

Political purging is also a disgrace

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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It is almost certain that political infighting was involved in accusations of influence peddling against the legislative speaker and the related wiretapping scandal.

Yet, while they have been described by some as a national disgrace, they could be a good thing for Taiwan.

On Friday, the Special Investigation Division of the Supreme Prosecutors' Office said Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) caucus convener Ker Chien-ming (柯建銘) had in June telephoned Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) Legislative Speaker Wang Jin-pyng (王金平), asking him to lobby then-justice minister Tseng Yung-fu (曾榮光) and Taiwan High Prosecutors' Office Head Prosecutor Chen Shou-huang (陳秀煌) to persuade a prosecutor not to appeal Ker's case in the Supreme Court after Ker was acquitted of embezzling funds in 1997 from Formosa Telecom.

President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九), who in the past has always called for thorough investigations into allegations of misconduct against his KMT comrades — such as in the case of former Executive Yuan secretary-general Lin Yi-shih (林益世) — this time promptly accused Wang of having lobbied on Ker's behalf and said on Sunday that Wang's conduct marked “the darkest day in Taiwan's democratic history.”

It is well-known that Wang, as a KMT member and legislative speaker, did not always carry out Ma's instructions in the legislature, and many suspect Ma is using the case to strip Wang of his political status and power.

It is political purging, as well as influence peddling, that should be seen as a national disgrace.

However, the incident offers a good opportunity for Taiwanese to understand the direction the nation has been taking.

For too long, Taiwanese have been described as mild-mannered in the way they treat

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politicians and interpret politics. For example, they will accept “minor corruption,” as long as politicians “do something good for the people.”

Historically, Taiwanese have not retaliated against the government until they have personally seen, or been at the receiving end of, extreme treatment. Some argue this is why Taiwan has missed several golden opportunities to mature into a full democracy.

Yet the extremes seem to have become norms. A few worrying examples are the Ma administration’s treatment of the suspicious death of an army corporal, the land expropriation cases in Miaoli County and the government’s insistence on resuming construction of the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant in Gongliao District (公寮), New Taipei City (新北市), despite strong public disapproval.

Also troubling is the merciless and brutal infighting in the Ministry of National Defense, the Control Yuan and now the Ministry of Justice and the KMT, and how Ma pays lip service to “upholding the Constitution,” but actually treats it as if it were not worth the paper it was written on.

After former DPP president Chen Shui-bian’s (陳水扁) corruption scandal, many DPP supporters came to despise their party and the DPP hit rock bottom. The party has had to go back to square one and try to regain the electorate’s trust all over again. This is why, as disgraceful as the current controversy may be, perhaps the silver lining is that for domestic politics and the KMT, there is nowhere to go in the future except up.

History tells us that when Taiwanese reach their darkest point, they will say enough is enough and will take action to put the country back on track.

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