

Ma is on the wrong track for Taiwan

Written by Taiwan News Editorial
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Taiwan President Ma Ying-jeou needs to rapidly learn the fundamental lesson that a political leader needs both to attract sufficient public support to win elections and to cultivate a sustainable public support through dialogue, transparency and consensus-building to exercise effective governance in a democratic society.

The need for such a lesson was shown by Ma's fist-shaking gloating over the 'successful' use by the KMT's nearly three-fourths legislative majority last Monday to ram undemocratic revisions to the Local Government Act as a "beautiful campaign" and his instruction to the KMT legislative caucus to continue to "act like a ruling party" by using the same heavy-handed tactics to overwhelm any further "irrational boycotts" by the opposition DPP.

Moreover, the KMT also released a television advertisement under the guidance of KMT Secretary General King Pu-tsung that highlighted alleged "DPP violence" in Legislature to hinder the "reforms" in the revisions to the local government act while neglecting to mention that the KMT's "reform" unconstitutionally extended the effective terms of township mayors from four years to nine years.

It is understandable that an elected president would want to display strong leadership especially when his approval rating is dropping, but two public opinion polls released last week indicate a backlash against Ma's new political moves.

A year-end survey of 1,014 Taiwan adults conducted by the Global Views Survey Research Center Jan. 14-15 showed a jump in dissatisfaction with Ma's performance from over 40 percent in May to just 23 percent last week with over 66 percent dissatisfied and found that nearly 76 percent of all respondents felt that the governance of the Ma administration was worse than they expected, an impression shared by nearly 72 percent of "pan-blue" or pro-KMT voters.

Governance, not domination

Moreover, a survey of 842 Taiwan adults conducted last week by the KMT - friendly TVBS cable network just after the KMT' display of legislative majority violence and the Control Yuan's

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impeachment of Prosecutor-General Chen Tsung-ming showed that Ma's popularity had dived to just 20 percent with 56 percent dissatisfied and that the public was becoming even more concerned with the KMT's lack of concern for public opinion and its inability to re-examine its behavior.

On the other hand, the DPP won the endorsement of 50 percent of the public for caring about the views of the people compared to just 32 percent for the KMT and was rated as more lively and vigorous by 62 percent compared to 34 percent.

In contrast to Ma, Tsai's approval rating continued a steady climb to 39 with 27 percent dissatisfied.

The TVBS poll showed that more voters believed in the political integrity of the DPP over the KMT by a margin of 31 percent to 26 percent.

These polls indicate that, under Tsai's guidance, the opposition DPP is gradually rebuilding public trust and support and has overcome the shadow of the cases of alleged corruption involving ex-president Chen Shui-bian and members of the former first family just as public confidence in the KMT's own integrity has plunged.

After all, the fact that most of the recent legislative by-elections were caused by annulments of January 2008 victories of KMT legislators due to vote bribery and the scandal over influence peddling in the ruling party's Central Standing Committee elections showed that the KMT has yet to change its image of arrogance and corruption despite reams of empty talk by Ma.

Voter support has also eroded due to Ma's failures to live up to his campaign promises to foster growth and uphold Taiwan's dignity.

Popular anger has focussed especially on the Ma administration's transparent incompetence in crisis management beginning with its response to the floods caused by Typhoon Morakot in August, its handling of the flap over the secretly negotiated Taiwan-United States protocol on beef imports, persistent concerns over the safety of A(H1N1) influenza vaccination shots, the

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rash and blind promotion of an "economic cooperation agreement" with China and the KMT's undemocratic legislative manoeuvres and interference in judicial and prosecutor independence.

Regretfully, Ma and King have interpreted their party's setbacks in precisely the wrong direction and believes that he can rebuild his leadership bases and revive public approval by resorting to the domineering methods used by the KMT in the 1980s and 1990s, painting the DPP as "a party of violence" that is addicted to "irrational boycotts" and adopting other moves to curry favor with "deep blue" voters.

Instead, the two polls show that Taiwan citizens do not want the revival of an authoritarian "Chinese KMT" which makes decision in a "black box" and then engages in top-down propagandistic "guidance," but prefer a "Taiwan KMT" that can provide consultative and consensus based governance in line with democratic values and procedures.

The public backlash shown by these polls and surveys showing that KMT candidates trail DPP rivals in three of the four by-elections slated for Feb. 27 will not cease until Ma realizes that he is standing on the wrong side of Taiwan history.

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