

Ma's legacy no concern of nation

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Strong pledges from a head of a state often reassure the public, as they reflect a strong character. It is different, however, with President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九).

Six years into his presidency, “how credible are Ma’s words?” is an oft-repeated question among Taiwanese. Campaigning for the presidency in 2008, Ma vowed to continue to seek UN membership: That turned out instead to be a push for so-called “meaningful participation in UN agencies” and a “diplomatic truce” with China.

Ma also promised that the nation’s future would be decided by Taiwanese, but this was replaced by his push for the so-called “1992 consensus” that deprives the Taiwanese of their right to decide.

How could the public ever forget his infamous “6-3-3” campaign pledge? — the vow to deliver annual GDP growth of 6 percent, annual per capita income of US\$30,000 and an unemployment rate of less than 3 percent — which ended up as a standing joke.

The list goes on. Yet, rather than asking himself why he has failed to honor his promises, Ma, without the motivation of having to seek re-election, is not only making little effort to fulfill his other campaign promises, but appears to be ignoring them altogether.

Ma’s repeated statement of his wish to meet with Chinese President Xi Jinping (習近平) suggests that, after winning re-election, he conveniently forgot the solemn pact he made with the electorate.

In an interview published by the Chinese-language Global Views Monthly on Sunday, Ma again expressed his wish to meet with Xi, reiterating that he still sees the APEC meeting this year in Beijing as the perfect occasion for a meeting with Xi.

Ma’s call for a meeting with Xi comes in stark contrast to the promise he gave in his campaign three years ago. Then seeking re-election, Ma on Nov. 18, 2011, pledged that “I absolutely will

not meet with the Chinese leader if I am re-elected.”

While some may quickly come to Ma's defense and argue that broken promises are to be expected coming from a politician, a president — particularly one who often claims the moral high ground — ought to be held to a higher standard.

It is no wonder that public trust in Ma remains low. This is obvious from a recent Taiwan Indicators Survey Research poll. It showed that 62.2 percent of those polled regarded Ma as untrustworthy, a number that climbed from 55.4 percent in June 2008 when he was first elected.

While Ma seems to no longer care about his credibility, he ought to remember that the burden will be passed to the KMT candidate in the 2016 presidential election. Whoever it is will face recurring public queries on the issue of political accountability.

The campaign promises an elected president makes are a solemn pledge to voters. Ma ought to be condemned for his total disregard and lack of ability to follow through on his promises to his people.

Yet more important than the issue of his personal credibility is the matter of national dignity. As the president, it is Ma's responsibility to uphold the national dignity of Taiwan.

Under normal circumstances, there is nothing wrong with having the president calling for a meeting with Xi, as it could reasonably be interpreted as the extension of an olive branch.

In Ma's case the crux of the matter is that Beijing has many times vetoed the idea of having a Ma-Xi meeting on the sidelines of the APEC summit.

To bring about the possibility of him meeting with Xi — hence achieving his personal desire to create a legacy for himself which he has made no secret of — Ma is essentially disregarding

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national dignity by his repeated show of unilateral willingness.

We may not care less if Ma cares enough about his political credibility to take steps toward rebuilding it.

However, it is downright despicable of Ma to flush Taiwan's national dignity down the drain simply to cement his personal legacy.

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