



Is there an elephant in the room?

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Yes! More than one! The stockade of pillars being erected by the Government will not keep them out. They stand, stamping their feet, slowly, as elephant do, swinging quietly to and fro, occasionally lifting their trunks to spray a cloud of dust into eyes of the crowd, waiting for the show to begin. They all belong to the same herd, grey, blackish grey, a reform species with strange names! Healthcare, Constitution, Elderly, Housing, Education, Social Services and a rather sickly, baby elephant who keeps pushing his way to the front called "GST". How did they all get into this already crowded space? Hiding behind the others is an old time veteran, worn out from being misunderstood called McKinsey. Is he to blame?

The people of this place of elephants call out, "Why doesn't somebody do something?" Another calls for a vision. Others claimed to have seen a vision. Bauhinia flowers are strewn in the road. At this point, a rather non-descript mahout, steps forward with BPF stamped on his rather tattered shirt and says "look at the Big Picture". For want of any other solution that is what they did. They began by dividing the elephants into five groups and each began their search for their part of the solution to get the elephants moving out of the room. "Would anyone listen?" "Maybe, but not now!" "We are too busy." "We have seen it all before." "Come back in ten years time."

Undeterred the BPF shirts pressed on with their work. They began with people. They called it Human capital, a more active and precise word than the passive word "resources", "human resources", which smacks of an inventory like natural resources. We need to build up our human capital. We must invest. Just as business operations need an entrepreneurial spirit and venture capital, a driving force, so do we need to build up our human capital, not to be protective and afraid. We may need our barbed wire fence on the border, to control who comes in by land sea and air, that's just part of the picture. We need an empowered person, a social and economic doctor to decide who to let in. A fearless and innovative leader for the management and development of our human capital. Then we must use the capital we have wisely to get the best results. To deploy our human capital, our professionals with knowledge and experience across all fields of government, to energise management, to bring our technocrats into the centre, in out of the cold.

Let professionals advice on the engines of growth who know from experience how best to achieve objectives so as to give advice to our Administrators. Professionals, be they financial, industrialists or technocrats must be integrated into the machine. Look at our success stories, our roadways, our airports, Ocean Park, our power companies, Soho, and so forth. What is the secret of their success? What does it tell us? Do we only pay lip service to the slogan of small government? Are we strangling growth and action, with rules, regulations, red tape and elephantine slowness? Where we have freed these undertakings from bureaucratic control



they fly like a bird. Obama is looking at critically at quangos and, on the other side of the Atlantic so, too, is Cameron.

With 400 advisory boards, have we too many? Are they a relic from another era when we had no elected Legislature? Or, to put it another way, do we need fewer strong, powerful advisory boards who can drive the government forward. Have our advisory boards committees become another elephant in the room with inflated memberships. Membership sometimes so large that in order to let everyone speak once for two or three minutes in a meeting there is no time to reply, to develop ideas through discussion and dialogue.

But is there another elephant in the room? A large more serious animal? It has been roaming about for twenty years since the drafting of the Basic Law at the end of 1989, trumpeting about how to reform our system of government and our constitution. Here is a case of Hong Kong not listening to what is being said by the Government in Beijing. The Standing Committee of the National People's Congress is not a school debating society. It consists of about 80 people and contains representatives of all the provinces of the Mainland. It is a solemn State authoritative body of the nation, guiding us along the reform. When the Standing Committee says something it means it. We should ask ourselves, what is the underlying reason for the Standing Committee's instruction to us that we should keep our functional constituency system in 2012? It is not because they have any particular affection for the individual representatives of these functional constituencies, the Doctors, Engineers, Social workers and so forth, it is the role played by the functional constituencies as a whole. They are spoken of by their opponents as though they were some virulent disease infecting that magic word 'democracy'. This misses the point. They are there because in the wisdom of the Standing Committee they are needed to guard against a possible dictatorship by a majority in other words an elected dictatorship. They are in fact part of our system of representative democracy. We should ask ourselves too what is the underlying reason for the Standing Committee to insist on keeping the two vote system in the Legislative Council. Here too, it is to prevent the governance, the management of Hong Kong being in the hands of a simple-majority with its unforeseen and unpredictable consequences.

Until we can come up with a better system or an improved system to expect the Functional Constituencies to be swept away, done away with, abolished as though no longer needed and the voting system to be removed then we had better think again. It is not a question of whether this or that sector in society has a vote. It is the basic structure of the Legislature that is at issue, until we can satisfy fully the need for a balanced structure we must retain what we have. By all means improve it, bring in fresh blood, ask some long serving members to retire, look again at corporate voting and the representativeness of some functional groups but all the while listen to the voice of the Standing Committee calmly and without defiance.

Others cry out "What about "One Country Two Systems" "Give power to the people!" Hong Kong with its small population of seven million in a nation of over 1 billion maintains its capitalist system in an essentially socialist country. That is the meaning of two systems.



Capitalism and socialism, that is what Deng Xiping said. We have our style of government, our lifestyle, law and freedom and other privileges. These are added on benefits bestowed upon us by our status as a Special Administrative Region. Try looking at it another way why not try to understand how we are perceived by the Mainland? Ask yourselves frankly “what do they think about us and our special status?” Are we asking for too much understanding and help with our difficulties when we could do so much more to help ourselves. We should look at both sides, try to show our understanding of the rest of China, their difficulties, progress and achievements and note their recent open admission of their weaknesses, their corruption. To close the gap between ourselves and the Mainland, are we really making an effort to learn the Mainland language? Are we putting the same effort into it as we are into learning English? Why don't we put more resources into learning both the national language and the world language of the world- English.

It was with these thought in mind that the five groups of the BPF set about driving the elephants from the room. They came up with the “Big Picture” which is on the table for everyone for take away, read and digest. They completed the “Big Picture” over the course of six months. If I may say so, it is full of pearls of wisdom from the eighty or so members who researched and wrote it. And I take this opportunity to thank them for their hours of work. I have touched on some of their thoughts tonight. It does not contain advice about which industry we should start, it describes the circumstances, the opportunities which are now so favourable to our growth and development, it talks about the need to bring experts into the heart of the government and the management of our economy, in particular to handle the complexities of present day financial services. The “Big Picture” is a full description of challenges and opportunities.

This year is also our sixtieth anniversary. It is sixty years since Hong Kong waited breathlessly to see whether the People's Liberation Army would advance into Hong Kong. They did not. Have we forgotten to be thankful? In these sixty years we have grown into a metropolis of world renown. If you need a monument to that greatness, as the phrase says, look about you. We are at another crossroads now. “Carpe diem” seize the day is the phrase used by the Romans. Will Hong Kong seize the day?

Thank you for coming along this evening. Together let us drive the elephants out of the room and fare forward Hong Kong!
