

## Media and Ma get interviews wrong

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In countries with a presidential system, it is common for the president to appear on television to deliver speeches and explain policies. The ways in which these appearances are conducted differ according to the needs of the time.

Sometimes, these are one-way exchanges of information in which the president gives a single speech that is broadcast on the various TV stations.

Sometimes, the president will be interviewed, responding to misunderstandings and doubts the public may have by answering questions. This is when it is key for the media to show professionalism. For viewers of these TV appearances, media professionalism is as important as the president's sincerity in his answers.

The recent political struggle that President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) started has severely damaged the constitutional order because of the way information was gained via wiretapping. It has caused debates about the misuse of power. In order to save his approval rating — which has now hit single digits — and win back public support, Ma has recently started to give TV interviews.

Due to both his and the Taiwanese media's lack of professionalism, these appearances, in which he could have helped explain policy, have turned into a monologue without any credibility. The media have lowered themselves to being nothing more than a mouthpiece for those in power. Such an anti-democratic situation is an insult to everybody.

Ma's interviews have disseminated a lot of erroneous ideas. Public opinion needs to be corrected in a timely manner, otherwise our officials with all their knowledge will be able to twist people's values and opinions.

Our government system is not a pure presidential system, but a semi-presidential one. The president does not need to present a State of the Union address to the legislature like presidents in countries with a regular presidential system, such as in the US. Instead, he appoints the premier who answers to the legislature.

When inter-ministerial disputes occur, the president is responsible for mediating them. However, after an interview on Aug. 7 in which Ma blasted Legislative Speaker Wang Jin-pyng (王金平) saying that his alleged attempt to influence judicial proceedings constituted a “shame of democracy,” Ma ignored the public criticism he received for this statement and repeated his erroneous comments.

He went on TV again to criticize opposition legislators for blocking the speaker’s podium and preventing Premier Jiang Yi-huah (江宜樺) from delivering an administrative report. He said that this incident was unprecedented in constitutional history.

There is no way that Ma could be so ignorant. In advanced democratic countries, in order to make their points clearer to the public, minority parties come up with all sorts of legislative strategies. The most famous examples are the procrastination tactics seen in the British parliament and the US Congress.

US senators have read page after page from books about nothing to do with the agenda to postpone an issue. In Japan, opposition parties deliberately use “slow movement” to delay the voting process, which sometimes can take hours.

Anyone who knows the history of the Palace of Westminster in the UK will know that the ruling and opposition parties would often draw swords at the first sign of a disagreement. This is why the seats in the meeting place are designed so the governing party and the opposition are seated opposite each other with exactly two sword lengths between them so that all-in battles were not possible. Stories like this exist in the constitutional history of various countries.

Ma gave up his presidential responsibility for mediation and got involved in things he should not have when he tried to control the legislature. This resulted in a constitutional storm, the like of which we have not seen in Taiwan for almost 20 years.

Ma has not engaged in any self-reflection and says the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) is in power is because of its victory in the presidential election and because it won a majority in the legislature.

However, Ma's voters now openly say they regret supporting him and his approval rating has plummeted to 9.2 percent — basically stripping him of all legitimacy to continue as president. What Ma needs is a stern warning that winning an election does not mean that he has a blank check to do whatever he pleases.

The president must act according to the promises made at his inaugurations, respect the Constitution and reflect on his actions at all times to see whether they are in line with popular opinion. Ma cannot ignore the effects that his actions have and keep on doing as he pleases.

In response to the continuous drop in his approval ratings, Ma said that if one pays too close attention to particulars, nothing will ever get done. He added that if he failed to handle the Wang "issue," there is no way the government could meet public expectations for a fair judicial system.

Obviously, Ma is not only incompetent and clueless when it comes to ruling the country, his moral character is also questionable.

The Wang case has yet to enter the judicial system, and the Supreme Prosecutors' Office Special Investigation Division announced that the case belongs in the realm of legislative self-discipline. Ma's use of the KMT's internal disciplinary procedures and the actions he has taken against Wang's request for an injunction to keep his party membership are bringing much unrest to society.

Ma has made no comment about why the prosecutor general could go over the heads of his superiors and report directly to the president. Why did Ma use information gained from wiretapping to openly become involved in the allegations against Wang? Just how can Ma think that it is acceptable for the procuratorial system to make use of long-term wiretapping against his political enemies?

In democracies, scandals like this are more than enough to force a national leader to step down. How can Ma act as if nothing has happened? How can the media lack the courage to ask the difficult questions? Such open manipulation is the biggest shame and insult to

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