

benefit. The League of Social Democrats came into existence with much fanfare in 2006. But barely three years later, two of its key members had left with a substantial faction of supporters to form a splinter group. And while the league found many young supporters and represented the frustrations of many socially disadvantaged groups during those three years, one has to wonder how effective it was in helping implement policies it thinks would benefit its supporters. The likelihood of that happening has now decreased even further.

Meanwhile, an analysis of party finances, conducted by corporate governance activist David Webb suggests that unless you have the backing of wealthy establishment figures, "party financing remains at its infancy". Financial support still comes mostly from donations and for pan-democratic parties these donations fall sharply during non-election years. "On these modest budgets, the parties cannot possibly hope to run meaningful internal think tanks or research units to support their decisions on policies," leading to knee-jerk reactions to short-term issues rather than principle-based proposals and well-researched criticism of government policies, concludes Webb.

Part of the blame must be laid on the government's unwillingness to create a climate conducive to the growth of parties. Earlier this month, it opposed allowing legislative amendments to allow the chief executive to have political affiliations. It then failed to gain enough votes to support the temporary budget funding and complained that pan-democrats did not switch sides and make up the numbers as if it were a game of schoolyard soccer. No doubt, this would not have happened if the administration had formal alliances with parties in the legislature. The reality is that the current political climate makes it easy for new parties to gain support for saying the right things, but difficult to mature into real institutions that are ready to offer real solutions to governance. It is hoped that the Labour Party, arguably more a consolidation of forces rather than a splintering of old parties, will be able to mature into such a party, especially if it receives the support of the Confederation of Trade Unions which would give the party a solid backbone. But still, before concrete moves are made to set up the Labour Party, it is hoped that those involved in the discussion are giving priority to assessing whether another party would ultimately be better at serving people's interests and not just become another "shell party" through which they can prolong their political careers in the legislature.

New affluence exposing consumers to danger

Regular product safety scandals including the latest revelations of illegal food additives, substandard rubber in tyres and recycled paper in napkins in violation of regulations have become distressingly commonplace on the mainland. Greed, corruption and inadequate monitoring often combine to produce harmful or even deadly consequences for consumers. The authorities have made all manner of promises to stamp out these practices, enacting laws and imposing rules, to little avail.

Each of these recent instances was highlighted by a CCTV programme that aired on Tuesday to mark World Consumer Rights Day. Undercover reporters found that inspection loopholes allowed the drug Clembuterol to be fed to pigs to make meat leaner and to give it a pinker colour. When eaten, such pork can cause dizziness, fatigue and palpitations. Another segment showed how low-quality rubber was used by Kumho Tyres, the top supplier to mainland carmakers. The tyres could swell or explode, putting the lives of drivers, passengers and other road users at risk.

None of this was surprising to viewers, who have little confidence in what they buy domestically. There have been so many scandals, from tainted milk powder to cancer-causing cooking oil to fake wine and eggs, among so much else. Recent surveys have shown that 70 per cent of respondents do not trust mainland food and goods.

Clearly, the mainland authorities need to redouble their efforts. There is little point in new laws or sanctions while corruption remains rampant. At the same time, there are too many government agencies in charge of enforcement of rules and legislation. Consumers would also benefit if media restrictions were lifted so that the public could be fully informed of potential threats to health and safety. Many other countries have suffered similar scandals but the sheer number of these on the mainland casts a pall over the dramatic improvement in living standards enjoyed by millions in recent decades. It is totally unacceptable that this new affluence exposes consumers to danger.

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Printed and published by South China Morning Post Publishers Ltd, Morning Post Centre, 22 Dai Fat Street, Tai Po Industrial Estate, Tai Po, Hong Kong.
Tel: 2680 8388.
Both SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST and 南華早報 are registered in the People's Republic of China.
South China Morning Post (南華早報), Hong Kong's premier English-language newspaper, is audited by HKABC.



Officials can do more to help six economic pillars

I was excited when I read about China's 12th five-year plan ("Five-year plan devotes a full chapter to Hong Kong, Macau", March 6). Hong Kong will be encouraged to become an offshore hub for renminbi business.

The plan also supports Hong Kong's development of its six pillar industries, namely, education, medical services, testing and certification, green industries, innovation and technology, and cultural and creative industries.

However, I am concerned that, despite support from Beijing, the SAR government might not be able to take the chances offered to it.

The global financial downturn showed that Hong Kong's economy is too concentrated in the financial sector.

This is why the chief executive announced the [knowledge-based] pillar industries (in 2009). According to the Census and Statistics Department, in 2009, these six industries only accounted for 8 per cent of our gross domestic product and 11.3 per cent of total employment. It was clear the government had to do more to foster the development of those industries. However, it is now 2011 and that strong support is not evident with mainland firms raising their profile globally, competition is fierce.

Shanghai is determined to become an international financial centre in China and Guangzhou is eager to develop as a city with vibrant high value-added industries.

