

Chapter VI : Information Technology and Broadcasting

6.1 At the Chairman's invitation, the Secretary for Commerce, Industry and Technology (SCIT), Mr John TSANG, briefed members on the priority tasks of the Communications and Technology Branch of the Commerce, Industry and Technology Bureau (CITB) (Appendix V-5).

Radio Television Hong Kong

6.2 Noting that the financial provision for Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) in 2004-05 would be reduced on account of the overall need to contain government expenditure, Mr SIN Chung-kai reiterated his concern, which had been raised on various occasions, that the Administration should actively consider the feasibility of licensing the distribution and use of RTHK productions with a view to generating revenue in the form of fees or royalty payment to support its production of quality programmes.

6.3 In response, the Director of Broadcasting (D of B) informed members that RTHK and the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau (FSTB) were in the course of discussing the feasibility of commercializing RTHK's productions. Having regard to the need to comply with the relevant requirements under the Public Finance Ordinance (Cap. 2) and the principle that all monies raised or received for the purpose of the Government should form part of its general revenue, the question of how RTHK could recover from the future revenue generated the costs, including staff costs, incurred from its work was being considered. In this connection, the Deputy Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury (Treasury) supplemented that FSTB was examining with RTHK the latter's direct and indirect costs of production, having regard to the overall target of containing the operating expenditure of the Government to \$200 billion by 2008-09.

6.4 On RTHK's role as a public service broadcaster, Mr NG Leung-sing opined that RTHK's current affairs and personal view programmes should present different points of view in order that the public could form a balanced view on the issues concerned. He also said that because of the political stance adopted by certain programme hosts, some of RTHK's current affairs and personal view programmes were often one-sided and provoking. Mr NG therefore considered that RTHK should exercise great care in appointing programme hosts so as to ensure a balanced presentation of different views.

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6.5 In response, D of B stressed that over the years, RTHK had upheld editorial independence and achieved a high level of credibility as revealed in a number of surveys and ratings. RTHK had to comply with the Codes of Practice issued by the Broadcasting Authority and the internal Framework Agreement signed between CITB and RTHK. Moreover, to provide relevant guidance, RTHK had issued a set of Producers' Guidelines with a view to ensuring that its programmes were accurate, impartial and rational. A number of phone-in and personal platform programmes allowing individuals to share their points of views and give comments on current affairs were broadcast by RTHK every week. While issues of public concern were likely to be controversial, D of B considered that the expression of strong views or heated debates on certain issues should not be taken as provoking.

6.6 As regards the selection of programme hosts, D of B advised that to achieve impartiality, RTHK would invite different hosts so as to secure a diversity of perspectives. He pointed out that in addition to the ability to stimulate discussion, the programme hosts should also be capable of interacting with the audience and guests and turning the programme into a quality discussion and exchange of views. D of B assured members that RTHK had taken all relevant factors into consideration in identifying suitable programme hosts, and that RTHK's programme hosts had achieved high ratings in relevant surveys.

6.7 Mr NG Leung-sing referred to his observation and experience and remarked that the number of complaints related to RTHK's programmes should far exceed 94 as reported by the Controlling Officer for the year 2003. In response, D of B explained that apart from lodging their complaints with RTHK direct, members of the public could also file their complaints with the Broadcasting Authority. On the complaint-handling arrangement, RTHK would respond promptly and take appropriate action to deal with complaints about misrepresentation or inaccurate reporting. However, where members of the public merely expressed their views against the style and stance of certain programmes or their hosts, RTHK would take into consideration these criticisms as comments on RTHK's programming service.

Film services

6.8 Mr Timothy FOK urged the Administration to consider co-ordinating the organization of Hong Kong's three major annual events for the film industry, namely, Hong Kong Film Awards Presentation Ceremony, Hong Kong

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International Film Festival and Hong Kong FILMART. He considered that by doing so, resources could be put to more cost-effective use and publicity for the events could be enhanced. He also requested the Administration to consider increasing its funding support for the events.

