

Government has to come up with right answers

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Many critical views were expressed by different sectors of the community on the November 23rd District Council Elections. Some newspaper headline stories advocated that the result of the elections showed that people's voice was loud and clear in demanding a much faster pace for democratisation. Others even indicated that the result of the elections meant people wanted universal suffrage (one person one vote) to choose a new Chief Executive in 2007 and to return all Legco members in the 2008 Legco elections. While Hong Kong is a free society and people can express their will very freely, I personally believe that jumping conclusions too hastily when analyzing this time's election result is uncalled for, and certainly not being helpful towards building the SAR's long term stability and prosperity.

Indeed the result of the 23rd November District Council elections has caught many Hong Kong people by surprise. Not only have the elections attracted the largest number of voters of over 1 million, but that a relatively high turnout rate of 44% was achieved, highest ever recorded in Hong Kong's history. This is despite the often-heard argument that District Councils have no real power to govern, as their basic role is merely one of advisory.

We have also noticed that one day after the elections, DAB chairman Tsang Yok-sing declared at a press conference that he would tender his resignation as party chairman in order to take responsibility for his party's poor performance at the District Council elections. This was accepted by the party on 2nd December.

On the other hand many media reports gave good coverage to the victory stories of "pro-democracy" camp. Perhaps parties and groups known to be supporting government while keeping their calm should at the same time do a careful analysis on this apparent turn of tide against them at the last elections.

We have noticed a phenomenal change this time on the great importance of whether a candidate belongs to a particular group or camp. Whilst party politics always have significance of different degrees in elections generally, at district board / council elections a good history and reputable past tract record in serving and making contributions in a particular locality would traditionally have great impact on a candidate being successfully turned out, whilst his political alliance could be of secondary importance only. On this occasion, success depends to a significant extent

as to whether or not he belongs to a group or party known to be pro-government or pro-establishment, which turned out to be a rather negative factor this time.

Why was there this phenomenal change? Commentators, politicians, government officials and indeed most people I have come across said that this was due to the effect of July 1st, when half a million people took to the street to express their frustration, discontent and anger against the SAR government for what ever reasons. The SAR government said that they have heard people's voice and would be responding positively. In the months that followed after July 1st, Hong Kong has clearly noticed the positive policies of the Central People's Government (CPG), that have been promulgated in conjunction with the HKSAR government - Firstly CEPA - Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement followed by removing restrictions on mainlanders coming to Hong Kong as individual tourists as well as other policies, including the proposed reduction in price for delivery of water from the Eastern Pearl River and the speeding up the process of constructing the bridge from HK to Zhuhai / Macau etc. These new policies actually begin to produce positive effect on Hong Kong's economy which has now experienced a gradual bottoming out and steady recovery in a noticeable manner, with a lowering of unemployment rate and a significant improvement in the tourism, retail, hotel and restaurant businesses. As a result, the overall business and general mood in Hong Kong has improved significantly while the image and rating of the CPG in the eyes of the HK people, which have always been high since HK's handover in 1997, improved even further and much faster. Chinese astronaut Yang Li Wei's prompt visit to Hong Kong was also seen by many as the CPG's effort to help boost Hong Kong's image and confidence. All these results are good and positive with people highly appreciating the good efforts made by the CPG. Somehow the "goodies" from the CPG apparently cannot be filtered through to become people's understanding, support and allegiance to the SAR government. As I see it, the July 1st effects simply mean: whether through skilful planning / maneuvering or perhaps through sheer coincidence, people's discontent, frustration and anger against the SAR government have been successfully transformed into action to cast their votes in supporting political parties or groups that openly give their thumbs down to the SAR government.

To a certain extent, more recent episodes like Ex-EOC chairman's resignation and Harbour Fest (average HK citizens still can't understand why HK should spend \$100 million from the public purse on this concert) might re-ignite some people's discontent towards the SAR government. This might explain why the Frontier backed "Long hair" Leung Kwok Hung who has practically no history of district work nor any tract record in the Kam Ping Constituency has won 1149 votes and could have

beaten DAB's Choi So Yuk (1433 votes) if a third party winning 636 votes did not participate in the race. This also explains why DAB vice-chairman Ip Kwok-him (with his over 10 year history of solid district work) at the Kwun Long Constituency lost to the relatively new comer to the constituency the Frontier's Cyd Ho, though by a mere 64 votes. Similarly, DAB legislators Yeung Yiu-chung and Lau Kwong-wah as well as many other so-called pro-establishment or pro-Beijing candidates, despite their good past long tract records have lost to some relatively new comers who belong to parties and groups giving thumbs down to the SAR government.

Another vivid example I can give is veteran elected independent District Councillor Law Cheung-kwok, but this time round entered the race with Civil Force as his political affiliation, therefore probably being classified as pro-Beijing and pro-government. Dr. Law has a long history in serving the constituency as an elected District Councillor since 1994. With a PhD degree Dr. Law was formerly teaching but has now been elevated to the position as Administrative Director (Graduate Programme), Faculty of Business in the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Dr. Law's contester was a new comer with little tract record of district work in the locality and was professionally and academically much less qualified.

Dr. Law perhaps jokingly told me this story: " The Democratic Party has been very kind to me. Had any one of the stars of the Democratic Party came to my constituency to give support to my contester for just 3 minutes on the election day, I would have lost my seat to my contester instead of my winning by a sheer 18 votes."

Frankly speaking, it is no easy task to find correct solutions to deal with the present situation and to turn the tide towards the proper direction. I certainly do hope that the SAR government is now be doing a careful soul-searching study to find out why political parties, groups and individuals were having such a difficult time, if they are associated as being pro-government, pro-Beijing or pro-establishment. Furthermore, why is it that people can gain so much credit merely by giving a thumb down to the SAR government? Are government's basic policies all wrong? Has government forgotten to look carefully before making its leaps in the dark? Why are Hong Kong people so unhappy that they choose not to support candidates who show sympathy towards government? What could the government do to relieve people's grievances and to make them happier? No doubt there are many more questions government needs to ask as well as finding the right answers quickly - hopefully well before next year's Legco election.

As an observer I also feel more efforts could be made by groups and political parties



themselves, known to be loving the mother country and Hong Kong. They should work more closely and harmoniously together towards achieving better coordination, cooperation and establishing more effective dialogue among themselves.

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