

Chapter XVI : Home Affairs

16.1 At the Chairman's invitation, Dr Patrick C P HO, the Secretary for Home Affairs (SHA), briefed members on the priority areas of the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB) in the new financial year (Appendix V-14).

Sports development

16.2 Referring to the Administration's plan to convert 19 less popular squash courts to other uses, Ms Emily LAU expressed concern about the low utilization rate of sports facilities. In reply, the Director of Leisure and Cultural Services (DLCS) advised that the Administration was monitoring the utilization rates closely. Where the average usage rate of any facilities had persistently dropped to 50% or below, the facilities would be identified as under-utilized facilities. Consideration would then be given to whether the facilities should be converted for other uses. It was through this kind of regular review that squash courts were found to be under utilized. In some districts, the usage rate could be as low as 6% to 29.7% only. In these cases, immediate action was taken to convert the squash courts to table tennis courts or multi-purpose rooms for activities such as judo and yoga classes. Conversion of this nature was relatively simple and could be put to implementation with little renovation work. The Administration would continue to monitor the usage of the facilities to ensure the effectiveness of the conversion.

16.3 In reply to Ms Emily LAU on the timetable for the above conversion works, DLCS explained that in most cases, the conversion only involved minor modification works and the procurement of the necessary equipment. However, if structural modification was required, conversion would take longer time. By way of illustration, the conversion of Victoria Park Squash Courts could only be completed in late 2004 or early 2005 because it involved demolition of the existing squash courts for conversion into an outdoor basketball court.

16.4 Ms Emily LAU enquired whether other measures, such as allowing schools, charitable or sports organizations to use the under-utilized facilities free of charge during non-peak hours, had been considered. In response, DLCS said that at present, to promote the usage of these facilities, schools and other non-profit-making organizations could make advance booking up to one year. Efforts had also been made to publicize the arrangement, including liaison on a district basis. As a result of these efforts, the usage rate of the under-utilized facilities concerned during non-peak hours had increased. In response to Ms LAU's request, DLCS agreed to provide the number of schools/organizations which had benefited from the arrangement after the meeting.

16.5 Mr Timothy FOK asked whether incomes generated from football betting duty could also be used to fund the development of recreation and sport. In reply, SHA advised that all tax incomes would directly go to general revenue for financing work in different policy areas according to the policy priorities.

Measures to address gambling-related problems

16.6 Mr Andrew CHENG referred to the expenditure of \$2 million for the “Say No to Gambling” Action project in 2003-04, and \$3.5 million for the provision of counselling and treatment services for problem and pathological gamblers. He opined that given the substantial revenue from betting duty, more funding should be provided for preventive and remedial measures to address gambling-related problems. In response, SHA emphasized that a 5-pronged strategy had already been implemented to proactively address gambling-related problems. The strategy covered: research and studies to assess the impact of gambling participation and the effectiveness of services, and to identify additional service demands; promotional efforts to involve the community in the fight against gambling; education, including public, family and school education, targeted at warning against excessive gambling; counselling and treatment services for problem and pathological gamblers; and preventive measures to provide support in exercising self-control against gambling. In the coming year, work in these five aspects would be stepped up to tackle the problem of gambling with additional funding and closer co-operation with various parties. The Permanent Secretary for Home Affairs (PSHA) supplemented that liaison had also been kept up with relevant organizations such as the Great Coalition to Oppose the Legalization of Soccer Betting to identify areas where greater efforts should be put in.

16.7 Mr Andrew CHENG stressed that anti-gambling efforts should not be mainly targeted at adolescents but also adults. In the face of extensive media coverage on ball games permeated with gambling information, more funding was required to gear up public educational efforts. In response, PSHA agreed to follow up on his suggestions. The Deputy Secretary for Home Affairs (1) (DS(HA)1) added that presently anti-gambling messages were being put to adults through TV docu-dramas and posters posted at off-course betting branches.

