

**Concerns Surface about HK Chief Exec's Ties to Beijing**  
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**By Our Correspondent**

***Amid cheers for quick action on some issues, CY looks a bit too close to the masters across the border***

The majority of Hong Kong's 7.1 million people were happy that Leung Chun-ying won the small-circle competition to become the territory's next chief executive against a clearly incompetent opponent. But as July 1 approaches – the date for his installation in power -- worries are mounting about what he stands for and whether he is more than just a smart, well-programmed Beijing apparatchik.

For sure, CY, as he is generally known, is getting a good press for his promise of quick action to increase housing and land supply and in particular to increase production of public rental housing. The latter is urgently needed as high private-sector prices, themselves partly the result of minimal supply and developer land-hoarding, have forced many households to abandon any idea of ownership and to look to the low-cost, public rental sector. There is also a huge need for cheap accommodation for the rapidly growing number of old people currently living in dismal circumstances such as cage homes.

Leung also looks set to move for quick action on other issues of public concern such as pollution, to which the current administration of Donald Tsang has devoted much talk and precious little action. Hopes are high that Leung's political appointees will be able to take decisions and ensure that they are implemented. Daily public appearances and speeches have given the impression of Leung as a hands-on leader at ease with the public and ready to press the flesh in markets and housing estates.

However, another side to his personality is also coming to the fore, which is likely to become a matter of contention. He has not only proposed a major reorganization of the government but insisted that it be in place very soon – preferably before he takes office and certainly before the current Legislative Council session ends in late July. With legislative elections due in September, the new legislature will not meet till after that.

Leung is presenting the changes as a necessary part of pushing for more pro-active government. However, critics reasonably ask whether enough thought and discussion has gone into the proposals. There is even a question of whether Leung himself initiated them or they were handed down to him by Beijing string-pullers. The fact is that Leung has no experience of government, no experience of the civil service and no experience of being popularly elected.

The proposals are supposed to speed decision-making by creating two new senior political posts of deputy chief secretary and deputy financial secretary. Some bureaus would report directly to either the Chief Secretary or Financial Secretary, others (including education) only to their deputies. The proposals involve a total of some 50 new posts costing HK\$72 million a year. Whether this extra layer of political appointees and decision makers would speed decision-making is questionable, as is the political motivation behind it.

The changes are viewed by many as an effort to reduce the influence of civil servants who are supposed to be politically neutral and push into government more people claimed to be "professionals," but more likely to be shoe-shiners of Leung and Beijing. The proposals have been particularly criticized by the highly regarded former Chief Secretary Anson Chan and have already led to the impending departure of the current one, Stephen Lam.

Leung has tried to gain some credit by reducing the salaries of the lower ranks of political appointees, the political assistants, but he has yet to make a clear case for the reorganization as a whole. It has passed the rubber stamp Executive Council but may yet not get through the legislature in time because of a filibuster being carried out by three radical opposition members against changes to the electoral law.

Although the changes are scarcely vital, the government has been unwilling to back down and withdraw the bill for reasons of face. The filibuster could however hurt pro-democracy parties in the coming legislative elections even though the Democratic Party and Civic Party have declined to join it.

Meanwhile Leung's proposal seeks the creation of two new bureaus, one of which, for Culture, has raised suspicions that this is a thinly disguised effort to foist political correctness on society as well as assuming that governments can create culture by throwing large sums of public money at cultural buildings and events.

There are already worries about the promotion of "patriotism" in school syllabuses and textbooks which reflect the Communist Party's rewriting of history – such as omitting the reasons why millions fled to Hong Kong to be "oppressed" by British imperialists rather than by Mao and the Communist Party's faithful followers who brought the Great Leap Forwards to starvation, the cultural destruction known as the Cultural Revolution, and now the wholesale corruption and theft of state assets associate with the party today.

Leung is under pressure from Beijing to undermine what is left of the separation of executive, legislative and judicial power in Hong Kong. "Executive-led" has been the guiding principle since 1997 and the role of the legislature has been subject to erosion. But now the supposed need for more decisive government could well see the judiciary as well as the legislature being undermined. The former deputy director of Xinhua in Hong Kong, Zhu Yucheng, asserted recently that there is no separation of powers in the territory. Even more alarmingly he praised Leung for the amount of research he had done on this when the Basic Law was being drafted and urged him to use executive authority to the full.

But if Leung now fancies that he can become Hong Kong's version of the pre-fall Bo Xilai, he will quickly find that the arrogance which is the norm for party elite in the ever-more-corrupt mainland will quickly lead to being despised in the territory. Leung's honeymoon will be long or short depending on whether he is a real leader or a party placeman.

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