

While it is inevitable that incumbent officials have more advantages than their rivals when it comes to campaigning, the amount of resources the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) government is throwing into its nominees' campaigns in the Nov. 29 nine-in-one elections is still astonishing.

In Taiwan or elsewhere in the world, incumbent candidates are typically able to promote themselves through advertisements paid for by the government, and this is usually a gray area that can be tolerated by most people. However, the actions of the KMT in the Taipei mayoral race have gone far beyond the boundaries of this tacit consent.

Over the weekend, when the KMT candidate Sean Lien (連戰) and independent candidate Ko Wen-je (柯文哲) attended the Taipei Hakka Yimin Festival, organized by the Taipei City Government, Lien was able to stand or walk alongside Taipei Mayor Hau Lung-bin (郝龍斌), and was formally introduced by the master of ceremonies. Ko was relegated to the back of the parade, and was asked to keep his distance for “administrative neutrality” purposes — although the differing treatment of Lien and Ko was already a violation of the administrative neutrality that city officials were so eager to defend.

President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) last week attended a groundbreaking ceremony for the Taipei Mass Rapid Transit System's Minsheng-Xizhi Line that was cohosted by Hau and New Taipei City Mayor Eric Chu (朱立倫). However, it turned out that the construction of the new line has not yet been approved by the central government.

Earlier this month, Ma, accompanied by Minister of Transportation and Communications Yeh Kuang-shih (葉匡時), attended a groundbreaking ceremony for the Tamkang Bridge that is to connect New Taipei City's Tamsui (淡水) and Bali (八里) districts. The bridge could reduce the travel time between the districts by 30 minutes as well as help to solve the traffic jams that have plagued Tamsui residents for many years.

However, the event proved to be another “fake” groundbreaking, as the New Taipei City Government has yet to obtain the land needed for the bridge.

KMT resorts to Potemkin trickery

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Faced with criticism from lawmakers yesterday over the public relations stunts, Yeh said that he was aware of the realities, adding that he “would not encourage” such ceremonies.

These illusions therefore, are not simply violations of administrative neutrality, they are frauds committed by the president, the minister, the mayors and other officials. They are proof that the KMT is putting all its efforts and spending taxpayers’ money to promote its own candidates through biased acts and deception.

During Ma’s first presidential campaign, his team put out TV advertisements criticizing former president Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) for inaugurating new freeways section by section, so that there would be several ceremonies to remind voters of his government’s achievements. However, at least under Chen’s administration, the freeways sections were actually completed afterwards.

What we have seen from the KMT administration in recent days are Potemkin constructs, which are as far removed from the reality as most of its economic and foreign policies.

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