

## Challenges faced by the Hong Kong SAR Government

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(Following is the speech by the Chief Secretary for Administration, Mrs Carrie Lam, delivered at the re-launch ceremony of the Hong Kong Public Administration Association's academic journal, held in the Police Officers' Club on September 27, 2012.)

Thank you very much, Peter (Professor Peter Fong). Just a bit of correction: I have been in the Government for 32 years. I don't want to understate my age. Of course, for the first 27 years I worked as a civil servant. And then I resigned from the civil service to join the political team in 2007, serving as the Secretary for Development for five years, and now continuing my service for the public as the Chief Secretary for Administration.

Now, of course, I often attend occasions. As long as there is a single non-Chinese-speaking guest, it is out of sheer courtesy that I should speak in English, but on this particular occasion there is another reason to speak in English. I hope you will forgive me: it's because I have not prepared any speech. So I came here and noticed there is this journal, and flipping through the pages I noticed that the Chief Executive, Mr Leung Chun-ying, has an article. Or perhaps it's not an article - I was told it was a speech delivered by C Y last July, so it was quite before he started his campaign for the position of the Chief Executive, and of course now being the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong SAR. So I thought I might as well do a response, or a critique, of what he has said last July, and that's why I need to do it in English, because the whole article was written in English.

I must say that when I first read this title, I was not very comfortable, because the title of the speech delivered by C Y was this: "How to Restore the Pride and Effectiveness of the Hong Kong SAR Government" on an occasion of the Hong Kong Public Administration Association (Hong Kong PAA) last July. So what made me a bit uncomfortable was this title, apparently suggesting that the Hong Kong SAR Government has lost some of its pride and effectiveness, and that's why it has to be restored. Fortunately, he started off in his speech, which was now recapped in this written piece, edited by Sonny (Professor Sonny Lo), I suppose, that he did not choose the title of the speech. The title was given to him by Peter. So it is for Peter to explain to us why he felt that the Hong Kong SAR Government has lost some of its pride and effectiveness that has to be restored. But I'm glad, actually, that before he contested for the position and assumed the position of the Chief Executive, C Y said that he too felt that this was not a very appropriate title because he rated the Hong Kong civil service

very, very high - it's very dedicated, very diligent, very hardworking - but he still wants to share with us some of his views.

Now, I had better treatment from the Association. The Association asked me, "What do you want to talk about over lunch?" Well, in fact I made a very casual suggestion. I told the Association maybe I'd talk about the challenge faced by the Hong Kong SAR Government in this term of the Administration.

So put simply, the greatest challenge I felt was actually to translate what the Chief Executive promised in his election manifesto into action. And some of the things that Mr Leung said last July were subsequently reflected in his manifesto, so it was still very proper for me to try to respond or comment on some of the points that he made over a year ago on the same occasion. Now, of course, we have successive Chief Executives in the last 15 years after reunification with the Mainland of China, but my personal view is that it was for the first time that we have a Chief Executive who had a very clearly laid out vision in his manifesto and, as he had emphasised time and again, that in putting together this manifesto he had done extensive consultation. I'm sure Ho Wing-him will bear that out, who has assisted him in writing parts of this manifesto as far as elderly welfare and other things are concerned. So I would really regard his manifesto as a promise to the 7 million people of Hong Kong.

So the greatest challenge of this term of Government naturally is to deliver those promises, especially when there is this Chief Executive who may want to run for a second term, especially come 2017 we have universal suffrage for the election of the Chief Executive. So the next five years will be crucial to test out whether, having promised people that there are things that he wanted to do, that he could deliver those.

And that brings me back to the purpose and the mission of the Hong Kong PAA, which is about effective governance, which is about good public administration. Because it is not enough, speaking as a public servant with over 30 years of experience, it is simply not enough for effective governance to be delivered just by vision. You need effective governance, you need good public administration in order to deliver those policy pledges for the people of Hong Kong.

Over lunch we talked about what is actually the relationship between politics and public administration. My view is the two simply cannot be separated. You cannot have effective governance just by displaying politics or political leadership. Likewise, these days, particularly in the Hong Kong situation, I'm becoming quite sceptical that you cannot just have good public administration without some political skills, political language, and all sorts of ways to really handle the political situation in Hong Kong, which is becoming more and more complicated.

So, in the last three months, the new Administration has really tried very hard to

deliver the Chief Executive's election pledges. The first thing that the team has decided is we have perhaps to deviate from the past practices, whether before the reunification or after the reunification, to follow this routine of an annual Policy Address to tell people what you want to do.

In the past, the due process is individual bureaux and departments will work out what they want to do in terms of policy initiatives, or what they call a bottom-up due process or approach, and then all these initiatives, after having secured the necessary policy support and resource allocation, will go into the annual Policy Address and the policy agenda of the Chief Executive.

But now that we have a manifesto, we have a vision of the Chief Executive, this approach is no longer adequate. To put it another way, in fact the way forward, or the direction, has been set in the manifesto document, and people are becoming more and more impatient - they don't want to wait for an annual occasion to listen to what the Chief Executive has to say and what action plans he has put in place, and what policy initiatives individual officials will roll out in the next 12 months. They look for real action - because they have already been promised something, so they look for real action. And so at the very early stage of the Administration, or really on the second day after we were sworn in, we have already decided that we need to spare no time and no efforts in translating the Chief Executive's promises into actions that we could tell the people of Hong Kong.

