

Taipei pajama protesters call on Ma to step down

Written by Taipei Times

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Protesters hold up placards bearing Chinese characters that are a coarse play on words
PHOTO: SAM YEH, AFP

Around 1,000 people joined a “pajama parade” yesterday — though only a handful of people actually wore pajamas — organized by artists unhappy with President Ma Ying-jeou’s (馬英九) leadership, calling on him to step down or to stop getting paid.

Following banners that read “stop paying the incompetent” and a woman dressed up as a Chinese zombie to portray Ma’s administration as a “zombie government,” demonstrators departed from the assembly point in front of the National Taiwan University and headed toward Ketagalan Boulevard in front of the Presidential Office, before moving on to Liberty Square for a rally in the evening.

Many brought along homemade placards voicing their discontent at the government, with slogans such as “Ma is the biggest disaster” and “the president is jogging, it’s time to start running,” alluding to Ma’s signature sport. Even with a busy schedule as president, Ma still manages to find time to take part in many running events.

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A protestor wearing a mask holds a placard during a demonstration against President Ma
PHOTO: SAM YEH, AFP

“We wanted to make this a ‘pajama parade’ because our government is always asleep, and with such an incapable government, the people may need to be prepared to escape from disaster in their pajamas at anytime,” said Koma Chen (柯瑪), one of the event’s organizers and a theater artist.

As most of the organizers are artists, they decided to make the parade a little different from most other political demonstrations.

“We hope to turn the demonstration itself into action art, as well as a festival,” she said.



Protesters dressed in traditional costumes attend a protest against President Ma Ying-je
PHOTO: NICKY LOH, REUTERS

Besides the organizers, however, only a few people actually wore their pajamas to the march.

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Among the demonstrators were bajiajiang (百將) performers. Traditional belief has it that the bajiajiang are eight generals who remove all evil spirits from a road before deities are to travel along them.

In most Taoist parades of deities on religious holidays, there are usually people dressed as bajiajiang marching and performing ahead of the deity statues.

The presence of the bajiajiang in the parade was thus to clear away evil spirits and misfortune for Taiwan, the organizers said.

Founder of the Taiwan Republic Campaign Peter Wang (王景弘) painted himself black and carried large rocks made of polystyrene foam, walking barefoot among the demonstrators.

“This is a representation of typhoon victims who, with mud all over their bodies, have lost everything, including their shoes, but have been forgotten by the government,” he said. “The rocks represent the ‘mudslide of anger’ from the devastated areas that is now heading toward the Presidential Office.”

Wang was referring to the devastation wrought by Typhoon Morakot, which hit the country on the weekend of Aug. 7 and took more than 700 lives in severe mudslides and flooding.

While the parade proceeded peacefully, with passers-by and motorists responding positively to the marchers for the most part, an elderly woman living in a high-rise apartment building along the parade route was upset by the demonstration, and threw water over the demonstrators from her fifth-story window.

Protesters responded with louder cries of “Ma Ying-jeou, step down.”

No further exchanges occurred between the woman and the demonstrators.

The artists performed a skit re-enacting scenes of people suffering and dying as the storm hit, implying that the government did not lend a helping hand fast enough.

“I want to tell the residents of Taipei — who are usually silent on political events — that if you think you can still believe in this government and wait for them to solve all of our problems, you’re putting your children’s future at stake,” one of the artists, Hsia Lin (夏琳), said.

Later on, several independent bands and solo artists performed at a rally in Liberty Square.

Musician Chu Yueh-hsin (朱月新), better known as Joy Topper (樂頂), opened the event, performing songs in his own unique style — half singing and half talking lyrics that are half pre-written and half improvised on the spot, blending criticism of current events and politicians.

“Coming here is a way to show that I love and care for my country,” said Ann Chiu (邱安), a 26-year-old woman in the audience.

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Chiu said that although she was never a supporter of Ma, she had been hopeful that he would do something good for Taiwan and act efficiently, since the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) holds an absolute majority in the legislature.

“I’m totally disappointed,” she said. “Ma is doing a worse job than I expected.”

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