

LegCo dumps troublemaker role to become troubleshooter

Lau Lan-cheong says residents realize that the city has no future if it keeps on indulging in political bickering

The official launch of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region's Legislative Council in the new year, after its rebirth in the Dec 19 election, is pointing to a renewal of Hong Kong as a whole, literally. As new lawmakers took their oaths on Jan 3 and Andrew Leung Kwan-yuen was elected as LegCo president on Jan 4, the HKSAR is on its way to reshaping its political landscape and improving its ecology. The newly elected councilors, with either outstanding political backgrounds or professional caliber, are expected to prove their worth by demonstrating their capability and prowess, bringing the SAR's governance back on track.

First and foremost, it is a LegCo of patriots, with every contender having been vetted by the Candidate Eligibility Review Committee. The all-patriot LegCo is bound to give rise to a new set of protocols for debating and deliberating in the chamber of LegCo, allowing the return of a normal legislative process, or a productive process underpinned by civilized discussion and exchange among the members — a departure from the recent past.

The normalized legislative process reflects the “paradigm shift” in the special administrative region's political landscape, with its focus shifting from political bickering to economic development for a better place to live. Under such a scenario, the SAR government's top priority is to home in on its governance, putting into full use its resources and ingenuity in solving the city's thorny, chronic social problems, with the aid of a productive and constructive LegCo.

Ever since Hong Kong's electoral system was revamped, some biased Western politicians and media outlets have been indulging themselves with a relentless propaganda campaign against the new electoral system, vilifying the new system with the ultimate aim of stoking resentment among the public in Hong Kong and thus foiling the Dec 19 LegCo election. The China-bashers, here in Hong Kong and elsewhere, have been in full gear attacking the vetting mechanism of the new electoral system. For example, British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss parroted the accusation of an “erosion of liberty in Hong Kong”, days before the election day. They conveniently ignored the fact that the new electoral system affords great political inclusiveness and diversity, with the vetting mechanism only targeting the subversives, as has been convincingly evidenced by the diverse mix of candidates as well as the lawmakers-elect.

The self-proclaimed “democracy fighters” in Hong Kong have only themselves



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to blame for having been irrelevant to the Dec 19 LegCo election. For example, the Democratic Party, one of the biggest political parties in the SAR, has chosen to lock itself in a mental cocoon from the very beginning. Its chairman, Lo Kin-hei, has stubbornly kept his stance of boycotting “the sham election”, and even blocked his fellow party members from running in the election, reducing his party to sourgrapes onlookers! Mired in his obsession with Western-style democracy, Lo has dealt a fatal blow to the Democratic Party with his poor leadership, and exerted a negative influence on the traditional “pro-democracy” camp. Had the Democratic Party taken the lead and participated in the election, the party and its political allies might have won as many as 15 seats. Their political turf might be well preserved under the new electoral system, with the volume of their voices remaining unchanged. Unfortunately, the Democratic Party under Lo's leadership chose to move toward political irrelevance or nonexistence. They are doomed to be washed out, not by the revamped electoral system, but by themselves.

It can be postulated that such a political “suicidal” decision, stupid as it appeared to be, was the brainchild of Washington, rather than an original idea of a political greenhorn like Lo, who was just doing Washington's bidding with gusto. There was a time when the proxies of the Western forces, including Lo and criminal fugitive Nathan Law Kwun-chung, who had just awkwardly performed a political stunt at the “Summit for Democracy”, succeeded in derailing democratic development in Hong Kong. Washington, after announcing its support for the decision of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress in 2014 on universal suffrage for Hong Kong, took a U-turn during the outbreak of the civil unrest in 2019. Some leading political figures on Capitol Hill,

including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, made a series of political blunders in their attempt to stoke the 2019 “black-clad” unrest in Hong Kong, probably in the hope of turning it into a full-fledged “color revolution”.

Those biased Western politicians seem to have taken it for granted that democracy cannot be achieved in Hong Kong without those self-proclaimed “democratic fighters” like Lo. I cannot imagine that any right-thinking individual would have subscribed to such an illogical, presumptuous assertion. Common sense tells us that no democracy can be achieved without solid steps toward socioeconomic progress.

The new legislature filled with patriots heralds a healthy political atmosphere conducive to facilitating tangible socioeconomic development to the city embattled by many deep-seated problems such as those of subdivided flats, a housing shortage and a wealth gap. Early in December, the SAR government released its latest “Long Term Housing Strategy” annual progress report, which is said to be concerned by the lack of determination to increase the number of new housing units. The strategy aroused fierce debates in the community on the potential ways to reduce, and eventually eliminate, the unhygienic pathetic-looking subdivided flats in the market. Many contenders in the Dec 19 election had listed the housing problems as one of the top priorities on their election platforms and explained their proposed solutions during their election canvassing, with some rightly pointing out that a close rapport between the new legislation and the executive branch would go a long way to solve, or at least alleviate, those chronic problems.

