

Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting

Extract from minutes of the meeting held on 11 March 2013

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Action **IV. Radio Television Hong Kong's Community Involvement Broadcasting Service and the role and future of Radio Television Hong Kong**

(LC Paper No. CB(4)458/12-13(05) -- Administration's paper on Radio Television Hong Kong's Community Involvement Broadcasting Service and the role and future of Radio Television Hong Kong

LC Paper No. CB(4)458/12-13(06) -- Paper on the role and future of Radio Television Hong Kong and issues relating to Community Involvement in Broadcasting prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat (background brief)

Presentation by the Administration

At the invitation of the Chairman, Permanent Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development (Communications and Technology) ("PSCED(CT)") briefed members on the progress of the roll out of the Community Involvement Broadcasting Service ("CIBS") and the role and future of Radio Television Hong Kong ("RTHK"). Details of the briefing were set out in the Administration's paper (LC Paper No. CB(4)458/12-13(05)).

Discussion

Digital Audio Broadcasting and Community Involvement Broadcasting Services

2. Mr WONG Ting-kwong expressed concern about the low take-up rate of RTHK's five Digital Audio Broadcasting ("DAB") channels, which were formally launched on 17 September 2012. He also enquired about the measures taken by the Administration to enhance public interest in purchasing digital radios for DAB services. In response, the Director of Broadcasting ("D of B") said that the RTHK, together with other DAB operators, would add more fill-in stations to improve the transmission of DAB signals, and enhance its publicity effort and promotion strategies to tie in with the progress of the network rollout and take-up rate of the DAB services. RTHK had also enriched the programme contents of the DAB channels by producing new types of programmes, including the audio-books programme which could bring the joy of reading to the listeners and a new programme introducing the natural environment of Hong Kong, featuring the sounds occurring in the natural environment such as birds chirping and twittering.

3. Mr Paul TSE expressed concern about the poor publicity and lack of diversity in RTHK's DAB programmes as well as the limited funding support to applicants participating in CIBS, which were capped at a ceiling of \$7,500 per half-hour programme and \$15,000 per one-hour programme, when compared to the production costs of RTHK programmes. In reply, D of B advised that the ceiling of \$15,000 for one-hour programme under CIBS exceeded by a large measure that for the RTHK programmes which were normally budgeted at \$3,000 to \$5,000 for one-hour programme.

4. Noting that the selection of CIBS programmes would take into account public voting, Mr YIU Si-wing enquired about the measures taken by RTHK to maintain the integrity of the process of selection of these programmes. In response, D of B said that the CIBS Selection Committee had been established with seven non-official members appointed by D of B. These members comprised three scholars in communications or broadcasting, three experts from different fields drawn from the RTHK Programme Advisory Panel (depending on the designated programme themes for each round of application) and a member familiar with ethnic minority issues. In order to maintain the integrity of the selection process, public voting through the Internet would only account for 25% of the scores in the CIB programme selection.

5. In response to Mr YIU's concern about the possible political inclination towards certain programme themes in the selection process, D of B advised that this could be resolved through diversification of programme themes. RTHK would adopt 11 programme themes for CIBS and each quarter would have three themes, one of which would be dedicated to ethnic minorities. Each CIBS programme would have 13 episodes in one quarter.

Copyright issues

6. Mr Charles Peter MOK raised concern about the copyright issue involved in "Kaleidoscope of Ideas 8" ("8 花齊放") under the RTHK's programme commissioning scheme. Noting that RTHK was the copyright owner of the programme under the scheme, he urged RTHK to review the copyright issue in a flexible manner so as to allow the participants to reuse their creative ideas contributed to these programmes for other purposes. This would also help groom local animation talents and support Hong Kong's creative industry. Deputy Director of Broadcasting (Programmes) responded that RTHK owned the copyright of the programmes under the scheme as these programmes were subsidized by public fund. The Administration would consider reviewing the copyright issues involved and implementing flexible contract terms with the participants in future.

Editorial independence of RTHK

7. Dr KWOK Ka-ki expressed concern about the alleged interference with the editorial independence of RTHK by D of B. He noted from media reports that there was disagreement between D of B and the producers of "City Forum" over the decision of putting empty chairs on the panel to represent absent senior Government officials, and the dispute between D of B and the Acting Assistant Director of Broadcasting (Television and Corporate Businesses), Mr SZE Wing-yuen, over the editorial issues of RTHK programmes, resulting in his not getting promoted. Dr KWOK asked whether these allegations were factually correct.

