

Exceptional circumstances call for exceptional action, and there is no doubt that Taiwan faces an exceptional predicament: Despite the Cabinet reshuffle that followed the mishandling of Typhoon Morakot, the administration of President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) is becoming increasingly detached from the public and impervious to criticism.

From the harsh ruling in the trial of former president Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) — marred by a reassignment of judges, political meddling and a ruling smacking of political retribution — to the administration's refusal to listen to dissenting voices on cross-strait relations, the government is acting according to an agenda that mocks transparency and ignores popular misgivings.

The Ma administration has coped with the post-Morakot crisis and the Chen trial verdict partly because the opposition is weakened and unable to find a voice capable of forcing the president to listen.

Part of this is the result of fragmentation that occurred within the pan-green camp during Chen's second term. In the process, light-green and other centrist voters were marginalized, which, added to a struggling economy, made it easy for the pan-blue camp to secure the presidency in last year's election.

Roundly defeated in legislative and presidential elections, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) is struggling to get back on its feet. When allegations of corruption were made against the former first family, the party took another hit, and its response — distancing itself from Chen and then censuring him — itself fueled party disunity.

The pan-green camp should be seeking a unified voice to counter Ma's pro-China policies, but pan-green figureheads continue to make emotional appeals that only discredit the entire movement.

Former vice president Annette Lu (呂秀蓮), for example, continues to trade in hyperbole, such as when she described the ruling in Chen's trial as "Taiwan's Sept. 11," a declaration that both distracted the public from the sinister ramifications of the ruling and disrespected the victims of the terrorist attacks in the US eight years ago. Even bookish DPP Chairperson Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) at times speaks in exaggerated tones.

The time has come for party leaders to avoid preposterous language, regain the trust of "light greens" and revive the party's appeal to "light blues."

It is clear that demonstrations, however large and rowdy, will not persuade Ma to act more cautiously on China policy. Furthermore, with signs that an economic memorandum of understanding with China could be signed as early as next month and an economic cooperation framework agreement (ECFA) early next year, waiting until 2012 to exact electoral retribution on the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) may be too late. Even the year-end local

The DPP's struggle for one voice

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elections will only have a marginal effect on national policies.

The Ma government is rapidly altering the political balance of the cross-strait “status quo” by exacerbating Taiwan’s dependence on China and opening the door to Chinese influence in the real-estate, banking and media sectors.

With all this in train, Taiwan simply cannot afford to see more of the same from the pan-green camp. Its leaders must professionalize and fine-tune their rhetoric, break out of the confines of the electoral cycle and establish concrete links with influential members of the international community.

New, powerful voices both within and outside Taiwan must be added to the mix. Then, and only then, will Ma be forced to listen.

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