

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(1)765/05-06

Ref. : CB1/PL/ITB

Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting

Meeting on 25 January 2006

**Updated background brief on issues related to the broadcasting
services of Radio Television Hong Kong**

Purpose

This paper outlines the preliminary views and concerns about the review on public service broadcasting expressed by Members in the course of discussing the broadcasting services of Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK).

Background

2. The subject of the broadcasting services of RTHK has been receiving ongoing attention by the Panel. At its meetings held on 19 April, 14 June 2004, 8 April and 14 November 2005, the Panel examined a number of salient issues relating to RTHK's role as a public service broadcaster, including the following :

- (a) the working relationship between RTHK and the Commerce, Industry and Technology Bureau and the editorial independence enjoyed by RTHK;
- (b) the institutional arrangement for RTHK and the need or otherwise to re-examine the subject of corporatization;
- (c) the programming policy of RTHK and unfair competition, if any, posed to commercial broadcasters; and
- (d) the implications of the reduction in annual financial provision for RTHK in recent years.

Review of public service broadcasting

3. Shortly before the Panel meeting held on 14 November 2005, it was widely reported in the press that the Government planned to set up a committee to review public service broadcasting in Hong Kong. Members also noted with concern that RTHK was allegedly kept in the dark about the prospective review, if any. When responding to members' query at the said meeting, the Administration declined to comment on the press reports but confirmed that an official announcement would be made as and when appropriate. The Administration also advised that there was at present no clear policy on public service broadcasting in Hong Kong but issues related to public service broadcasting were subject to ongoing review. The major views and suggestions given by Members about the review are summarized as follows :

- (a) Members to be appointed to the committee tasked to conduct the review should be well-versed in public service broadcasting, free from conflicts of interests and acceptable to all stakeholders.
- (b) Members noted RTHK's view that as Hong Kong's sole public service broadcaster, RTHK should be involved and participate actively in the review.
- (c) The scope of the review should not preclude certain issues such as corporatization from consideration.
- (d) The Administration's refusal to disclose information about the review to the Panel vis-à-vis its extensive coverage by the press was disapproved by some Panel members as a secretive and selective approach in the dissemination of information.

4. The relevant extract of the minutes of the meeting on 14 November 2005 is at the **Appendix**. Discussion on the review is recorded in paragraphs 12 to 24.

Latest position

5. On 17 January 2006, the Administration announced the appointment by the Chief Executive of an independent committee to review public service broadcasting in Hong Kong. The committee comprises seven members and is chaired by Mr Raymond Roy WONG.

6. The Panel will hold a special meeting on 25 January 2006 to follow up the subject.

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LC Paper No. CB(1)459/05-06
(These minutes have been seen
by the Administration)

Ref : CB1/PL/ITB/1

Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 14 November 2005, at 2:30 pm
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building

Members present : Hon SIN Chung-kai, JP (Chairman)
Hon Albert Jinghan CHENG (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP
Dr Hon LUI Ming-wah, SBS, JP
Hon Howard YOUNG, SBS, JP
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP

Members attending : Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP
Hon LEE Wing-tat

Members absent : Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, GBS, JP
Hon Timothy FOK Tsun-ting, GBS, JP
Hon Ronny TONG Ka-wah, SC

Public officers attending : Agenda Item IV

Mr Francis HO, JP
Permanent Secretary for Commerce, Industry and
Technology (Communications and Technology)

Mrs Marion LAI, JP
Deputy Secretary for Commerce, Industry and
Technology (Communications and Technology)

Mr Raymond NG
Acting Director of Broadcasting

Mr TAI Keen-man
Assistant Director of Broadcasting

Agenda Item V

Miss Angela LUK
Assistant Commissioner for Television and
Entertainment Licensing (Entertainment)

Mr IP Lup-ng
Principal Entertainment Standards Control Officer (Film)
Television and Entertainment Licensing Authority

