

...Tung Chee-hwa's defenders always point out that he was dealt a rotten hand of cards. This is true. It does not excuse his lack of competence, but it undoubtedly highlighted it to a staggering and almost unfair extent. When poor CH Tung went into his office on July 2, 1997, he was starting an eight-year period of misery...

...Apart from reacting with admirable calm to the financial crisis overseas, Tung spent his first few months in office letting the city settle down after the handover and emphasizing 'business as usual'. A stable transition was his number-one priority, and it will be remembered as his main success. In September he visited the United States to reassure President Bill Clinton, legislators and others that Hong Kong was still alive and well. On PBS *Nightline*, he told interviewer Jim Lehrer that Hong Kong would have a more democratic system, explaining that the Basic Law 'says very clearly that at the end of [1997-2007] we are going to move into universal suffrage if it is at that time the wish of the Hong Kong people.' Back home, he ordered a funereal-looking wrought iron fence to be erected around the Central Government Office compound just above the central business district, a space that had always been visibly open to the public. The explanation was that the chief executive would be working there rather than in the secure Government House that governors had always lived in (supposedly because Tung disliked the feng-shui, though the suspected presence of British bugging devices may have had more to do with it). The fence proved to be like the red flag flying in the compound courtyard, or the city's utilitarian, vaguely socialist-looking new badge attached above the entrance to the main block: initially the symbolism was jarring, but after a while everyone got used to it...