16.8 Mr WONG Sing-chi, on the other hand, considered that the anti-gambling efforts targeted at adolescents were not sufficient. There was no secret that even primary students took part in the betting activities through betting agents. In reply, DS(HA)1 said that the Hong Kong Jockey Club (HKJC) had already agreed to conduct more frequent random checks in both the racecourses and the

off-course betting branches. In addition, law enforcement would also be geared up against betting agents assisting adolescents to participate in gambling activities. Education also played a very important role to help adolescents in this respect. The “Say No to Gambling” Action project to be launched by the Hong Kong Education City aimed to enhance the understanding of gambling and to strengthen the ability of adolescents to exercise self-control so as to prevent themselves from becoming addicted to gambling.

16.9 Mr WONG Sing-chi said more focussed and effective measures, such as additional funding to deploy more outreaching social workers to help young gamblers, under-cover actions directed at catching gambling agents etc., should be taken to combat gambling. In response, DS(HA)1 confirmed that in preparation for the 2004 Euro Cup soccer tournaments to be held in June 2004, and the likely increase in betting activities as a result, more funding would be sought from HKJC to gear up promotional activities before and during the Euro Cup tournaments to educate adolescents that sports and gambling were two different things.

Installation of closed-circuit televisions at selected hygiene blackspots

16.10 Miss CHOY So-yuk pointed out that the number of closed circuit televisions (CCTV) installed at selected hygiene blackspots fell far short of the number of such blackspots. She called for the allocation of more resources in this regard. In reply, Deputy Director of Home Affairs (1) (DDHA(1)) said the CCTV scheme was only being implemented on a pilot basis. As such, only five projects were launched in Yuen Long, Kowloon City, Yau Tsim Mong, Sham Shui Po and Eastern during the first stage of the scheme which commenced in November 2003. A comprehensive review of the pilot scheme would be conducted in April 2004 to assess its overall effectiveness and identify improvement measures where appropriate, and to see whether and how additional funding should be made to extend it further if justified. DDHA(1) emphasized that full consultation with the relevant District Councils would be conducted should extension of the pilot scheme be recommended. In principle, the installation of CCTVs at blackspots should aim at tackling persistent and recurring environmental problems which could not be resolved despite regular clean-up efforts by the Government.

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16.11 As to whether the pilot scheme would be extended with the additional provision of \$3 million in 2004-05, DDHA(1) said that on average, around \$150,000 to \$200,000 would be required for installing one set of CCTV. Nevertheless, the actual number of CCTVs to be installed would have to be determined according to the outcome of the above review.

16.12 Mr NG Leung-sing expressed support for enhanced efforts in civic education which, in his opinion, should cover the promotion of the sense of nationalism. As far as public education on environmental hygiene was concerned, he enquired how enforcement action would be geared up to make the above pilot scheme more effective. In reply, DDHA(1) assured members that since the installation of CCTVs was for monitoring and deterrent purposes, corresponding actions would be taken to ensure that it could achieve its purposes effectively. Videotapes taken from CCTVs would be viewed by staff of the Home Affairs Department, and where offences were detected, they would be referred to the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department for enforcement actions accordingly. In fact, as a result of the pilot scheme, 13 oral warnings had been given in Yuen Long, two raids conducted in Mongkok, and four raids conducted and 22 fixed penalty tickets issued in Kowloon City.

Youth development

16.13 Mr Henry WU declared interests as a member of one of the successful applicant organizers under the Community Participation Scheme (CPS). Mr WU enquired why the estimated amount of subsidy to be allocated for CPS in 2004-05 for organizing study tours to the Mainland was only reduced by 4.74% while the estimated number of participants would drop by 16%. In reply, DS(HA)1 said there was no direct correlation between the two figures as the costs of the study tours, hence the amount of subsidy, would vary according to the destinations and duration of the tours apart from the number of participants.

16.14 Mr Henry WU asked whether higher priority would continue to be accorded to proposals seeking subsidy for youth exchange programmes between Hong Kong and the Pearl River Delta in 2004-05. DS(HA)1 replied in the affirmative. He pointed out that due to similar cultural background and dialect, local young people would benefit more from the exchange programmes held within the Pearl River Delta. Mr WU remarked that the relevant authorities should not ignore the importance of organizing more exchange programmes with other provinces where Putonghua was used so as to enhance young people's understanding of other parts of the Mainland.

