

After repeatedly downplaying the possibility of a direct meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping (习近平), while insisting that such a meeting could only take place with the support of the Taiwanese public, President Ma Ying-jeou (马英九) finally revealed his true intentions in an interview with the Hong Kong-based weekly Yazhou Zhoukan.

Ma was quoted in the interview, released on Wednesday, as saying that although China has ruled out the possibility of a Ma-Xi meeting at next year's APEC summit, he remains willing to attend the economic summit and meet Xi, adding that the two sides of the Taiwan Strait "need to create the conditions necessary for such a meeting, and we are still in the process of creating these conditions."

Observers of the political power play could see that it was only a matter of time before Ma revealed his true intentions.

Ma has a history of feigning lack of interest just before jumping into the fray when the timing appears to be right. The 1998 Taipei mayoral race was a classic example: After repeatedly stating that he was not interested in running, he ran. Ma also repeatedly claimed that he would not take on the dual roles of national president and party chairman, but then followed these claims by running for the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) chairmanship twice.

After securing re-election as president in January last year, Ma has made no secret of his ambition to leave a significant legacy in cross-strait relations. Despite this, it remains shocking that he appears more eager to meet and converse with Xi than with his own people.

While expressly stating in the interview that he has a personal wish to meet Xi, Ma has remained unresponsive to calls from the public to reshuffle the Cabinet in an attempt to resuscitate the nation's economy, to the appeals of residents of Dapu Borough (大埔) in Miaoli County over the forced demolition of their houses and to calls to meet with Chinese dissidents.

In case the president is in need of a reminder, because of his administration's poor governance and misguided policies, the nation is suffering with a sluggish economy and a high unemployment rate.

Ma's focus on Xi, not constituency

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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The nation's economic woes and lack of employment prospects have even driven young people to commit suicide.

One would hope that the president, who is fond of lecturing his officials, is able to keep the public's suffering close to heart, and can empathize with their plight and struggles by addressing his plans to overcome the bleak situation facing the nation. This would recapture the people's confidence.

Ma, despite having a low approval rating of 9.2 percent, chose to speak at length about his wish to meet with Xi instead of addressing the multiple difficulties plaguing the nation and his people.

Rather than responding to calls for dialogue from various groups within the country, he is interested in discussing his future meeting with Xi. This is evidence that he is only seeking personal gain and to cement his personal "legacy."

Ma would be well advised, as head of the nation voted into office by the people of Taiwan, to make the public's welfare and national interests his priority. Only if he can live up to the role and responsibilities of the nation's president will he leave a positive and lasting mark in Taiwan's political history.

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