So in exactly half a month's time, on July 16, when the Chief Executive attended the full Legislative Council, before the Council went into prorogue in preparation for the Legislative Council elections, he already outlined five important initiatives that he will deliver. All those are taken from his manifesto; we did not dream up those initiatives through a bottom-up approach. We already had those initiatives laid down in the manifesto. The job of the Administration, Principal Officials plus senior civil servants together, is to work out the actual implementation plan for each and every of those initiatives.

Of course, in order to fulfil the pledge that we will look after livelihood issues, several of the, or in fact all of the, five measures introduced on July 16 are livelihood measures, like introducing an Old Age Living Allowance for elders in need who are aged 65 and above, this \$2,200; doubling the medical vouchers, again for elderly people, from \$500 to \$1,000; making available a 5,000 quota for those who aspire to own a flat to buy from the secondary market of HOS (Home Ownership Scheme) without land premium; creating \$500 million for promoting social enterprises and social entrepreneurship in Hong Kong; and helping the NGOs to redevelop their GIC (Government, Institution or Community) land into youth hostels, so we could also help to meet some of the housing, if not ownership but for rental, aspirations of the young people.

We thought we'd have a little bit of breathing space, having done the five, but in no time we realised that we need to continue with this pace of delivering the Chief Executive's Policy Address, particularly after those rounds of district visits. As you will remember, on July 2, many Principal Officials were sent down to districts to have district forums, and in between the district forums we also met with the people to listen to community groups' aspirations, and we actually got very useful feedback from what the people want. All these then aggregated together and suggested that we should do some more livelihood projects that would touch the hearts of the people.

So one of those that we have put together, very much by myself co-ordinating with the various departments, is this programme to install lifts throughout the territory where there are pedestrian walkways, footbridges, in order to enhance universal access for elderly people, for people with disabilities or even for young families with babies. This particular programme, which is entitled "Making it easier to get around", has proven to be very popular. It is not a big project, it's not a very sexy project, to put it that way, but it is a very encouraging move by the Administration - that to us, to this term of Government, no livelihood issue is too trivial. So we try to respond as positively as possible to the needs of the people, especially at the very local level.

In order to do that, actually we need to pull different parts of the Government together, and that's where I find my job as the Chief Secretary for Administration meaningful, purposeful and very heart-warming, because I truly believe that, as I try to dispute the title of this speech, I truly believe that the Hong Kong civil service remains very effective, a very proud organisation that wants to do good for the people. But we are facing increasing obstacles in various respects. First is, of course, these days government businesses are very complicated. Normally you cannot have one bureau or one department that is capable of handling one issue, whether it is about a lift installation programme throughout the territory or about the recent enforcement actions against these parallel traders, or even after the major typhoon Vicente, we had to clear up those plastic pellets spilled over - it is not the job of one department or one bureau. It has to be one government, it has to be different parts of the Government being pulled together in one direction, in one heart, in one mind, to serve the people of Hong Kong. And once we get there, we get things done, as you can see for yourself after the last three months.

So with that experience we went on. We went on to do some very interesting projects. One is at Tin Shui Wai. There have been so many complaints about Tin Shui Wai New Town, particularly in the northern part, which is predominated by public rental housing. People coming from grass-roots backgrounds, and many of whom are on social security, so they have very low buying power and so on. But in the same area, people complain that there is a lot of monopoly of shops and retail spaces and so on. There is insufficient diversity in the retail end for these grass-roots people to buy. So again through - cutting a long story short - by pulling the relevant departments together,

and particularly under the co-ordination of the District Officer (Yuen Long), we launched a project to create a Tin Shui Wai open-air bazaar in a very centrally located area in Tin Shui Wai North which is next to an LCSD (Leisure and Cultural Services Department) park. And it will provide around 200 stalls on very low rental, estimated to be around \$800 to \$1,000 a month, for leasing to hawkers, small businesses, individual entrepreneurs who want to provide more shopping outlets for the local people, or also maybe other outlets to sell their home-made souvenirs, art pieces and so on.

This particular project has gone a step further, to tease out what C Y said in his speech last July, that we have to perform different layers of government. We have to be more or less like the federal government type, devising our own education policies, our housing policies and also our international relationship, economy and trade, and so on. But down at the lowest level, we are also a municipal type of government. We need to look after the daily needs of people in districts, in neighbourhoods, and so on. So the Tin Shui Wai project has demonstrated to us that the CE is right in his vision that we should try to resolve district problems by district solutions, and we should seize district opportunities to create jobs for the district. And so this is a little example. I promised the Yuen Long District Council during my visit yesterday that we will, again through all these concerted efforts of the government departments, try to aim at opening this bazaar before Chinese New Year next year, so it's only four months from now. It's quite incredible in terms of efficiency.

That's why you don't need to doubt the efficiency of the Hong Kong SAR Government. It remains very efficient, as long as we get our act together, as long as there is a very clear direction, and all my colleagues, whether they are Principal Officials or civil servants, they still want to do good things for the people because that's the best reward for being a public servant. And I realise that in the audience I have my former colleagues. Ho Wing-him is here; Michael (Mr Michael Yip) is also a former colleague working in the Police. I'm sure there are others, and I can speak on behalf of them as well that the biggest reward or the biggest appeal to be in the public service is to serve the people of Hong Kong, it's to make sure that we are doing good things. We are helping to improve the livelihood of the people.

I want to stop here, and if you have questions you want to ask in whatever language, as long as I know that language, then I could give you my view. But this is not an occasion for very serious debate on very controversial issues. I long to hear from you - you are the public administration gurus and practitioners, and I look forward to reading more enlightened articles in the re-launch of this journal and hope the Hong Kong PAA will continue to play a very crucial part in the effective governance of Hong Kong.

Thank you very much.