

President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) has touted consistency as one of his guiding principles in governance, even though he has time and again shown inconsistency in his commitments to the nation. Except, however, when it comes to the manner in which his administration deals with the public when conducting cross-strait negotiations — the government has been consistent in shunning public oversight by continually choosing to hold cross-strait negotiations behind closed doors.

Taiwan and China on Wednesday began the ninth round of talks on a trade in goods agreement. Likely due to concerns over protests, the government has kept the talks secret by refusing to disclose the location of the three-day meeting.

However, this tactic of playing “hide-and-seek” with the public serves only to trigger a fiercer backlash while further eroding public trust and confidence in the government.

One would have thought the student-led Sunflower movement's three-week-long occupation of the Legislative Yuan's main chamber in protest of the government's non-transparent handling of the cross-strait service trade agreement in March would be enough of a lesson for the Ma administration to better heed democratic principles when conducting cross-strait talks.

One would also have thought that the March 30 protest, which saw more than 500,000 people take to the streets of Taipei in a show of solidarity with and support for the Sunflower movement, would make the government understand the popular sentiment for transparency and citizen participation.

In the wake of the Sunflower movement, Ma himself said that he would engage in some soul-searching to better understand how to react to the public.

Apparently Ma has more soul-searching to do, as the government's secrecy surrounding the latest cross-strait talks suggests he continues to lack sincerity and respect, and harbors an inability to respond to public concerns over secretive cross-strait negotiations.

Ma's childish hide-and-seek tactics

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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The way the Ma administration signed the cross-strait service trade agreement with China without first discussing it with the legislature has seriously undermined the values of democracy.

In light of these actions, which caused such fierce controversy, and with the government still unable to dispel public doubts, it is dumbfounding that the government is already in such a hurry to conduct talks with China over a trade in goods agreement.

All cross-strait talks should be halted until the legislature has passed a law to monitor cross-strait negotiations. Not to mention that the government is still embroiled in the case concerning former Mainland Affairs Council deputy minister Chang Hsien-yao (張顯耀), who is accused of leaking state secrets during his time at the council and as vice chairman and secretary-general of the Straits Exchange Foundation.

Chang handled the signing of the various cross-strait agreements, including the cross-strait service trade agreement. If Chang did overreach his authority during the negotiations, as the Ma administration alleged, then the result of those negotiations, including the service trade pact, should be considered invalid.

The murkiness surrounding the Chang case and the lack of a mechanism to monitor cross-strait deals have confounded the public's lack of confidence in the government's ability to conduct cross-strait talks in a manner that prioritizes domestic industries and protects national interests.

In short, it is downright despicable for the Ma administration to employ underhand tactics in dealing with matters of such grave concern to the public and the nation as a whole.

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