

KMT paves way for further isolation

Written by Taipei Times Editorial
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Since the Chinese Nationalist Party's (KMT) disastrous defeat in the Jan. 16 presidential and legislative elections, the once-dominant party has been at odds with itself about whether to go down a reformative path that would transform itself into a more tolerant and Taiwan-centered party, or to shift toward deeper-blue ideology.

The KMT's conflicting mindset is evidenced by its handling of two incidents pertaining to what is the most suitable appellation for the nation in the international arena.

On May 25, Minister of Health and Welfare Lin Tzou-yien (林錫山) delivered a speech at the 69th World Health Assembly (WHA) in Geneva, Switzerland, an event from which Taiwan's delegation was almost excluded due to pressure from China.

In his five-minute speech, Lin twice mentioned the term "Chinese Taipei," a title under which Taiwan has been participating in the WHA since 2009, the second year former president Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) was in office.

Lin did not mention "Taiwan," except for the one time when he talked about "Taiwanese population."

To the astonishment of many people, the KMT caucus — a longtime champion of using titles such as "Chinese Taipei" and the "Republic of China (ROC)" — filed a motion two days later demanding an apology from Lin and Premier Lin Chuan (林錫山), saying that Lin Tzou-yien's failure to mention "Taiwan" in his speech constituted a degradation of the nation's sovereignty.

The KMT's unusual defense of "Taiwan" became ironic after it made a fuss over President Tsai Ing-wen's (蔡英文) identification of herself as the "president of Taiwan (ROC)" when she signed a guest book in Panama during her first overseas state visit last month.

The party held several news conferences lambasting Tsai's decision to choose "Taiwan" over the "ROC" as belittling national dignity.

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As the grounds for the KMT's criticism of Tsai's choice of title is similar to that cited by the party when it blasted Lin Tzou-yien's WHA speech, many were puzzled by the party's seemingly inconsistent and contradictory stance.

It is apparent that the KMT is having difficulty finding the middle ground between its decades-long defense of the existence of an exiled Chinese government and the growing Taiwanese awareness on an island that it deems as being "recovered" by the ROC in 1945.

Given that Tsai's description of herself as "president of Taiwan" received support from 72.4 percent of the respondents in a poll released on Sunday by the Taiwan Thinktank, it would definitely be unwise for the KMT to go against mainstream public opinion unless it wants to isolate itself even further.

The KMT's conflicting stance only makes its statement that Taiwan and the ROC have become an integral part of each other sound insincere and expedient. Such an impression certainly would not help a party seeking to regain the public's trust and support.

Following the KMT's controversial expulsion earlier this month of its former spokesman, Yang Wei-chung (楊偉中) — who was kicked out for doing what he was recruited to do: bring diverse opinions into the party — the hope that the KMT would be more tolerant toward different views, as it has pledged to be, seems far-fetched.

It is up to the KMT to decide whether to adopt the less popular deep-blue ideology and become marginalized like the New Party, or to listen to the public's voice and make a comeback.

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