

President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) and his Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) were supposed to respond — either through a heartfelt apology or a grand scheme to address flawed national policies — to the hundreds of protesters who threw shoes near the KMT congress venue in Greater Taichung on Sunday.

These actions are long overdue. For more than five years, Taiwanese have lived through a persistent crisis: slow economic growth, rising living expenses, backsliding democracy and human rights. Meanwhile all that has been on their president's mind has been eliminating his political foes and rivals.

The KMT shares the same, if not more, responsibility for the nation's miserable governance.

Yet what Ma and his party did at the one-day congress — which was pushed back from Sept. 29 and moved from Taipei to minimize the number of protesters — was again a disappointment.

With only a nominal statement of the government's determination to assuage food safety fears, Ma and the KMT focused on other things of greater importance to them — and only them.

A revision of the party charter was passed to automatically make a KMT head of state also the party's chairman to enhance "party-state cooperation." Ma has called the revision a "sacrifice" because it means his current four-year term as chairman could be cut short, but most observers saw it as his attempt to shun responsibility in the event of a potential loss in next year's seven-in-one municipal elections.

Former KMT chairman Wu Poh-hsiung (吳伯雄) pulled off a memorable speech that could go down in history. Tearing up, the veteran politician told delegates that solidarity is essential for the KMT because the party has not been a master of political wrangling and has always been at a disadvantage in terms of media influence.

Taiwan losing patience with Ma, KMT

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Wu's remarks undermined the collaborative effort by Ma, Premier Jiang Yi-huah (江宜華) and Prosecutor-General Huang Shih-ming (黃世明) to remove Legislative Speaker Wang Jin-pyng (王金平), which has widely been recognized as a political conspiracy.

For any who still hold on to any last shreds of confidence in Ma and the KMT, what happened on Sunday could be — and should be — a sign that neither Ma nor the party will change their spots during the remainder of his presidential term. People's livelihoods have never been top of the KMT's agenda and the party still believes that if the same lies are repeated often enough, people will believe them.

The congress also told Taiwanese two things. First, Ma has become the second coming of former president Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁), who struggled to hold on to his power in the later stages of his presidency.

Second, the KMT will never honestly face up to its failures and shortcomings, nor does it have members with the courage to say or do the right things, not least of which would be to confront the party chairman.

Repeated shoe-throwing protests suggest the public is running out of patience and will not stop reminding the government what has to be done to bring the country back on track.

Responding to the protesters, Ma said — as he always does — that he listens to the people's voice. Unfortunately, he hears nothing.

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