6.9 In response, the Permanent Secretary for Commerce, Industry and Technology (Communications and Technology)(PSCT) highlighted that the Administration was in the course of discussing with the relevant organizers on the feasibility of staging the three events at about the same time in order to create the best synergy effect. PSCT confirmed that CITB would continue to provide sponsorship to the 2005 Hong Kong Film Awards Presentation Ceremony from its own resources.

6.10 Noting that the number of inspections of Category III films conducted by the Television and Entertainment Licensing Authority (TELA) in 2003 had dropped to 1 254 from 2 026 in 2002, Mr NG Leung-sing enquired about the reasons for the drop. He also noted that the number of articles scrutinized under the Control of Obscene and Indecent Articles Ordinance (Cap. 390) was around 1 million and 1.38 million in 2002 and 2003 respectively but the number for 2004 was expected to rise to 1.4 million. Mr NG was concerned whether TELA could cope with the increasing workload.

6.11 In response, the Commissioner for Television and Entertainment Licensing (C for T&EL) advised that as a result of TELA's enforcement efforts, there were now fewer shops selling obscene and indecent articles. As most of these shops were located in certain shopping areas, enforcement action was thus easier. This had enabled TELA to cope with the anticipated rise in workload arising from the need to scrutinize a greater number of articles.

Innovation and technology

6.12 Noting that Hong Kong Productivity Council (HKPC) was planning to establish offices in Dongguan, Shenzhen and Zhuhai in 2004-05, and that their estimated expenditures ranged from \$1.3 to \$7.6 million, Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung questioned whether these offices would be able to perform their functions effectively with such a low level of funding allocation.

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6.13 In response, the Commissioner for Innovation and Technology (CIT) explained that HKPC was planning to establish the three offices in the form of “wholly foreign owned enterprises”. The estimated expenditures for 2004-05 referred to by Mr YEUNG were only the set-up costs. CIT stressed that these offices would operate on a self-financing basis and meet their operating expenses by the income generated from the services provided.

6.14 Noting that an equity injection of some \$525 million for the construction of the Hong Kong Science Park (HKSP) Phase 2 would be made in 2004-05, Mr SIN Chung-kai enquired about the timetable for commissioning Phase 2 and the current take-up rate of Phase 1 of HKSP.

6.15 In reply, CIT advised that 78% of all lettable floor areas in Phase 1 of HKSP had either been leased or earmarked, and that the remaining floor areas might likely be taken up by end 2004 when Phase 1 was completed for occupancy. Phase 2 was scheduled for commissioning in two years’ time. CIT envisaged that the uptake for Phase 2 would be favourable since many enquiries on tenancy in HKSP had been received following Hong Kong’s agreement with the Mainland on Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement.

6.16 Noting that the total approved funding for projects under the Innovation and Technology Support Programme (ITSP) amounted to as high as \$147.6 million, Mr SIN Chung-kai considered it necessary to formulate criteria in evaluating the effectiveness of each approved project. He cited the example of Singapore where end-users applying the project results on their businesses would be invited to evaluate the effectiveness of the funded projects.

6.17 In response, CIT highlighted that a theme solicitation arrangement was introduced for ITSP in November 2000. The aim of this arrangement was to facilitate more sharply focused project objectives. The specific areas for soliciting research proposals were identified through discussions with the local research communities and industries in order to ensure that projects solicited under these themes could meet the needs of Hong Kong. CIT further remarked that the progress of each funded project was closely monitored. Each project had to reach certain milestones at different stages of development. CIT further advised that in the event that the final report of a certain project was not endorsed by the Innovation and Technology Commission (ITC) or the project result could not be effectively applied to the industries, the researchers concerned might not be able to secure future funding for projects under ITSP. CIT assured members that ITC

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would keep the implementation of ITSP under review and introduce improvements where necessary.