Attendance by invitation : Agenda Item IV

Radio Television Hong Kong Programme Staff Union

Ms Janet MAK Lai-ching
Chairperson

Ms Echo WAI Pui-man
Exco Member

Clerk in attendance : Miss Polly YEUNG
Chief Council Secretary (1)3

Staff in attendance : Ms Debbie YAU
Senior Council Secretary (1)1

Ms Sharon CHAN
Legislative Assistant (1)6

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IV. Broadcasting services of Radio Television Hong Kong

(LC Paper No. CB(1)238/05-06(03) -- Information paper provided by
Administration

LC Paper No CB(1)237/05-06

-- Background brief on broadcasting services of Radio Television Hong Kong prepared by the Secretariat)

Late provision of paper by the Administration

5. The Chairman informed members that the Administration's information paper for this item had only been received on 9 November 2005, two days after the deadline of 7 November 2005. Pursuant to the decision of the House Committee on 26 November 2004, the Chairman consulted members on whether the item should be discussed at the meeting as originally scheduled.

6. The Permanent Secretary for Commerce, Industry and Technology (Communications and Technology) (PSCIT(CT)) said that the Administration had been slightly late in preparing the paper and expressed his apology. While agreeing that the item could be discussed at the meeting, Mr Fred LI highlighted that the Administration should strive to observe the agreed rules and procedures of meetings in order to maintain a good working relationship between the legislature and executive government. He said that he would not wish to see similar slippage happen again.

7. In this connection, Ms Emily LAU, Chairman of the Finance Committee (FC), shared with members that normally, the FC would not accept late submissions of FC papers. Members raised no further objection to discussion of the item.

Briefing by the Administration

8. At the invitation of the Chairman, PSCIT(CT) briefed members on the Administration's response to the following issues raised at the Panel meeting on 21 July 2005 (LC Paper No CB(1)238/05-06(03)):

- (a) corporatization of Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK);
- (b) development of digital broadcasting;
- (c) provision of public access channels;
- (d) improvement measures on communications between the management of RTHK and stakeholders;
- (e) a summary of views expressed at a public forum held by RTHK on 29 October 2005; and
- (f) the way forward for the proposed Broadcasting House.

9. PSCIT(CT) remarked that while the Administration had provided its view on the provision of public access channels as requested by members, the issue in question should be explored from a wider perspective and not solely in the context of RTHK. Ms Emily LAU agreed in principle with PSCIT(CT) and noted that the subject had been included under item 16 on the Panel's "List of outstanding items for discussion". The Chairman recapped earlier remarks by the Deputy Chairman concerning surplus channel capacity of RTHK and said that the provision of public

access channels might be relevant in the context of whether the unused frequencies could be allocated for such a purpose.

10. The Acting Director of Broadcasting (Acting D of B) expressed apology on behalf of the Director of Broadcasting (D of B) who was unable to attend the meeting due to his engagement in the capacity as the deputy leader of a delegation to Beijing in connection with the 2008 Olympic Games (心繫奧運 - 香港青年社團奧運領袖及各界青年學生代表訪京團).

Presentation of views by the Radio Television Hong Kong Programme Staff Union

11. The Chairman welcomed the representatives of the RTHK Programme Staff Union and invited them to give their views. Ms Janet MAK, Chairman of the RTHK Programme Staff Union, recalled that at the Panel meeting on 21 July 2005, the Union had referred to the Broadcasting Review Board Report published some 20 years ago and urged for a timely review on the development and way forward for the broadcasting industry in Hong Kong. While the Union was pleased to note from recent press reports that the Government would set up a committee to review public service broadcasting, Ms MAK said that members of the Union were very surprised that RTHK had not been notified of the said review at all. Ms MAK also expressed the grave concern of the Union that according to the press reports, the review would not cover the corporatization of RTHK or its reprovisioning to the new Broadcasting House. As such, the Union had written to the Secretary for Commerce, Industry and Technology (SCIT) on 4 November 2005 to express their concern and their willingness to offer assistance over the said review but so far, no reply had been received yet. Ms MAK also reiterated the hope of RTHK staff for a stable working environment.

