

If President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) motto of "integrity is my life" — which he has publicly repeated numerous times — were to be taken literally, he would currently be on life support.

This year's Global Corruption Barometer report, conducted by Transparency International, dealt a debilitating blow to Ma and his administration, with 35 percent of Taiwanese respondents reported as paying a bribe to the judiciary in the past 12 months.

More than half, or 56 percent, felt that public officials, civil servants and police were corrupt. Also branded corrupt was the judiciary by 57 percent of respondents, the legislature by 75 percent, and political parties by 74 percent.

While the Ma administration had suspicions about the validity of the survey and argued that the results were different from similar polls conducted by the Taiwanese government, it is no surprise that people say the results more or less reflect their real-life experience.

In the past two years, numerous officials in the Ma administration and politicians of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT), of which Ma serves as chairman, have been either indicted or accused of corruption. Among them are former Executive Yuan secretary-general Lin Yi-shih (林益世), former Taipei City councilor Lai Su-ju (賴素珠), former National Fire Agency director-general Huang Chi-min (黃奇敏) and several officials at River Management Offices and the Taiwan Railways Administration across the country.

Just this past week, Control Yuan Secretary-General Chen Feng-yi (陳鳳儀) was charged with illegally destroying documents reportedly related to the KMT's ill-gotten party assets, an issue that Ma pledged to deal with, but never did. In an interview with Next TV on Wednesday, Ma evaded the party assets issue each time he was pressed about it.

The president has also turned a blind eye to concerns raised by lawmakers across party lines that officials of Taiwan Power Co and CPC Corp, Taiwan, could be involved in corruption. This is why these state-owned companies must be reformed first before electricity and fuel prices are increased — one of Ma's proud policies displaying questionable vision.

Integrity ought not be invoked in vain

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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The implications behind the survey results and the incidents are alarming, but not without explanation.

First, this administration has gotten used to making promises it thinks are okay not to deliver. Sadly, it appears Taiwanese have also gotten used to the cheating, even if they find it unacceptable.

Second, misconduct and malfunction are rife in Ma's government, with the Agency Against Corruption, established under Ma's leadership, the Supreme Prosecutors' Office Special Investigation Division and the Control Yuan all failing to do anything about it.

Third, the power of media is so strong that Ma's "Mr Clean" image sticks in people's mind and the KMT has succeeded in making people believe it is the party of integrity or, at least, less corrupt than the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP).

However, Ma and his party need to understand that repeatedly flogging the dead horse of the DPP does not justify the KMT's widespread and persistent corruption on both local and central government level. First they must deal with the ill-gotten assets and prove that they are an administration as clean as Ma promises.

Before those things happen, Ma should be very careful about voicing his motto "integrity is my life" when those who work under him do not seem to care for Ma's life.

The full extent of his integrity, and that of the KMT, will no doubt only be uncovered after Ma leaves office in 2016.

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