The SAR government has also put the issues of livelihood at the top of its agenda in line with the central authorities' high expectation for it serving the public interest to their best. Thanks to the plethora of sensible local news coverage, the malicious, politically motivated attacks and machinations against Beijing and the HKSAR government have increasingly lost their traction as residents increasingly realize that Hong Kong has no future if it keeps indulging in political bickering as was the case over recent years. All in all, the new legislature, coupled with the improving overall political atmosphere in Hong Kong society, heralds the disappearance of the once-commonplace tug of war in the legislative chamber; LegCo will be a troubleshooter from now on, departing from its recent past as a troublemaker in Hong Kong.

The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Stand News abused role as watchdog to incite sedition

There is no such thing as a “free press”. Every publication and broadcaster throughout the world must abide by the law of the land and, in particular, laws regarding libel and national security. So it is no surprise that the online publication Stand News' directors, editors and reporters have been arrested and are facing charges of sedition after they allegedly published seditious material in violation of the law. Other charges are likely to follow.

Western press and politicians were quick to express “concern” over and condemn the arrests and demand the immediate release of those taken into custody. The Ottawa government in Canada sought freedom for one of its detained nationals — pop singer Denise Ho Wan-see — while the UK government sought the release of barrister Margaret Ng Ngoi-ye, a UK citizen. Both were board members of Stand News until their resignations in June.

Ronson Chan Ron-sing, Stand News deputy assignment editor and the head of the Hong Kong Journalists Association, was not among those arrested but said police confiscated his computer, cellphone, tablet, press pass and bank records during a search of his home.

Sedition, as defined by the Oxford Dictionary, is “the use of words or actions that are intended to encourage people to oppose a government” Synonyms include treason, riots, insurrection, etc. It is a word not to be taken lightly.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken maintained in The Guardian newspaper that “journalism is not sedition.” How wrong he was (as with most things). Journalism allows for freely criticizing a government's misdeeds — real or imagined. But journalism cannot and must not encourage people to overthrow a government.

The US state-controlled Voice of America said that the raid raised more concerns about press freedom in Hong Kong, whose constitutional document, the Basic Law, has enshrined various “freedoms”.

But press freedom has not eroded after the return of Hong Kong to China. Journalists here can continue to write whatever they like. They can criticize the government for any wrongdoing or maladministration. But they must keep within the law. The media has the privilege of being the watchman on social and economic issues within a community, but this privilege should not be abused. That is universal. Sedition laws, as applied in Hong Kong, are clearly defined as they are in Australia, the US, Canada, the UK and elsewhere and there are no exceptions.

Sedition coverage in these countries does not materialize because their media have the sophistication to realize that sedition, subversion, and any action impinging on a country's sovereignty are against the law. This is something which the Hong Kong media must learn. India is another place that has been forced to apply sedition charges against publica-



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tions that flout the law. The Hong Kong law enforcement authorities have seen it fit to bring charges against Stand News as they had done with Apple Daily last June. It is now for the courts to decide if the defendants are guilty or not. It is not for the media or politicians to pass judgment because they are not privy to all the facts of the case.

Stand News was aware of its shortcomings when it switched to paying its staff in advance (at the beginning of the month) and stopped receiving subscriptions and donations the day before the arrests.

Stand News' UK bureau chief, Yeung Tin-shui said it would immediately cease operations and he would step down from his position. The office was established recently to follow up on Hong Kong residents who moved to the country using the British National (Overseas) route.

Steve Li Kwai-wah, senior superintendent of the Hong Kong Police Force's National Security Department, told reporters that Stand News had published news and commentaries inciting hatred against the authorities. He said some of the articles lied about protesters missing during the city's 2019 social unrest or being sexually harassed, which he called “factually baseless” and “malicious”.

He added that some articles falsely claimed the Communist Party of China extended its powers through the city's independent courts or called for foreign sanctions.


During his media briefing, Li questioned why Stand News had opened a branch in the UK and the source of its \$7.8 million in assets. He said the police will probe whether the media has colluded with foreign forces.

Interestingly, both Ho and Ng, directors managing the Stand News' cache of assets, were also trustees of the now-defunct 612 Humanitarian Relief Fund, which spent \$32.4 million mainly on court costs for 2,221 defendants facing riot-related charges. The trust ceased operations last October with a balance of \$1 million seized by the authorities.

Ho, a career activist, has addressed the US Congress and the UN seeking sanctions against Hong Kong and has appeared at the Oslo Freedom Forum advocating violent protests.

The National Security Department is investigating whether foreign funding was used in the accounts of Stand News, Apple Daily, the 612 Humanitarian Relief Fund and other riot-related organizations.

