

The nation's biggest headline-grabber over the past few days has been the head-to-head confrontation between Taipei Mayor Ko Wen-je (柯文哲) and Hon Hai Group chairman Terry Gou (郭台銘) over the controversy involving the Syntrend Creative Park project in the capital.

Amid accusations by media pundits that there might have been corruption involved in the bidding procedure for an underground parking lot won by a Hon Hai subsidiary, Gou spent more than NT\$3 million (US\$95,100) on newspaper advertisements on Monday demanding that the city government make public all documents related to the bid within 48 hours or it would cease construction on the site.

Ko responded by saying that the city government "is not a subsidiary of Hon Hai" and that it will "not buy into threats" from anyone.

Putting the controversy over the project aside for the moment, Gou's sheer presumptuousness is beyond belief.

A successful entrepreneur, Gou has long been known for his brisk and fierce personality. He has on numerous occasions threatened to leave Taiwan because of dissatisfaction with the nation's economic policies. However, the extent to which he felt he could simply "communicate" with the government by spending NT\$3 million on an advertisement to demand things go his way is dumbfounding.

The incident has left many wondering about the relationship between big business and local governments. Is the way Gou conducts himself and issues threats a result of being spoiled by the administration of former Taipei mayor Hau Lung-bin (郝龍斌) and the central government, or because such tactics have worked for him in the past?

Many more might question the relationship between the rich and the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) government, following media reports of how Council of Agriculture Minister Chen Bao-ji (陳寶基) was "summoned" by food-scandal-plagued Ting Hsin International Group (鼎新國際) for a meeting at the group's headquarters at Taipei 101 over the issue of cross-strait agricultural trade; or Gou's threat in June last year to stop paying taxes and move Hon Hai's headquarters

## Standing up to big business

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out of Taiwan if he did not get an explanation from the National Communications Commission as to why a subsidiary could not use 4G telecommunications equipment manufactured by China-based Huawei Technologies Co.

Hau, meanwhile, has described the many criticisms that Ko has directed at several projects that he initiated as “unbearable.” Hau said he has reached the limit of his patience and accused the new mayor of cherry-picking information to repeatedly discredit the previous administration.

The question is who is the one responsible for the public’s bad perceptions of the capital’s many development projects — such as the Taipei Dome, the Taipei Twin Towers project, the Songshan Cultural and Creative Park and the MeHAS City project.

As such, “unbearable” ought be the word that Taipei residents use in the face of low administrative efficiency, efficacy and lack of transparent information on government affairs.

In the past, due to a lack of information transparency, many Taipei residents have been kept in the dark on various city projects, whose terms and contracts might have been unreasonably and unfairly drafted.

Less than a month into his term, Ko has already rubbed several conglomerates the wrong way, including Hon Hai, Far Glory Land Development Co and Fubon Land Development Co. As Ko locks horns with Gou and other big-name tycoons, he needs to know that he has the backing of the public in the battle for justice.

After all, any political party interacting too closely with big corporations brings the likelihood of corruption, and, Ko, being an independent, might for once be a politician unhindered by baggage, and capable of tackling the issues and looking after the public’s interests.

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