

## Hung case defines Taiwan

Written by Taipei Times Editorial  
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The Ministry of National Defense and President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) are probably wondering why the death of late army corporal Hung Chung-chiu (洪仲丘) has become perhaps the single most important news event in Taiwan in the past month, ruffling feathers in every part of society and showing no signs of stopping.

One reason it raised a high degree of public attention was because people imagined themselves in one of the roles in Hung's family — the son who died from institutional injustice, the heartbroken mother whose grief over the loss of a son was almost too much to bear, or the sister who was determined to find the truth behind her brother's death and hold people accountable.

It is also because the case is the epitome of the current status of Taiwan. The nation has been hit with a credibility crisis, led by an irresponsible government that has a habit of lying to its people and burying its head in the sand and which embarrassed itself with a lack of understanding of human rights. Reckless journalism also harms Taiwan's credibility.

People called for civil investigators to join the military's probe into the Hung case because almost no one trusts the military investigators and judges. They have handled numerous unfair investigations and trials.

As the case has progressed, people have found the ministry to be untrustworthy, both the Supreme Military Court's Prosecutors' Office and the military officials and units involved in the case.

Ma's own credibility rating has been hovering around 20 percent and, after reports of many corruption cases, the public has also questioned his administration's policies as well as the integrity of local governments and officials.

The distrust is based on absurd military comments on the Hung case which were inconsistent with most people's real-life experiences — millions of male Taiwanese served in the military, and the Ma administration's advocacy, analysis and explanation for its policies — for example, the cross-strait service trade agreement and its decision to demolish four houses in Miaoli

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County's Dapu Borough (▯▯). These cases have involved either lies or flawed assessments.

Negligence during the first few days after Hung's death reflected the ministry's lack of respect for human rights. Former defense minister Chiang Chung-ling (▯▯▯) told lawmakers in 1995 that "people die everywhere" when he was questioned over inappropriate discipline cases in the military.

For the military, while Hung's death was regrettable, his life was just another number in the annual toll. It is the same for the Ma administration, since the four houses in Dapu are among numerous houses that ultimately have to give way to development projects across the country. Protesting university professors and students are dragged away and arrested because they are said to endanger public safety when all they do is chant slogans.

The government has not lived up to its promise of making human rights the foundation of the country because it has not respected and safeguarded people's right to life, rights of property and right to work.

Unfortunately, when media outlets were doing their best to seek justice for Hung, they also demonized virtually every military person who was involved in the case, which violated the privacy of those officials and their families. Once again, the media tried to provide reporting in the name of justice and public interest, but failed to uphold journalistic values and ethics and the principle of presumed innocence. The practice that attempted to disclose more truths has ended up creating more confusion and inciting irrational debates among the public.

The Hung case will someday come to a close, but if journalistic values are not reviewed and addressed, how can Taiwan mature as a democracy?

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