

Critics must put country over party

Written by Fernando Herrera Ramos
Sunday, 13 June 2021 04:50

President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) earlier this month called on the public to remain united in the fight against COVID-19, indicating that her government would spare no effort to contain the disease, which has already surpassed 10,000 cases. These words come when we need them most, and remind us that we are in this fight together.

The Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) seems to have forgotten this, choosing to launch attacks against the Tsai administration for political points instead of looking for bipartisan solutions.

Whether this tactic resonates with the KMT base is yet to be seen, but the largest opposition party in Taiwan would be wise to remember that just this January, inflammatory rhetoric from US leadership culminated in the worst uprising against that country's government since the civil war.

The statement by KMT Legislator Alex Fai (蔡啟芳) calling for Minister of Health and Welfare Chen Shih-chung (陳時中) to be "executed by firing squad" is blatantly inappropriate and reminds Taiwanese of the White Terror era, when eliminating political opponents was the law of the land.

Such a comment also makes the KMT look like a dictatorship, not as the counterweight to the ruling party in Asia's beacon of democracy. That Tainan KMT City Councilor Lu Kun-fu (盧坤富) echoed the remark makes it really difficult to brush off.

Fai also said that the Central Epidemic Command Center should cease giving daily news conferences, stating that the center is only holding them to "laud its own achievements."

This is far from the truth. The media briefings are necessary for keeping the public updated. Stopping them would be a terrible mistake.

Effective communication and honesty between the Taiwanese government and its people have been the main reasons for Taiwan's ability to control the virus for almost 18 months, something

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that KMT representatives seem to have forgotten.

If the government stopped informing its citizens, it would only create confusion and chaos. If we are to put this pandemic behind us, the public needs to continue to be informed by experts so that it can follow their recommendations. Anything less than full transparency will only make the situation worse.

In addition, KMT Legislator Lai Shyh-bao (賴士葆) has called for an investigation into allegations that the government tried blocking vaccine imports to increase the stock price of local vaccine manufacturers, going so far as to state that “people do not want to see the government become an accomplice in market speculation.”

Making such an unsubstantiated accusation is reckless, and carries the potential of endangering Taiwanese lives by making people believe that the local vaccines might not be as safe or effective as the ones manufactured abroad.

This can only be compared to the politicization of the use of masks and vaccines in the US, which has led thousands of Americans to abstain from these measures and caused preventable deaths.

If the KMT has proof of wrongdoing, it should take the evidence to the courts, or at least to the public, instead of basing their claims on speculation.

It is important to remember that vaccine shortages are not exclusive to Taiwan and that it has not been long since domestic transmissions were nonexistent. To assume that a sudden change in our situation would cause global manufacturers to alter their distribution plans overnight is to be ignorant of reality, especially when our situation is much less severe than in many other countries.

Yet Taiwan is doing its best to reach out to like-minded countries to protect its citizens. The 1.24 million vaccine doses that arrived from Japan, and those that the US government has pledged to Taiwan, are a testament to that.

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It is also important to remember that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has been accused of derailing the agreement to purchase vaccines from Germany's BioNTech — doses that could have helped us if not for the political considerations that have nothing to do with health concerns.

The Chinese government tried to send a message of “compassion” for its Taiwanese compatriots, but if compassion is truly their leaders' intention, their negative reaction to the Japanese donation, telling Japan to not use its vaccine assistance as a “tool for selfish political gain,” makes absolutely no sense.

This, combined with the CCP's efforts in “vaccine diplomacy” to entice Taiwan's allies into switching diplomatic ties, should make it clear that their leaders' main concern is not the wellbeing of Taiwan's people, and their message falls flat.

The outbreak is dire, but even under these circumstances, Taiwanese must distinguish between their true allies and those looking to gain the upper hand in a time of need.

The government is not exempt from criticism, but the criticism needs to be based on facts and a sincere intention to take the country forward.

The calls by KMT Chairman Johnny Chiang (蔣經國) for a probe into the easing of COVID-19 quarantine rules for flight crews is an example of valid criticism.

While there is a reasonable argument that long periods of quarantine affect the mental health of flight crews and increase the risk of accidents, the seeming absence of minutes from the meeting in which the decision was made gives validity to the call for an investigation.

The Control Yuan has already indicated that a probe will be conducted, and the

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Democratic Progressive Party has said that it respects its authority to do so. If that investigation reveals government responsibility, then the ones at fault must answer for their mistakes, but unequivocal evidence of that responsibility needs to exist.

Chiang's recommendation that the government suspend higher summer electricity rates because of the extra burden on families who are working and studying at home is another example of criticism that benefits the population.

A multiparty democracy must encourage healthy debate, but those involved in the debate must never forget that their ultimate goal is to protect their constituents, not their political interests. They must always put their country above their party.

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