

## Yilan Children's Festival tests Ma's credibility

Written by Taiwan News Editorial  
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President Ma Ying-jeou and his rightist Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) have brought further doubt on the reliability of their political commitments by renegeing on a public promise to support the revival of the popular and successful Yilan International Children's Folklore and Folkgame Festival (YICF).

The YICF was designed with children as the stars with performances of local and foreign children dance, musical and other performing arts troupes, water games and other amusements and all kinds of cultural and artistic exhibitions for the enjoyment of children of all ages.

During its initial run from 1997 to 2006, the festival attracted hundreds of thousands of visitors to Yilan's Cinshuei Water Park and put Yilan on the world cultural map and became one of a handful of Taiwan activities to be registered as an international activity in the United Nations.

However, after restoring KMT governance to Yilan after 24 years of Democratic Progressive Party administration, then KMT Yilan County Commissioner Lu Kuo-hua claimed that the annual festival, which had regularly turned in sizable profits, was "financially infeasible" and cancelled the Yilan Children's Festival in 2007 despite intense protests from Yilan community groups, the local tourist industry and thousands of citizens.

After DPP candidate and Lotung City mayor Lin Tsung-hsien made its revival the core symbol of his campaign slogan "Restore Yilan's Pride" last fall, Lu publicly recanted and proposed to merge the international children's festival with his own "Blue Water" Exhibition and received Ma's public promise of "full support" of the central government.

However, the president and KMT chairman's vow failed to rescue the hapless Lu from being thrashed by Lin by a margin of 133,394 to 112,469 in the Dec. 5 poll and the president and KMT chairman, KMT Premier Wu Den-yi and KMT Yilan County assembly members have evidently "forgotten" Ma's promise.

Instead, the Executive Yuan agreed to provide only NT\$2 million of NT\$55 million requested by the Yilan County government to restore the cancelled festival, while the KMT majority in the

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Yilan County Assembly sliced NT\$80 million from the county government's proposed NT\$180 million budget on May 19.

This reversal of a solemn campaign promise not only violated the principles of integrity and sincerity that ordinary politicians, much less a national leader, should uphold.

If the Executive Yuan had to sacrifice funds for the Yilan festival due to a general necessity to trim the central government budget, its actions could have understandable.

But facts and numbers speak otherwise.

For example, smaller programs such as the Pacific Tourist Season in KMT-administered Hualien County and the Austronesian People's Cultural Festival in the KMT-administered Taitung County both received over NT\$10 million in central government funds, not to mention the lavish support for the NT\$13-plus billion Taipei International Flora Expo being put on by KMT Taipei City Mayor Hau Long-pin's administration.

Ignorance or vengeance

Besides the tight-fisted response by the KMT government, Premier Wu personally manifested disdain for the revived festival during a visit to tourist facilities on Yilan's Guishan Island on July 4.

When asked whether the Executive Yuan would assist the Yilan Children's Festival, Wu indicated that he was unaware of its opening and denied that the Cabinet had refused to provide support, saying that the Yilan County government had not submitted any request for financial assistance.

Wu's statement was promptly rebutted by DPP Yilan County Commissioner Lin Tsung-hsien who told reporters who told reporters that Ma and the heads of the five branches of

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government, including Wu, had been sent personal invitations to the festival's July 3 reopening.

Lin added that his administration had documents to prove that it had sent official requests on April 14 for a total of NT\$55 million to the Council for Cultural Affairs, Tourism Bureau of the Ministry of Transportation and Communications, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Council for Indigenous Affairs and only received NT\$1.5 million from the Tourism Bureau and NT\$500,000 from the MOFA.

If the premier was unaware of these developments, he might be well advised to review the efficiency of his staff.

The failure of the Ma government to fulfill such a public commitment will unavoidably fuel doubts about the credibility of its other commitments to Taiwan citizens as well as spark suspicion that the KMT government's actions in regard to the Yilan International Children's Festival reflect a narrow-minded partisanship, if not a juvenile vengefulness.

Moreover, these actions also displayed contempt for the creativity and energy of the thousands of Yilan and Taiwan citizens who have created the prominent and enjoyable festival, which demonstrated its staying power by attracting over 10,000 visitors on its opening day and shows every sign of attaining an attendance target of 600,000 before it concludes Aug. 15 ([www.folkgame.org.tw](http://www.folkgame.org.tw)).

For the sake of his own credibility, Ma would be well advised to reaffirm his support for the Yilan Children's Festival and ensure that the Executive Yuan treats its requests for assistance fairly.

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