

Administrative neutrality violated

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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For anyone who cherishes Taiwan's democratic achievements, it was certainly disturbing to see six government officials accompanying Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) Chairman Eric Chu (馬英九) on his recent visit to China for the 10th Cross-Strait Economic and Cultural Forum in Shanghai — a sight that has left many shaking their heads and wondering whether the nation's state apparatus has been manipulated for partisan gain.

The six officials were from the Ministry of Economic Affairs, the Mainland Affairs Council (MAC), the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Culture and the Council of Agriculture.

MAC Minister Andrew Hsia (夏立言) defended their visit by saying the six did not travel at taxpayers' expense, but had their expenses subsidized by a KMT think tank. However, the sheer notion of government officials attending the annual KMT-Chinese Communist Party (CCP) forum — a party-to-party mechanism that primarily serves as a channel of dialogue between the leaders of the two parties — is extremely inappropriate and appears to violate administrative neutrality.

Article 8 of the Public Servants' Administrative Neutrality Act (公務員行政中立法) clearly stipulates that public servants must not use powers, opportunities or methods granted by their office to aid or benefit political parties or other political groups of political candidates, nor accede to their requests, accept bribes in any form or donate in their interests.

The Ministry of the Interior's Permit Regulations Governing the Entry into the Mainland Area by Civil Servants and other Personnel with Special Identities in the Taiwan Area (公務員及具有特殊身分人員進入大陸地區許可辦法) also prohibits civil servants from entering China on non-official matters and carrying out activities related to their offices.

It is beyond belief that Chu chose to disregard the law by bringing these officials — what the KMT called “the party's specially invited experts” — to the forum, where issues pertaining to Taiwan's entry to Beijing's proposed Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership were discussed.

Blurring the line between state and party suggests not only an abuse of administrative power

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and possibly an exploitation of administrative resources for partisan gains, but also Chu's arrogance as the party chairman of the nation's ruling party.

More importantly, the incident strongly suggests that Chu, despite being dubbed one of the KMT's most promising stars, is still clinging to the dated concept that "the party leads the state" and considers the nation's civil servants to belong to the KMT.

So much for President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) repeated lectures that government officials need to heed public perception and ensure neutrality between administrative and party affairs.

The job description of civil servant calls for them to serve the public, not a specific politician or a particular party.

In view of the alleged abuse of the nation's administrative apparatus and the brazen breach of administrative neutrality by members of his Cabinet, Premier Mao Chi-kuo (馬英九) owes the public an explanation.

With the campaign season for next year's presidential election approaching, the administration's neutrality will become increasingly pertinent and the public must keep a close eye on Ma's government to keep it in check.

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