Hong Kong will lose its competitive advantage if the government still adopts a passive role in economic development under the principle of so-called "Big Market, Small Government".

If the administration plays a more active role in helping with the growth of the industries that form part of the six new economic pillars, they will develop at a faster pace and be able to gain a foothold in the booming China market.

Philip Hon Chi-ho, Tsuen Wan

Departure tax not the answer

I refer to the letter from Angel Cheung, ("Impose tax on milk powder", March 10).

Your correspondent believes fewer mainlanders would come here to buy baby formula if there was a departure tax placed on it. I do not think this would solve the problem of Hong Kong mothers not being able to get enough formula.

Many of those coming from across the border are well-off and even if prices increase, they will still come to the city because they know that the quality and safety of the formula sold here can be guaranteed.

It is therefore important that the mainland authorities try harder to improve the quality control of products made there to ensure they are safe and are not fake.

If food quality does not improve, mainlanders will continue to come here to buy milk powder.

Tammy Wong Wai-ting, To Kwa Wan

Wealthy DAB has shown its colours in defence of tycoon

It is quite clear from the research figures provided by David Webb with reference to the fund-raising abilities of our political parties that the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong should be renamed the Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of the Business Sector ("DAB first past the post in fund-raising", March 8). In the 2008 Legislative Council elections, there was a difference of fewer than 30,000 in the number of geographical votes won by the DAB and that by the Democratic Party (including the votes for Emily Lau Wai-hing). One would therefore expect, as both parties purportedly represent the grass roots, that their donations should be similar in value.

However, the DAB reported HK\$48.37 million in donations in 2010 while the Democratic Party received HK\$6.04 million. The difference of more than HK\$40 million can therefore be attributed to,

"We received a lot of donor sector", as quoted by DAB vice wall.

The largesse on the part of certainly recouped many time windfall property developers the passing of the Land (Comp Redevelopment) Ordinance older.

This bill was enthusiastically legislators with absolutely no ordinary people will be driven often through dubious methods given the opportunity to realise potential of their assets.

There are many more examples of legislation that has been passed approval of this party.

In fact, the only time the D interests of the man in the street public purse that have popular to the business sector, the ride handout that has only generated the most recent incident.

A round of applause for Mr our eyes. It is not the puny little represents the tycoons but the Business, party that ensures that making its way through the le benefit the ordinary person is measures that benefit the tycoon. Strangely, the DAB did not its own budget proposals the party member Henry Cheng I World Development, that provide one or half a percentage point.

The additional funds could funding the introduction of a and be totally in line with the Premier Wen Jiabao (温家宝), the vulnerable groups, thus in Kong live a better life". Martin Brinkley, Ma Wan



DAB candidates for the 2008 Legco election in Chater Garden, Central. Photo: David Wong

Stiff opposition. Some legislators say there is no rationale behind in first registration tax for cars announced in the budget. What do you think?
Cash crisis. Should the government help out Hong Kong's only one for victims of sexual violence, which is facing a funding squeeze? What do you think?

Breastfeeding the best option

I refer to Enoch Yiu's column ("Earthquake shakes up baby formula delivery chain", March 15).

There are better means to help mothers than ensuring formula supply. Breastfeeding is the biological norm to protect and nourish babies and young children.

Lots of mothers in Hong Kong continue to breastfeed their babies after going to work. It is possible to do so, even though there are challenges such as too-short maternity leave and lack of pumping or nursing breaks.

The public needs to know that formula is an inferior choice of nutrients. Research has shown that infant morbidity and



Mothers do not need to buy milk powder. Photo: Felix Wong

mortality are higher in formula feeding. Babies fed with formula have more bouts of sickness and a lower IQ. And now with a supply threat of formula from Japan and an unknown threat of radiation, mothers are even more concerned.

It is time to think about how we can give our offspring better protection. We already have what nature has given us—breast milk. For those mothers who want to keep on breastfeeding, there are mother support groups in the city, like La Leche League-Hong Kong, which will help them to achieve their breastfeeding goals. Human babies need human milk, not cows' milk.

The government must ensure mothers are given the support they need to breastfeed their babies. Heidi Lam, Discovery Bay

Give police lighter guns

I am puzzled as to how a policeman can drop his revolver during "Police gun falls to ground during rally", March 9). In my day, the gun was attached to a lanyard which was secured to the belt or shoulder.

Apart from this, the gun is heavy and carries six bullets, which is outdated. A lightweight automatic pistol is now used by

police force but I believe suitable, in lower IQ. The police brought up As a police officer, I had fallen ground first fired and John Fleming

Discos ferrie

Residents, the merry operators. many breath we have that we have

The price cheap either paying a service the When a transport experience will be a story the press. ferry service provide in problems.

The operation and Disco has done it. The ferry Central are to be opened especially rush hours Thomas Wo