

JAMES TIEN Column for South China Morning Post, April 2006

Newspapers have been filled with fevered speculation about the relationship between our chief executive and the DAB as Donald Tsang tries to establish a power base for his anticipated campaign to be elected for a second term in 2007.

Mr Tsang is seeking to forge political alliances, and that is something we warmly welcome. It is a development that signals a progression of our developing political system and should allow for open and honest debate and dialogue between government officials and political parties.

It shows positively that, like governments in developed democracies around the world, our administration is seeking out allies with similar philosophies. With our government, however, such alliances are even more vital because the administration has no seats in the 60-member legislature.

As this cooperation develops, it is important that the chief executive ensures that he builds a broader spectrum of relationships. Commentators have made playful references to a marriage between Mr Tsang and the DAB. I am sure both parties realise their relationship will need to be less exclusive and more pragmatic than a union of that sort.

Our chief executive is sworn to serve all of Hong Kong and while an alliance with one party holding 10 seats in the legislature is a positive start, it is a start and no more. Mr Tsang needs a wide spectrum of allies if he is to hear the voice of the people and win the legislative support he needs to see his policies succeed.

Mr Tsang should seek out an alliance with a more representative range of legislators to lend his governance the political legitimacy he seeks. The nature of those alliances, however, is critical. The chief executive needs more than a group of legislators willing to rubber-stamp his policies in a kind of "management coalition". He needs alliances in which he is offered advice, guidance and criticism.

What the chief executive should try to create is a "policy coalition" – a partnership in which legislators representing their constituents have a real say in policy decision and can bring the voice of the Hong Kong people to the very heart of the government.

With our 10 legislative council seats, the Liberal Party with our support in the middle-class, business and industrial sectors combined with the DAB' s grass-roots voters could speak for a large part of Hong Kong society. But the chief executive should not stop there. His allies should include The Alliance and other independent, like-minded legislators.

Between us, we could not and would not presume to speak for all of Hong Kong. But in our imperfect and developing political system, a broader alliance of this kind could help make our government a more listening and representative administration.

It would be no marriage of convenience. It would instead be pragmatic and progressive coalition in which we could advise and argue and debate on behalf of the people who voted us into office, with the advantage of being able to use that voice at the very heart of decision-making.

In a recent article by Chris Yeung in the South China Morning Post, an unnamed official was quoted as saying that the Liberal Party was seen as somehow unreliable by the government. As a party that has supported the government on every budget and every policy address since the handover, the accusation surprised us to say the least.

What the official was referring to, it appears, was the Article 23 debate when the Liberal Party put its weight behind the 500,000-plus people who marched on the streets opposing the legislation. On that occasion, we acted with our conscience and took a stand that we believed then and believe now was for the best of Hong Kong.

If an official chooses to interpret the way we acted in relation to Article 23 in the way that Mr Yeung describes, I am afraid I have to disappoint that official and tell him: We will carry on speaking our mind. We will carry on continue doing what we consider is right for our constituents and right for Hong Kong.

Mr Tsang needs a bridge to the people of Hong Kong if he is to build a successful and lasting administration. I believe that by seeking out the advice and support of not only the DAB, but also of the Liberal Party, the Alliance and other independent, like-minded legislators, we can - with more than 30 votes in the legislature - help him achieve his policy address mission of "strong governance" .

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