

Yaung's failure is no 'shock' for Taiwan

Written by Taiwan News Editorial
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The sudden resignation of Health Minister Yaung Chih-liang due to backtracking in President Ma Ying-jeou's right-wing Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) on national health insurance system reform exposes to public view the inability of the KMT government to display leadership and responsibility in the resolution of Taiwan's urgent problems.

After the inept and callous response by the Ma government to the massive floods in southern Taiwan triggered by Typhoon Morakot in the "August 8th flood disaster," Ma incessantly reiterated that "the people's pains are my own pains" and in mid-September replaced the technocratic premier Liu Chao-hsuan with then KMT secretary-general Wu Den-yih, who vowed to implement a policy of "ordinary people's economics."

As the Ma government's approval ratings have plunged into the 20th percentile, Premier Wu has used the slogan of "ordinary people" as a cover for currying short-term favor with voters at the expense of evading the responsibility to provide solutions to our society's pressing problems.

Hence, after the state - owned CPC Taiwan Corp was accused of excessively collecting pollution surcharges, the state oil firm promptly engaged in a series of price cuts in petroleum products.

After a bubble of property speculation, stirred up in large part by the KMT government's decision to allow Chinese companies to invest in Taiwan's real estate market and expectation for the sale of public property, triggered an explosion in housing prices, Wu ordered a freeze on the sale of state-owned real estate.

In the face of Yaung's report after careful study that hikes in National Health Insurance Service fees could not be avoided, Wu attempted to duck having to implement such an unpopular measure or force KMT Taipei City Mayor Hau Long-pin to pay the over NT\$40 billion that the KMT city government owes to the NSIS coffers.

Instead, Wu triggered Yaung's resignation by demanding last week that the health minister revamp the plan for NHIS reform so 75 percent, instead of less than 60 percent, of Taiwan

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citizens would not have to pay higher fees.

Elections not the problem

In the wake of his resignation Monday, Yaung complained that "too many elections will bankrupt the country and ruin the people."

However, it is important that the fact that there were no elections during the first 18 months since Ma took office on May 20, 2008 did not impede his KMT government from displaying an unexpected degree of incompetence.

Indeed, the incompetence of the Ma government was not due to an excess of electoral democracy but was the product of a surfeit of arrogance and elitism, as manifested by the performance of former premier Liu, who muffed the disaster response to Typhoon Morakot, and ex-national security czar Su Chi, who sold out Taiwan's health security in secret negotiations with the U.S. on liberalizing beef imports.

On the contrary, only the successive defeats suffered by the KMT in a series of legislative by-elections and its poorer than expected showing in the December 3 city and county elections has saved Taiwan from total ruin by demonstrating to Ma and other KMT leaders that their mandate to govern can be taken away if their policies and actions violate the fundamental interests of the 23 Taiwan people.

The current problem lies in the refusal of Ma and the KMT camp to re-examine their decision-making patterns and priorities and instead to avoid confronting the genuine problems faced by Taiwan society by trying to currying favor with the electorate in order to win re-election in 2012.

In the meantime, the Ma government has transferred all hopes for "solutions" to Taiwan's economic, social and environmental problems in the truly dangerous basket of the touted "cross-strait economic cooperation framework agreement" with the authoritarian People's Republic of China.

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Instead of responsibly working with opposition leaders and civic groups to develop reasonable, feasible and socially equitable solutions to Taiwan's problems, the Ma government has turned in a blank score in virtually all fields, ranging from tax, administrative, judicial and political reform as well as with regard to the NHIS.

The root of the Ma government's vicious cycle of incompetence lies not in "too many elections," but in the failure of the KMT leadership to realize that Taiwan's 23 million people cannot be ruled and Taiwan's current problems cannot be solved with bureaucratic mentality or habitual secretive decision-making patterns inherited from the KMT authoritarian period.

By refusing to engage in serious dialogue or even "bottom-up" consensus building with the opposition or civic groups, the Ma government has failed to find a center of gravity that will help it realize when it should be resolute and when it should reconsider its policy decisions.

Taiwan's people need competent, clean honest and progressive political leaders who are capable of facing our most pressing problems and working with our citizens to resolve them.

Yang's resignation shows that such expectations will not be fulfilled by Ma's KMT government.

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