

Lee's gesture puts spotlight on Ma

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South Korean President Lee Myung-bak's latest gesture, which keeps one of his campaign promises, puts President Ma Ying-jeou in a bad light.

On Monday, Lee announced that he would donate 33.1 billion won (US\$26 million) — more than 80 percent of his total personal wealth — to a scholarship foundation to help “those who really need it.” Prior to this latest donation, in March last year — a month after taking office — Lee donated the entire salary for his five-year presidency to help low-income households amid the global economic downturn.

In contrast, Ma, in an obvious attempt to ride on the coat tails of newly elected Lee's presidential victory, tried on several occasions to draw a parallel between himself and Lee. Aside from using South Korea as an economic example in his campaign speeches, and that the country could serve as a model for Taiwan, he also borrowed Lee's “7-4-7” policy by proposing a “6-3-3” economic policy of his own that promised to raise GDP growth to 6 percent, trim unemployment to 3 percent and boost per capita income to US\$30,000 a year.

Following his election victory, however, Ma has all but ceased comparing Taiwan to South Korea, nor himself to the South Korean president.

The reason is obvious.

The Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics in May trimmed the nation's GDP forecast for this year to minus 4.25 percent. Meanwhile, the nation's unemployment rate in May was a record high of 5.82 percent, which translated to 633,000 people out of work.

Prior to these disappointing numbers, Ma had already admitted — a mere three months into his presidency — that the realization of his “6-3-3” economic goals would take until the final year of a possible second term as president.

Aside from showing any remorse for failing to honor his campaign promises, as well as the arrogance of delaying delivery of his campaign promise until 2015, by attaching it to a second term, there is still no sign of the donation that Ma promised to make should he fail to deliver on his “6-3-3” policy.

Granted, earlier this year Ma donated NT\$360,000 of his year-end bonus to charity groups. That amount, however, was a drop in the ocean compared with the numbers of people in the country suffering from unemployment and increased commodity prices spearheaded by state-run companies.

Some may argue that Ma, like most politicians, should not be taken at his word, but when a head of state repeatedly fails to rise above the usual politicking, it is the public who suffer and this cannot help the nation's competitiveness.

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Ma has the public to thank, because everyone seems to have either forgiven or forgotten the promise. But that doesn't mean Ma should get away with deceiving people so easily.

Lee's generosity and compassion should serve to remind us how disingenuous Ma can be.

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