Discussion

Review on public service broadcasting

12. Ms Emily LAU expressed grave concern that according to recent press reports, RTHK had been kept in the dark about the Government's plan to set up a committee to review public service broadcasting in Hong Kong. She sought clarification from RTHK on the matter. Ms LAU was also very concerned about the scope of the review, the involvement or otherwise of RTHK and the membership of the committee tasked to conduct the review.

13. In response, Acting D of B said that about two weeks ago, D of B convened an urgent meeting and informed members of senior management that he was aware of a decision of the Government to conduct a review on public service broadcasting. Drawing on the lesson from the decision to scrap the live broadcast of horse-racing, RTHK saw the need to step up communications between senior management and operational staff. As such, D of B had met with staff in the rank of Chief Programme Officer or above. Acting D of B confirmed that so far, RTHK had not received any written information from the Commerce, Industry and Technology Bureau (CITB) or other high-level Government sources on the said review.

14. On whether RTHK should be involved in the review, Acting D of B stated in the affirmative. In elaboration, he said that according to the World Radio and Television Council of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), public service broadcasting was defined as broadcasting which was free from commercial or state control but made for the public. The essential elements of public service broadcasting were universality, diversity, distinctiveness and most important of all, independence. Acting D of B considered that RTHK, being the sole public service broadcaster (PSB) in Hong Kong, could by and large meet the above standards set out by UNESCO. Moreover, over than 70% of the respondents in a survey conducted by the Chinese University of Hong Kong had concurred with the positive image of RTHK. In addition, D of B had been the chairperson of the Strategic and Planning Group of the Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union for a number of years. These were some of the achievements which reflected RTHK's strengths and international standing in public service broadcasting. As such, Acting D of B highlighted that RTHK should participate actively in the said review.

15. Ms Emily LAU noted that according to press reports, the review would not include issues related to corporatization of RTHK. Ms LAU was very concerned that there should not be a pre-determined agenda and that the committee should include in its study the corporatization proposal which had been initiated some 20 years ago. She sought the Administration's clarification on the hearsay information.

16. In response, PSCIT(CT) said that he would not comment on the press reports about the review on public service broadcasting. He also referred to the remarks by SCIT in response to media enquiries on 12 November 2005 that issues related to public service broadcasting were subject to ongoing review and that an official announcement would be made as and when appropriate. He advised that as pointed out by SCIT, there was at present no clear policy on public service broadcasting in Hong Kong. As the responsible policy bureau, CITB had kept under review the objectives and functions of public service broadcasting applicable to Hong Kong, including financial management and the performance monitoring mechanism. For historical reasons, RTHK, a government department, had been providing public broadcasting service in Hong Kong. Besides RTHK, commercial free-to-air broadcasters were also required to provide public service programmes, such as educational, arts and culture programmes, specific programmes for the elderly and youth, according to their licence conditions. PSCIT(CT) further remarked that the issue at stake was the need to examine how public service broadcasting should be provided in Hong Kong, with regard to the respective roles of RTHK and commercial broadcasters.

17. In this connection, PSCIT(CT) elaborated that the Government would need to examine the fundamental issues of public service broadcasting in the light of changing market environment. For example, it was necessary to evaluate the relationship between PSBs and commercial broadcasters in terms of their respective market position, business opportunities and other commercial considerations etc.

It was also necessary to strike the right balance between the types of programmes to be produced by PSBs and commercial broadcasters in order to provide programme choice and diversity. Moreover, the rapid developments in information and communications technologies, media convergence and proliferation of new media had enabled the delivery and broadcast of information in different formats via a variety of means. The changing environment had brought about opportunities as well as challenges to public service broadcasting. As such, the mission of public service broadcasting might be more profound than that "to inform, educate and entertain the general public". PSCIT(CT) stressed that as technological advancement and media convergence would also impact on the development of commercial broadcasters and their business models, public service broadcasting should be reviewed from a macro perspective in the context of the overall development of the broadcasting industry in Hong Kong.

