-tsung, as KMT secretary-general to promote so-called "reforms" within the ruling party has helped, especially after both Ma and King refused to take seriously the message sent by the DPP sweep Jan. 9,

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which included the opposition party's first ever legislative victory in Taitung County.

Ma and King indicated that they still have not heard the message after losing three of four seats, including two in traditional KMT strongholds in Taoyuan and Hsinchu, by apologizing only to KMT supporters, and not all the Taiwan people, and without admitting to any mistakes.

However, the Ma - King duo committed a litany of errors in the run-up to Saturday's polls.

King's nomination strategy of parachuting "the best people without factional ties" led the defeats of former Taipei City politician Chen Hsueh-sheng in Taoyuan County and hapless economics professor Lin Teh-jui in Chiayi County.

A more strategic set of errors concerns the KMT leaders's erroneous belief that the DPP's sweep in January was due to a low turn of KMT hard-core or "deep blue" supporters.

The ECFA factor

Besides ignoring the fact that DPP voters were not so "discouraged," Ma and King have failed to grasp the reality that voters who cast ballots for Ma in March 2008 did not come out and cast ballots for KMT candidates not because Ma has not done enough to curry to the ideological preferences of hard-core KMT supporters but because of Ma's all too evident incompetence.

Even a poll of 1,181 Taiwan adults carried out by the pro-unification United Daily News after Saturday's voting showed that Ma's approval rate had plunged to 29 percent, the lowest since August in UDN polls.

Third, Ma and King have stubbornly refused to recognize that the majority of the Taiwan public are simply and plainly opposed to some of the KMT government's controversial policies, notably the proposed ECFA with the PRC, whose Chinese Communist Party regime continues to deploy over 1,500 missiles targeted at Taiwan.

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In Chiayi County, where most traditional service and manufactured sectors would be severely influenced by further opening of made-in-China products into Taiwan, DPP candidate Chen Ming-wen scored a landslide win after making "taking care of Chiayi and protecting Taiwan" the core slogan of his campaign.

Nevertheless, Ma has insisted on driving for the signing of the ECFA this summer without sincerely engaging in a candid and comprehensive dialogue with the Taiwan public or holding a debate with the opposition party on the pros and cons of signing such an economic accord with Beijing.

Ma may again turn a deaf ear to the message sent by voters Saturday in the belief that the KMT's legislative majority, his personal popularity and King's electoral manipulations will ensure that the KMT will win at least three of the five mayoral posts in the year-end special municipality elections and pave the way for re-election in March 2012.

But the implementation of such schemes, which aim to safeguard the narrow interests of the KMT and not the welfare of the Taiwan public, promises to only pave the way for another lesson in December.

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