

Chapter VI : Information Technology and Broadcasting

6.1 At the invitation of the Chairman, the Secretary for Information Technology and Broadcasting (SITB), Ms Eva CHENG, briefed members on the programme areas of the Bureau and highlighted a number of priority tasks in 2000-01 (Appendix V-5).

Broadcasting

Webcasting

6.2 Noting that \$3 million would be allocated from internal resources of Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) to further expand webcasting services to all six of its self-produced channels, Mr SIN Chung-kai asked whether this level of provision would be sufficient given the popularity of RTHK's "Cyber Station" on the Internet. He also asked if some of the high-quality old programmes in RTHK's archive could become a source of funding for expanding webcasting services. Mr MA Fung-kwok further suggested that RTHK might consider marketing its self-produced programmes with a view to generating income.

6.3 In response, SITB advised that a strategic review on RTHK would be undertaken in the near future in which the development of Internet services and collaboration with outside bodies would be explored, having regard to the existing policy and the role of RTHK as a public broadcaster. She remarked that developing services on the Internet might not require substantial capital investment and appreciated RTHK's effort in securing the necessary funding from internal redeployment of resources.

6.4 As to whether RTHK should also market its programmes and sell the copyright in return for royalty, the Director of Broadcasting (D of B) said that the matter would require further study. He advised that at present, documentaries and drama productions were already provided to other broadcasters at a charge while news programmes were provided free of charge for timely broadcast. D of B also pointed out that as RTHK did not produce popular items such as soap operas, the opportunities for marketing and sale of its productions were quite limited.

6.5 As regards plans to expand webcasting services, D of B confirmed that with effect from 1 April 2000, the number of radio channels offering live webcasts would increase from four to six, and all RTHK prime-time TV

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programmes would also be transmitted live on the Internet. The news update on the net would also be improved. He also reported that the latest average number of daily hits on RTHK's web pages had reached a new high of 900 000, 70% of which were from overseas.

6.6 In this connection, Miss Cyd HO expressed concern about the resource constraints faced by RTHK under the Enhanced Productivity Programme (EPP) and asked whether consideration would be given to providing additional resources to RTHK to strengthen its Internet-related services.

6.7 The Deputy Secretary for the Treasury (1) recapitulated that with a few exceptions, EPP was implemented across the entire public sector and individual departments would be encouraged to provide new services through redeployment of existing resources since no Resource Allocation Exercise (RAE) had been conducted in 1999-2000 for them to bid for new resources. SITB also reiterated that the possibility of strategic co-operation with outside partners as a way to strengthen resources for RTHK would be explored in the strategic review, the outcome of which would be reported to Members in due course. Members noted that where justified, D of B could put up bids for additional resources in the next RAE.

Accountability of RTHK

6.8 Noting that public hearings were a pre-requisite for the renewal of licences of commercial TV broadcasters, Miss Emily LAU was concerned about the absence of similar arrangements for RTHK and asked whether resources would be allocated to enhance the public accountability of RTHK.

6.9 In response, D of B stated that RTHK operated with a high degree of transparency and actively canvassed public feedbacks from various channels. As far as TV programmes were concerned, the RTHK TV Programme Advisory Panel held two open meetings every year and its 60-strong membership was changed once every two years. The Listener Advisory Panel met at least once a year to review RTHK's radio programmes. Besides, individual radio channels also hosted ad-hoc programmes to receive comments and suggestions from members of the public. D of B nevertheless took note of Miss Emily LAU's suggestion to hold open fora for the public to air their views on RTHK.

Control of obscene and indecent articles

6.10 Mr Andrew CHENG Kar-foo expressed reservation on the need to engage a research company to conduct a public opinion survey on the operation of the Control of Obscene and Indecent Articles Ordinance (COIAO) at a cost of \$750,000. He also questioned the appropriateness of conducting public consultation on the Administration's policy proposals arising from the review of COIAO pending completion of the said public opinion survey in October 2000.

6.11 On the estimated cost of the survey, the Commissioner for Television and Entertainment Licensing (C for T&EL) clarified that as tenders would be invited, the actual cost for the survey would depend on the tender outturn price. He added that the cost for the last survey conducted by the Lingnan College from September to December 1998 on 1 000 respondents for the general survey and 200 respondents for the focus group study was \$500,000. The forthcoming survey to be conducted in May 2000 would cover 1 500 respondents for the general survey and 320 respondents for the focus group study.