18. Noting the lengthy explanation given by PSCIT(CT) on the Administration's position and views, Ms Emily LAU said that the information should have been included in the Administration's paper for members' perusal and consideration. Given the importance of the review in question, she expressed her dismay that the Administration had neither announced its plan in the Chief Executive's 2006 Policy Address nor briefed LegCo Members and RTHK, but had instead divulged certain essential information to the media. Ms LAU disapproved of such a secretive approach under which even the top management of RTHK had been kept in the dark. Ms LAU also enquired whether the Executive Council had considered the Administration's plan for conducting the review. In reply, PSCIT(CT) said that he was not in a position to provide information regarding the agenda of Executive Council meetings.

19. To enhance the credibility of the said review, Ms LAU considered that members of the review committee should be well-versed in public service broadcasting. However, noting from the press reports that most of the prospective appointees were closely associated with the commercial sector, Ms LAU was worried that a conflict of interests might arise having regard to SCIT's earlier open remarks that PSBs should not compete with commercial broadcasters for business opportunities. Ms LAU urged CITB to take heed of the need to come up with a membership which would be widely accepted by all stakeholders. She also asked whether consideration would be given to appointing representatives from RTHK with extensive experience in public service broadcasting to the review committee.

20. In this connection, the Chairman opined that overseas experts or representatives from internationally renowned PSBs should be invited to join the committee. Acting D of B said that RTHK was also concerned that persons with foresight and well-versed in public service broadcasting should be appointed to the review committee in order that their relevant expertise could be tapped into.

21. In response, PSCIT(CT) took note of members' views and concerns. He reiterated that if there was a concrete plan for a review, the Administration would announce the details at the appropriate time and the Panel would be briefed accordingly. Ms Emily LAU considered that the Panel should convene a special

or urgent meeting to receive the briefing.

22. Noting from press reports that some persons had been invited by the Government to join the review committee, the Deputy Chairman enquired whether CITB had received any documents regarding the appointment of members into the committee; whether it had issued any appointment letters or extended any verbal or written invitation to prospective members. In response, PSCIT(CT) advised that it was an established government practice not to disclose its internal deliberations and communications on policy issues. As such, he was not in a position to provide any further information in reply to the Deputy Chairman's question. However, he could confirm that to the best of his knowledge, he had not seen any appointment letters issued by the Government.

23. The Chairman was surprised to note that on one hand, the Administration had insisted on adhering to the principle against disclosing information on internal deliberations; while on the other hand, details of the review had been so extensively reported by the press. The Chairman said that this might be indicative of a major flaw in how the Government managed its information and the Administration might need to consider investigating into the leakage of confidential information.

24. Mr LEE Wing-tat considered that if there had not been a deliberate leakage of information by top Government, the said review could not have been reported in such details by the press. He was very concerned that keeping RTHK in the dark about the review was unfair to its staff. Citing the examples of how the Government had disseminated information on the latest development of the West Kowloon Cultural District and the future constitutional development of Hong Kong, Mr LEE expressed dissatisfaction over the Government's repeated attempts to selectively leak information to the media over major policy issues before reporting to LegCo. He said that on behalf of the Democratic Party, he had written to the Chief Secretary for Administration stating his objection to such practice.

Corporatization of RTHK

25. In reply to Ms Emily LAU's question on RTHK's stance on corporatization, Acting D of B highlighted the position of RTHK's senior management that corporatization could help sustain RTHK's role as a PSB. He referred to the recommendation of the McKinsey Report (i.e. the report of the consultancy study commissioned to recommend an optimal organization structure for a corporatized RTHK) that corporatization could help RTHK improve its management structure so that it could operate more cost-effectively and efficiently, at the same time help enhance RTHK's transparency and accountability. Acting D of B stressed that while RTHK should be editorially independent, it must also be seen or perceived to be so. This could be achieved if RTHK was organizationally independent from the Government. Nevertheless, Acting D of B acknowledged that before taking forward any corporatization proposals, it was necessary to take into account the overall policy direction of the Government, the views of LegCo Members, RTHK staff and the general public.

