

Lo Shiu Hing's View on Civil Service Reform

Reform is always a positive word. I support the idea of reform but I strongly oppose the content of civil service reform as proposed by the Hong Kong government. I also strongly oppose the way in which consultation is now conducted by the government on civil service reform.

First and foremost, the content of civil service reform should be directed at the top level of the civil servants, not the middle and lower levels of the civil service. There should be accountability of senior civil servants. At present, the consultative document ignores the concept of accountability of senior civil servants.

Second, the government should explain whether there is a hidden political motivation in civil service reform. There is a rumour that the government wants to use civil service reform to exert political control upon the civil servants. The government should explain whether this is true. Also, there is a magazine report saying that civil service reform is probably attributable to the decision of the central government to control the civil service in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR). Again, is this true? The government needs to explain. Even if there is no political motivation, it is possible that the reform would bring about an unintended consequence of giving the government a chance to exert political control on civil servants. Civil servants would probably be selected and promoted on the basis of political criteria instead of merit. Politicization of civil service would be detrimental to political neutrality of civil servants.

Third, the entire civil service reform ignores staff or employee participation. Government officials make decisions on civil service in a top-down manner without consulting the opinions of civil servants sufficiently. I strongly oppose the current way of top-down consultation without respecting the views of civil service unions. There should be more respect given by the government on meaningful, not cosmetic, staff participation.

Fourth, the government document on civil service reform fails to provide appeal or complaint channels for civil servants if there are cases of injustice. I strongly oppose the idea of reform without providing complaint channels to civil servants.

Fifth, the government should not reform the civil service at the expense of social stability. Because there is deep mistrust between the government and civil service unions, more consultation should be conducted and the consultation period should be prolonged. Otherwise, the government would probably undermine social stability especially when Hong Kong is encountering numerous strikes and protests launched by employees in the private sector.

Sixth, the government has made decisions on the new direction of civil service reform after the publication of the consultation document. This is not real consultation but a top-down decision-making process. I strongly oppose the way in which the government conducts consultation. In short, I support reform of the civil service, which should tighten its performance appraisal and management of street-level bureaucrats. But I oppose the absence of accountability mechanism on senior civil servants, the possible politicization of civil service, the absence of staff participation, and the lack of genuine consultation.