6.12 Regarding the public consultation and the public opinion survey, SITB pointed out that the former would cover general issues such as the regulatory framework while the latter was a periodic exercise which the Administration had undertaken to carry out in order to gauge the views of the public on moral standards generally accepted by the community. She assured members that although the consultation paper on policy proposals would be released in the first half of 2000 for public consultation, the Administration would take into consideration all views received, including those collected from the forthcoming public opinion survey, before finalising the way forward.

6.13 On the enforcement of the COIAO, Mr Andrew CHENG Kar-foo considered it inadequate to deploy only 21 officers in the Television and Entertainment Licensing Authority to inspect retail outlets that sold articles regulated by the Ordinance. He was also concerned that as a result of deploying seven officers now responsible for inspecting cinemas to the enforcement of COIAO, the enforcement of requirements under the Film Censorship Ordinance would be affected.

6.14 In response, C for T&EL advised that following the deployment of the seven officers, the number of inspection teams to enforce COIAO would be increased from four to five in 2000-01 to step up enforcement actions. He

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assured members that despite the redeployment of staff, the target number of cinema inspection for 2000 would remain at 10 000 and hence, enforcement action would not be slackened. Regarding the proposed three posts for the programme area of film classification and control of obscene and indecent articles in 2000-01, C for T&EL advised that they comprised two posts of Personal Secretary and one post of Clerical Assistant to provide secretarial and clerical support in relation to the enforcement of COIAO.

6.15 As pornographic material could be readily viewed on the Internet, Miss Cyd HO cast doubt on the cost-effectiveness of cinema inspections to enforce age restriction for audience admission and enquired on the number of prosecutions resulting from such inspections. C for T&EL agreed to provide the information after the meeting.

Information technology

Manpower needs

6.16 On the declared objective of the Information Technology and Broadcasting Bureau (ITBB) to promote information technology (IT) development in Hong Kong, Miss Emily LAU sought the Administration's view on whether there was sufficient trained IT manpower and whether consideration would be given to facilitating the entry of IT professionals from overseas.

6.17 SITB acknowledged that there was a global demand for IT personnel and ITBB was working closely with the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) in this regard. She also referred members to the recently completed consultancy study commissioned by EMB on the manpower and training needs of the IT sector, the findings of which were being studied by relevant Government departments and training bodies with a view to formulating an appropriate IT manpower training strategy.

6.18 On concerns about whether Hong Kong could rely solely on its internal supply of IT manpower to meet the industry's needs and growth potentials, SITB referred to existing training opportunities and initiatives such as the Cyberport and Science Park which would attract a critical mass of technology-based companies to bring along their personnel and at the same time, train up their local expertise. As for admission of overseas IT personnel, SITB said that the

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Administration would closely monitor the progress of the Admission of Talents Scheme and pointed out that professionals from countries other than China were at liberty to apply for permission to work in Hong Kong in accordance with existing immigration requirements.

6.19 Mr LEE Kai-ming did not consider the shortage of IT manpower a serious problem for Hong Kong as employers who could not recruit local personnel could apply to the Immigration Department to bring in their professional staff from other places in accordance with existing procedures or under various Admission Schemes. On the manpower shortfall, the Deputy Secretary for Information Technology and Broadcasting (2) said that certain projections on the future demand for IT manpower were made in the consultancy study but the forecasts should be interpreted with caution in view of the fast developments in the IT industry.

IT infrastructure and standards

6.20 On the security of computer systems, Mr SIN Chung-kai expressed concern about increasing hacking activities and enquired about the resource provision in 2000-01 for stepping up security for the Government's Central Internet Gateway System.

6.21 The Director of Information Technology Services (DITS) advised that of the financial commitment approved by the Finance Committee in April 1999 for this project, a recurrent expenditure of \$1.65 million had been earmarked for outsourcing professional service including regular preventive security assessments. Apart from equipping the System with security features such as firewall and various detection systems for viruses and intrusion attacks, the Administration also kept itself posted of the latest developments in Internet security. DITS pointed out that the Central Internet Gateway System was subject to vigorous monitoring around the clock and the provision of \$9.98 million earmarked for 2000-01 had taken into account the need for such security measures. The present set-up of a single central gateway instead of several thousand different access points would also facilitate better monitoring and control of security risks. He added that guidelines had been issued to all Government departments/bureaux on the adoption of the same standards in network security for existing departmental gateways.