26. Notwithstanding the Administration's remarks that all along, RTHK had enjoyed editorial freedom as the viewpoints presented in many of its programmes were not necessarily pro-government, Mr Fred LI considered that under the present set-up, the Government could still undermine the editorial independence of RTHK through resources allocation. Noting that the proposal to corporatize RTHK had been put forward as early as 1984, Mr LI enquired about the road map and timetable in implementing corporatization.

27. In response, PSCIT(CT) reiterated the position of the Government as stated by SCIT at the Panel meetings on 21 July and 18 October 2005 that at present, there was no plan to turn RTHK from a government department into a corporation. He said that the policy stance of the Government on the matter had been clear and consistent all along.

28. Ms Emily LAU however pointed out that on the basis of the comments given by PSCIT(CT) and Acting D of B at the meeting, there was an obvious difference in the position taken by CITB and RTHK over corporatization. She said that as she could recall, the former OMELCO Panel on Recreation and Culture was supportive of RTHK's corporatization. She urged CITB not to rule out the option of corporatization and should conduct more discussion with RTHK.

29. Dr LUI Ming-wah considered that RTHK, as a publicly-funded broadcaster, had a public mission to fulfil and should take on the production of programmes which might not have a commercial appeal or viability. As long as RTHK remained publicly-funded, Dr LUI did not envisage much difference to the operation and editorial independence of RTHK even if it was corporatized.

30. On whether there was support from RTHK staff for corporatization, the Deputy Chairman enquired whether the RTHK Programme Staff Union had conducted any survey among the staff to gauge their views on corporatization and if yes, the outcome. In response, Ms Janet MAK of the RTHK Programme Staff Union confirmed that at the present stage, the Union had not conducted any survey. While the Union agreed that corporatization could help address concerns about RTHK's editorial independence, the Union considered that it was not an appropriate time to conduct consultation now, and that it would be more meaningful to consult staff members when more details of the corporatization proposal, such as the corporatization model(s) and options on bridging-over arrangements for existing staff, were available.

Development of digital audio broadcasting

31. Referring to the low penetration rate of digital radio at 6% only in the United Kingdom (UK) which was the pioneer in digital broadcasting, Mr Howard YOUNG asked whether this might be seen as an opportunity for Hong Kong to take a lead in the global development of DA broadcasting. Noting that the reception of radio signals was sometimes interrupted during his rides inside tunnels, Mr YOUNG said that if DA broadcasting could bring about instant benefits to consumers, such as improved reception, he would be prepared to support its early implementation.

32. In response, PSCIT(CT) remarked that the development of DA broadcasting would depend very much on the availability and affordability of digital receivers. He considered that it was unlikely for DA broadcasting to replace analogue broadcasting completely in the foreseeable future because analogue receivers were currently available at very low prices while digital receivers were relatively much more costly and could not receive analogue transmission. He added that while allowing sound broadcasters to simulcast in both the analogue and digital formats, the UK had not set a switch-off date for analogue sound broadcasting. Therefore, it remained to be seen as to whether DA broadcasting would become the future sound broadcasting standard. Nevertheless, PSCIT(CT) highlighted the global trend in the associated non-broadcasting applications of DA broadcasting, such as data broadcasting, radio paging and still picture/graphics. He said that as there was a potential market in developing these services by using the DA broadcasting platform, Hong Kong might wish to explore market opportunities in this direction with a view to developing itself into a digital hub of Asia. PSCIT(CT) reiterated the Administration's policy stance that the introduction of DA broadcasting should be market-led. Nevertheless, the Administration was prepared to revisit the justifications for introducing DA broadcasting service in Hong Kong based on up-to-date market information, international experience and the deployment of competing technologies.

