

## Ghosts of one-party state linger

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Minister of Culture Hung Meng-chi (洪孟啟) offering his resignation yesterday amid media reports accusing the Ministry of Culture of using the national coffers to “subsidize” the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) comes as a timely reminder that, with next year’s presidential and legislative elections less than 110 days away, it is increasingly important for the public to keep a close eye on the government to prevent it from squandering taxpayers’ money on partisan interests.

While Hung has denied the accusation, telling a news conference yesterday that the proposal to allot NT\$2.5 million (US\$75,465) to each KMT lawmaker serving on the legislature’s Education and Culture Committee to ensure the passage of the ministry’s budget had been immediately rejected on the grounds of the principle of administrative neutrality.

However, the Chinese-language Next Magazine, which exposed the alleged irregularities within the ministry, said Hung was lying.

In view of the alleged breach of administrative neutrality by members of his Cabinet, Premier Mao Chi-kuo (馬英九) certainly owes the public an explanation; it is therefore dumbfounding that Mao has instead asked Hung to stay put and did not accept his resignation.

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 — or could it be that even Ma’s own Cabinet members are used to merely paying Ma lip service?

After all, Ma’s own political track record suggests that he himself has not been setting a good example of drawing a clear line between state and party and ensuring administrative neutrality.

Some might still recall that Ma, shortly after assuming the presidency in 2008, used the state affairs fund to purchase 8,400 boxes of moon cakes from disadvantaged fruit farmers for the Mid-Autumn Festival to give to the underprivileged. While that in itself was a nice gesture, Ma allegedly used the national coffers for partisan gain by having the moon cakes delivered to the underprivileged via the KMT’s local chapters.

Some might also recall that there were media reports in the run-up to Ma's re-election in 2012 accusing Ma of committing breaches of administrative neutrality by having his re-election campaign office instruct Cabinet-level ministries to encourage their employees to take part in Ma's re-election rallies.

Not to mention that there have also been reports in the past alleging that under Ma, the nation's intelligence agencies have conducted surveillance on opposition presidential candidates.

And these are only a few examples in a long litany of transgressions.

Hung's case is no small matter, as the Anti-Corruption Act (反貪污法) clearly prohibits officials from engaging in acts that profit an individual, either directly or indirectly, not to mention that the Civil Service Administrative Neutrality Act (公務員行政中立法) also clearly stipulates that civil servants and administrative officials have to remain politically impartial.

Mao's easy dismissal of the Hung case shows disregard for the law, is an abuse of administrative power and is disturbing to the many who cherish the nation's democratic achievements as the nation struggles to throw off its one-party state past.

Civil servants need to bear in mind that they are on the taxpayers' payroll and their job description calls for them to serve the people, not a specific politician or a particular party.

For any government official to blur the line between state and party suggests not only an abuse of administrative power and possible exploitation of administrative resources for partisan gain, but also an arrogant act that treats the public with contempt and plays them for fools.

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