

Voters can choose a brighter future

Written by Liberty Times Editorial
Tuesday, 05 January 2016 07:33

Amid disaster, dejection and crises, we made it through last year. For Taiwan, this year could see a continuation of present problems, but it could also be a year to bravely face challenges while laying the foundation for new prospects and hope.

This year is to see a new president after Taiwan's sixth direct presidential election is held. The president is to bring in a new administration, replacing staff at the Executive Yuan and government agencies. Taiwan has already experienced two transitions of government that involved one party handing power to another.

However, the most important change this year might occur in the legislature, as opinion polls show that control of the legislature — which has been dominated by the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) since the end of World War II — might pass to another party.

A change in legislative majority would be of major significance, because the KMT — which has been in charge of the governing body for a long time — has caused representative democracy to malfunction because it has been placing party interests over public interests.

The economy is in the doldrums and national development is way off track. Last year, economic growth fell below 1 percent, and it looks as if this year it is set to be about 2 percent at the most.

China's economic growth has slowed and that is dragging on Taiwan — which is dependent on that nation for 40 percent of its exports. However, an even more fundamental impact of China's influence on Taiwan's economy has been the big exodus of Taiwanese industry to China, which has led to a serious deficit in domestic investment, innovation, progress and a clear drop in international competitiveness.

If a concerted effort is not made to adjust and change this industrial and economic development model, even an improvement in the external economic environment would not be able to improve existing problems.

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All the major policies of President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) administration over the past eight years have been leaning toward China. More than one year ago, the administration tried to bring Chinese companies into Taiwan by way of the cross-strait service trade agreement, but their neglect of basic communication and procedural justice ignited the Sunflower movement and forced it to give up the attempt.

In addition, information has become available indicating that the trade in goods agreement — now under negotiation — is set to deregulate the importation of Chinese agricultural products.

As the government has guided Taiwan's trade and economy toward China, it has not allowed Taiwan to develop its ties with the international community — particularly with respect to participation in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and other multilateral regional integration agreements.

Opinion polls show that Ma's administration is set to suffer a great defeat in the upcoming elections, and its failed China policies have been its biggest undoing.

This means that the incoming government is set to have a strong mandate to leave the floundering pro-China policies behind and create a new platform for Taiwanese trade, economy and industry that focuses on progress, diversity and internationalization.

China's growing military strength is causing it to deal with the South China Sea and the East China Sea disputes unreasonably, but confidently, and this is worrying its neighbors. It also does not hide its ambitions to challenge existing trade, economic and financial norms. In this changing situation, if Taiwan increases its dependence on China, it will only fall deeper into the trap set by China. Taiwan must therefore develop close relations with developed countries that have no ambitions or enmity toward Taiwan and also pivot toward ASEAN, India and other developing nations.

A new year, a new government and a new direction could bring new fortunes to Taiwan.

However, Ma, who is about to step down, has all along tried to build his legacy. From election

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day to the presidential handover on May 20, there is a four month constitutional window period, and whether or not Ma respects the public's will and calmly helps his successor accomplish a smooth handover in accordance with the example set by former president Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) in 2000 is a constitutional issue that has lately received a fair deal of attention.

As a legal framework regulating the process has yet to be established, some political observers recently proposed that national security matters should be handed over to the next president the day after the election and — to safeguard national security and constitutional development — this is a necessary step.

Ma should take this good advice and set a precedent.

Whether Taiwan's difficulties are to be perpetuated or if Taiwanese can face the new year with confidence and the nation can create its own fortunes is to depend on the wisdom of voters.

The Jan. 16 presidential election is exceptionally important, and we therefore remind all Taiwanese that we are responsible for the nation's future and that we must make an active and wise choice at the ballot box.

Translated by Perry Svensson

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