33. PSCIT(CT) further advised that while DA broadcasting service and digital terrestrial television service were two distinct types of services, consumers would benefit from the application of both types of broadcasting technologies. For DA broadcasting, consumers could enjoy better sound quality than analogue transmission.

34. On the benefits of DA broadcasting, Acting D of B and the Assistant Director of Broadcasting (AD of B) added that DA broadcasting could also improve service coverage and allow more efficient use of the available spectrum. AD of B pointed out that at present, the reception of RTHK's programmes transmitted through medium-wave was far from satisfactory in certain geographical areas. DA broadcasting, however, could offer consumers high-quality transmission territory-wide without distortion and interference since a single frequency was used, thereby obviating the need for fine-tuning when listeners received analogue radio signals in different geographical areas. On the development of DA broadcasting in overseas jurisdictions, AD of B shared with members that currently, there were about 400 digital broadcasting stations in the UK whereas Taiwan had issued six licences on digital sound broadcasting recently. Given that some 80% of the world's digital receivers were manufactured in South China, AD of B considered that Hong Kong should take advantage of its strategic position to develop DA broadcasting with a view to strengthening its status as a regional broadcasting hub. Acting D of B supplemented that RTHK had been conducting testings for DA broadcasting on Eureka 147 DAB Band III. Noting that LG and Samsung, two leading industry players in South Korea, had begun testing on digital multi-media broadcasting since May 2005, RTHK considered that as a PSB, it should also play a key and proactive role in the development of advanced broadcasting technologies.

Provision of public access channels

35. Mr Fred LI did not agree with the Administration's view that it was doubtful whether there were strong justifications for providing public access or community channels in a city like Hong Kong. On the contrary, he considered it more cost-effective to provide public access channels in a densely populated city like Hong Kong where a large portion of the population would benefit from such provision. Referring to overseas practice such as that in the United States and Canada, Mr LEE suggested that instead of relying on a commercial broadcaster to broadcast meetings of the legislature as in the case of Hong Kong, consideration should be given to allocating a channel exclusively for use by LegCo, such as for broadcasting its meetings.

36. Echoing his view, Mr LEE Wing-tat said that some places which were also geographically small had set up public access channels. He asked whether the Administration had conducted any relevant study in this regard. Notwithstanding the availability of diverse platforms for the expression and exchange of opinions, Mr LEE maintained his view that the Government should consider opening up public access channels to enhance the freedom of expression and diversity of views in society.

37. Referring to a public forum attended by a few thousand people on the day before the meeting, Ms Emily LAU pointed out that this had amply demonstrated the lack of appropriate platforms for people to express their views. Ms LAU thus urged for the provision of public access channels without further delay.

38. While maintaining the Administration's stance, PSCIT(CT) supplemented that there were other considerations in the provision of public access channels, such as the financial capability of the channel providers, channel governance and management as well as the accountability of these channels. Regarding Mr Fred LI's suggestion of allocating a channel for the exclusive use of LegCo, PSCIT(CT) advised that the matter should more appropriately be considered by the Legislative Council Commission and if necessary, the Commission could take up the matter with the Administration. The Chairman advised Mr Fred LI to pursue the matter at the Commission if he so wished.

39. Recapping his remarks made at previous meetings that RTHK had not made the optimal use of the channels allocated to it, the Deputy Chairman urged that the surplus radio channels as a result of merged broadcasting should be made available for the use of the public. This would also provide a means for certain popular programme hosts whose programmes had been terminated to continue their broadcast on air. In this connection, the Deputy Chairman referred to the remark of D of B at the Panel meeting on 21 July 2005 that there was room for co-operation between RTHK and Mr WONG Yuk-man and queried why RTHK still had not invited Mr WONG to host any of its radio programmes.