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HK Thoughts

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Benefits from high-tech research must reach entire SAR population

To some local youth, their first day of 2022 was kick-started with a hypnotically dazzling experience — cloud exploration of the mystery of the universe with Shenzhen 13 spaceship taikonauts. While they are wrapping their heads around the enigma of the universe, they are contemplating how to make more scientific and technology breakthroughs in an era in which the world is their oyster.

Cultivating an encouraging, vigorous and organic innovation and technology ecosystem bears some resemblance to crop farming. An idea is the seed; research and development, the fertilizer; while funding is the water and sunshine. But the raw harvested crops are coarse, bland and unpalatable until they are processed into digestibly edible flour. It is what Hong Kong's I&T farmland is most deprived of.

Hong Kong has the seed of knowledge and innovative ideas galore. Five Hong Kong universities have a listing in the world's top 100 university rankings. It also gives Hong Kong a competitive capacity in R&D, which together with accelerators and incubators provided by universities, Cyberport and the Hong Kong Science Park allow ideas to sprout and mushroom. Increasingly generous funding by the government, complete with prefer-

ential policies under the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, nourish innovative impulses and brainchildren. But when it comes to translating them into concrete scalable products, there's less activity.

While there's no official number exacting how many research results remain a mere result without being developed into a product in Hong Kong, there's no denying that the former disproportionately outnumbers the latter.

Such an I&T ecosystem is incomplete, non-instrumental and unhealthy, and could sap innovative energies.

Personally, I hold that Hong Kong has immense potential in many disciplines, such as artificial intelligence, robotics and innovative medical health.

Artificial intelligence and robotics have been frenetically adopted in companies, factories and industries to optimize production lines, inventory management and assessment systems, to inform decision-making and boost operational efficiency. In Hong Kong, where manpower is always direly coveted and expensive, efficiency supercedes everything. Low efficiency has bitterly led to grumpy voices, whether among customers outside restaurants or applicants for public housing or government allowances. Machinery-

learning streamlines the vetting process, ensuring eligible applicants can get their hands on resources in the shortest possible time. AI and robotics automate routine-based and labor-intensive tasks, allowing workers to focus on high-value intellectual inputs and outputs.

While the benefits of AI and robotics to manufacturing may not be salient in Hong Kong, the service industry will be an undoubted beneficiary of the technology, not only shedding manual costs but also improving the quality and precision of on-demand services. AI and machine-learning algorithms could help relieve Hong Kong's housing shortage woes with land zoning, mapping and development, and facilitating organic urbanization.

Despite the whole bunch of dividends that AI and robotics promise, they are not fully tapped in the city.

We have good intentions and are on the right track, with promising initiatives and supportive funding programs in place. For example, the Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation launched AI Plug and the Robotics Catalysing Centre with a view to fostering a local AI community and accompanying start-ups through its growth by providing help that includes technical support, knowledge transfer, business match-

ing and infrastructure for prototyping, as well as trials of new robotics solutions. In the AI+U: Explore and Experience Exhibition last year, over 70 local companies showcased their ready-to-deploy AI solutions. But we don't want the lifespan of these supposedly game-changing technology solutions to cease at the prototype stage. We want them to be trialed, fine-tuned, commercialized, and applied broadly — and to genuinely change the game.

What's missing between the R&D results and products in the city is a testing ground or market that is sizable and diversified enough to gauge the prototype's efficacy, validity, and economic feasibility. Hong Kong has a small consumer market, which is a hard-and-fast fact, but the markets in our neighboring cities in the Greater Bay Area are a ready sounding board.

Shenzhen, for example, is no stranger to robot-powered restaurants, hotels and warehouses; Chinese e-commerce giant Meituan tested delivery robots in Shenzhen and Beijing; a Shenzhen-based warehouse robotics startup, Hai Robotics, announced it had secured \$200 million in funding; Shunde opened a “robotics supermarket” as early as 2015, allowing companies to display and sell their latest robotics products and models; Shenzhen-based drone

behemoth DJI has dominated 80 percent of the global nonmilitary drone industry, selling one of the most compact drones. The list of successful examples of technology commercialization in Shenzhen and other Guangdong cities is exhaustive, which is a solid testament that the playground for technology conversion is at Hong Kong's fingertips.

The Shenzhen-Hong Kong-Guangzhou technology cluster ranked as the world's second-largest, according to the Global Innovation Index 2020. In the cluster, innovative ideas can be cross-fertilized and commercialized.

While the government has consistently pumped a handsome amount of investment into technology R&D, which has paid off, it should have doubled down on promoting government-funded research projects to private enterprises and developers, to expedite knowledge transfer. Private sectors should be incentivized to purchase the patents of those government-funded projects and convert the technology into commodities.

The true value of a research is visualized only when it has a price tag and when residents can feel the benefits, rather than slumbering in the laboratory or in academic reports.

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