8. In response, D of B said that the RTHK Charter ("the Charter") promulgated in August 2010 had already enshrined the editorial independence of RTHK and set out the public purposes and mission of RTHK. According to the Charter, D of B was the Editor-in-chief and accountable for editorial decisions taken by RTHK. The allegations of his intervention in editorial matters as reported in the media were totally unfounded. Regarding the issue of putting two empty chairs on a City Forum panel representing the absence of the two guests in an episode about

the curriculum of National Education subject, D of B said that the management was not at all concerned whether the decision of RTHK production team might embarrass the guests as the guests should be responsible for their own decision to turn down the RTHK's request for appearance. The management was, on the other hand, more concerned about the three different and contradicting explanations offered by the production team in explaining the absence of the guests, and the subsequent decision to put up empty chairs, which could undermine the credibility and public confidence in RTHK.

9. Mr SIN Chung-kai enquired whether there had been differences in views between D of B and the Programme Meeting on programming issues, and on the criteria adopted in making the decisions on these issues. D of B responded that the Programme Meeting of RTHK, which consisted of directorate-level officers, executive producers and members of production teams, was responsible for making decisions on the programming of RTHK. The meetings were held every Thursday and were conducted in an open and transparent manner. All decisions of the Programme Meeting must be guided by the four editorial principles (i.e. "(a) be accurate and authoritative in the information that it disseminates, (b) be impartial in the views it reflects, and even-handed with all those who seek to express their views via the public service broadcasting platform, (c) be immune from commercial, political and/or other influences and (d) uphold the highest professional standards of journalism") as stated in the Charter and the professional standards as set out in RTHK Producers' Guidelines.

10. Ms Claudia MO queried the reasons for the alleged cancellation of the programme "LegCo Review" and the change of content of the programme "Headliner". She pointed out that D of B's request for the production team to explain how the idea of using Nazi characters in the television show "Headliner" came about, including a chronology of how the idea was initiated and processed, had created "white terror" among RTHK staff.

11. In reply, D of B said that the decision to change the content of the programme "Headliner" by replacing the Nazi characters with characters from the classical Chinese novel "Journey to the West" was made by the production team. D of B stressed that he was politically neutral as part of the Civil Service team, and the allegation that RTHK staff were forced to undertake political missions was groundless.

12. Mr Albert CHAN opined that D of B should maintain the political and editorial independence of RTHK while making improvements for and bringing changes to RTHK. Sharing a similar view, Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung considered it inappropriate for Mr Roy TANG to serve as D of B

as there were conflicts in his dual roles as Editor-in-chief and as a Government official who was required to carry out political missions for the Administration. In reply, D of B said that if a civil servant was under the impression that he was being asked to carry out political missions, the person should lodge a complaint with his supervisor or the Civil Service Bureau in accordance with the Civil Service Code.

13. The Chairman drew members' attention to a letter from Mr James TO dated 11 March 2013 on issues relating to RTHK (tabled at the meeting and subsequently issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(4)479/12-13(01) on 12 March 2013). Upon the Chairman's request, D of B undertook to provide a written response to Mr TO's letter as well as other comments made by Members at the meeting.

(Post-meeting note: The written response provided by D of B was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(4)524/12-13(01) on 26 March 2013.)

Motion moved by Ms Claudia MO

14. Ms Claudia MO proposed the following motion which was seconded by Mr Charles Peter MOK:

"本事務委員會促請政府當局履行承諾，保障香港電台編輯自主權，及不會作出任何形式的政治干預。"

(Translation)

"That this Panel urges the Administration to honour its promise by safeguarding Radio Television Hong Kong's right to editorial independence and abstaining from political interference in any form."

15. The Chairman considered that the proposed motion was directly related to the agenda item under discussion and members agreed that the motion should be dealt with at the meeting. The Chairman put the motion to vote. At the request of Ms Claudia MO, the Chairman ordered a division. The Chairman announced that of the 11 members who were present and voted, seven members (namely, Mr Paul TSE, Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung, Mr Albert CHAN, Ms Claudia MO, Mr Charles Peter MOK, Mr CHAN Chi-chuen and Mr SIN Chung-kai) voted for the motion, no member voted against the motion and four members (namely, Mr WONG Ting-kwong, Mr Steven HO, Mr YIU Si-wing and Mr Christopher CHUNG) abstained from

Action

voting. The Chairman declared that the motion was passed.

(Post-meeting note: The wording of the motion was circulated to members vide LC Paper No. CB(4)480/12-13 on 13 March 2013.)

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