40. On channel capacity, the AD of B advised that currently, RTHK was producing 140 hours of programmes each day, which was equivalent to the output capacity of 5.9 radio channels. He also pointed out that the merged broadcast of the same programme by different channels mainly took place during late hours from 2:00 am to 6:00 am. Due to the reduction in annual provision for 2005-06, RTHK had increased 7.5 hours of merged broadcasting per week this year in order to reduce cost. In fact, the annual provision for RTHK's radio programme production had been reduced by 12% during the past four years but the number of hours of merged broadcasting had only risen by less than 5%. Acting D of B supplemented that due to budgetary constraints, RTHK had to take into consideration the cost-effectiveness or otherwise of providing full programming service during late night and early morning hours when the number of listeners were likely to be low. He assured members that if there was an increase in financial provision for the coming year, RTHK would increase its radio programme production and cut down on merged broadcasting.

41. On the question of room for co-operation with Mr WONG Yuk-Man, Acting D of B said that the selection of programme hosts was primarily a matter to be decided by the respective programme producers and RTHK's senior management normally would not adopt a top-down approach to direct the selection of programme hosts.

42. The Deputy Chairman did not subscribe to the Administration's response. He was very concerned that RTHK, being a PSB, should produce for the community public service programmes which commercial broadcasters were not inclined to produce. The Deputy Chairman considered that RTHK should invite Mr WONG Yuk-man to host radio programmes since Mr WONG's once popular personal view programme was no longer available on commercial radio stations.

43. Dr LUI Ming-wah did not consider it appropriate for the Panel to make comments or recommendation on RTHK's selection of programme hosts, as this was primarily an internal affair for RTHK. The Deputy Chairman said that there was no question of interfering with RTHK's internal affair and pointed out that he was merely following up on D of B's remark made at an earlier Panel meeting.

44. Dr LUI Ming-wah agreed that RTHK should strive to make the best use of the available frequency spectrum allocated to it and enquired on listenership among the seven channels of RTHK. In reply, Acting D of B clarified that unlike the audienceship of a television programme which was reflected in rating points, radio listenership was represented by headcounts. He reported that the overall daily listenership of RTHK's programmes was more than 3 million headcounts with a breakdown as follows:

<u>Radio channels</u>	<u>Headcount number ('000)</u>
RTHK 1 & 2 (Chinese)	up to 2,000
RTHK 3 (English)	about 300
RTHK 4 (Bilingual) – serious music and fine arts	about 270
RTHK 5 (Chinese) – elderly, cultural and education	about 600

45. Dr LUI Ming-wah considered the listenership of RTHK 3 too low and questioned whether RTHK had made the best use of public resources in providing public broadcasting services. In response, Acting D of B highlighted the high quality of the comprehensive English language programmes produced by RTHK 3. He understood that many secondary school teachers had made use of one of its programmes entitled "Teen Time" for English teaching. Acting D of B also stressed the intangible value of the radio programmes aimed at fostering the artistic and cultural qualities of the public and said that it might not be fair to evaluate the cost-effectiveness of a radio channel merely in terms of the number of listeners.

New RTHK Broadcasting House

46. Given that there was now some improvement to the Government's fiscal position, Mr Howard YOUNG urged the Government to expedite the re-provisioning of RTHK to the new Broadcasting House. Moreover, in view that the prime site currently occupied by RTHK at Broadcast Drive could be sold at a much more favourable price under current market conditions, he considered that it was now timely for RTHK to relocate to Tseung Kwan O as other broadcasters.

47. Recalling the overcrowded conditions and out-dated facilities she had observed during the Panel's visit to RTHK about two years ago, Ms Emily LAU considered that the reprovisioning of RTHK to the proposed Broadcasting House should be taken forward without delay. She added that as she understood, there had not been any objection from Members against the proposed reprovisioning on account of RTHK's operational needs. Since it would take a few years to complete the reprovisioning project, Ms LAU was worried that any further delay in the reprovisioning project would affect the quality of RTHK's programme services and efficiency.

48. In response, PSCIT(CT) informed members that the Administration had reviewed the priorities of its public works proposals for 2006-07 and the reprovisioning project of RTHK was in Category C of the Public Works Programme. Nevertheless, he said that like other public works projects, the priority of the proposed Broadcasting House was subject to ongoing view.

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