

Ko's Taipei parade draws thousands

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Crowds gather in front of the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall during a campaign rally for independent Taipei mayoral candidate Ko Wen-je in Taipei yesterday.

Photo: Wang Min-wei, Taipei Times

More than 200,000 people, according to organizers' estimates, took to the streets yesterday to join independent Taipei mayoral candidate Ko Wen-je (柯文哲) in a carnival-themed campaign parade, voicing their support for Ko's "campaign for a change."

Including samba dancers, people dressed as characters from fairy tales, giant balloons in the shape of a four-headed dragon, Mother Teresa — and the first Presbyterian missionary to northern Taiwan, George Leslie Mackay — as well as decorated floats and people holding colorful flags reading "Hug for Taipei," thousands paraded from Liberty Square to Taipei City Hall in what appeared to be a festival celebration rather than a campaign event.

The crowd was divided into eight sections, each represented by symbolic colors: red for friendship, orange for brevity, yellow for passion, green for creativity, blue for freedom, indigo for eagerness, purple for equality and white for tolerance and dreams.

Each section was led by a float decorated with specialties and landmarks from different districts in the municipality. Although the head of the parade left Liberty Square at about 2pm, Ko, his wife and his parents, who were at the end of the parade, did not depart until 3:30pm, because the parade route was jammed.

Many marchers and onlookers cheered as Ko and his family passed by, while others were eager to point out Ko to bystanders.

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Although Zhongzheng (中正) and Daan (大安) districts — where the parade passed — are considered to be Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) strongholds, many residents waved to the parade from their windows and shouted their support.

“I would like to thank everyone for cheerfully taking part in the parade, embracing Taipei with love, welcoming the approaching mayoral election with feelings of festivity and looking forward to realizing the change,” Ko told his supporters in front of Taipei City Hall.

“Along the parade route, I saw bright colors, creativeness, and smiles on your faces. I would like to thank you for what you did with me — we succeeded in changing the political culture in Taiwan, elections are no longer about sorrow and threats; they are bright and joyful.”

Referring to his KMT rival, Sean Lien (林錫山), who cried during his own rally on Saturday, Ko said that unlike “another person” who was in tears during another parade and made it sorrowful, “I think the objective of politics is to make people happy, not sad.”

Ko said that the parade ended at the city hall because, if he is elected, his government would be a transparent one and therefore he would “lead the people into the city hall.”

“In the past, due to differences in ideology, an invisible and cold wall had been erected in the city between you and me. The wall divided us into ‘pan-green’ and ‘pan-blue,’ pro-‘unification’ and pro-independence, nationals and imperial subjects,” Ko said. “The two sides of the wall hated each other, shouted at each other and opposed each other. We do not know when this wall appeared, or how long it has existed, but it makes our family relationships, friendships and loves suffer.”

“I am here to stand with everyone in the city, to tear down the wall with love and hugs,” he said.

Ko added that there are many challenges facing society, including an increasing wealth gap, the unequal distribution of social resources, housing injustice and injustice in education resources.

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"These are all the walls we must tear down," he said.

Police estimated that about 100,000 people attended the event.

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