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16.15 In response to Mr Henry WU's request for details of the study tours to the Mainland organized under CPS in 2003 and 2004, DS(HA)1 agreed to provide details of the destination and number of participants for each of the tours. In this regard, PSHA also undertook to provide details of the DRAGON 100 Young Chinese Leaders Forum, an exchange programme to be held in Beijing in September 2004. Chinese young leaders, coming from different parts of the world, would be taking part in this Forum. The event, which was organized jointly with the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups and the Dragon Foundation, would be one of the first projects with private participation, hence saving public resources.

16.16 Mr MA Fung-kwok noted that the Government currently relied on the successful applicant organizers to submit self-evaluation reports in assessing whether the objective of CPS to enhance young people's understanding of and respect for Chinese culture and heritage could be achieved. Mr MA cast doubt on the effectiveness of this evaluation method. He enquired whether any objective criteria had been adopted in assessing the results.

16.17 In reply, DS(HA)1 said that the Administration was aware of the limitations of self-evaluation reports. Steps had been taken to tighten the control and monitoring mechanism, particularly in ensuring that Government's subsidy was put to meaningful use. From 2004 onwards, the young participants would be requested to make presentations on the impact of the study tours on them. Through these efforts, the Administration would be in a better position to assess the cost-benefits of the tours and identify areas for improvement. In this regard, PSHA quoted a recent example where some professionals were invited by her to meet with a deputation which received Government's subsidy for attending the United Nations' Children's Forum in Geneva, for the purpose of ascertaining whether the trip had achieved its purpose. She assured members that she and SHA would personally follow up with the assessment of the benefits of local young people's participation in the DRAGON 100 Young Chinese Leaders Forum.

16.18 Mr WONG Sing-chi questioned why there was a need to decide on the future management and operation mode of the Centre for Youth Development (the Centre) before the superstructure works could be determined. He also enquired whether this move would incur any additional funding. In reply, DS(HA)1 explained that when the funding proposal for the Centre was approved by the Finance Committee, it was the Administration's intention that the Centre should be operated on a self-financing basis rather than relying on recurrent subvention from public funds. It was then estimated that operation of the Centre

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could be funded by a maintenance fund supported by operational surplus from rental received from non-governmental organizations and youth groups using its facilities. However, due to changes in the economic environment, the original financial assessment might not be realistic if there were no corresponding changes to the facilities to make the Centre self-financing. The construction of the superstructure of the Centre was therefore held up pending decisions on its operation mode. A consultancy study, which would take 10 months to complete, had been commissioned to shed light on the way forward.

16.19 In response to Mr WONG Sing-chi's concern about the financial implications of the suspension of works, DS(HA)1 assured members that the project would proceed as planned as funding for the Centre had already been secured from the Finance Committee. He said that it was likely that the Centre would be operated on commercial principles. The Administration was in favour of setting up a limited company which had the sole responsibility of managing the Centre with a view to making it a focal point for promoting youth development. To ensure the financial sustainability of the Centre, it was important that the management body had a say on what facilities it required. He further assured members that the current suspension would only defer the commissioning of the Centre for a few months and hence would not give rise to any significant financial implications.

Human right issues

16.20 Dr TANG Siu-tong noted that there were 16 Senior Equal Opportunities Officers but only 13 Equal Opportunities Officers in the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC). He questioned the need for the large number of senior posts in EOC and expressed concern about whether public money was being put to proper use. In reply, DS(HA)1 explained that the staffing structure of EOC was determined with regard to the nature of its work and its actual workload. As the work of EOC involved mediation and law interpretation, there was a high demand for higher ranking officers with higher qualifications.

16.21 Mr Albert HO noted that the drafting instructions for a Racial Discrimination Bill (the Bill) had already been given to the Department of Justice while consultation in this regard was still underway. He was concerned that most part of the legislative proposal would have been determined and there was little leeway for changes after consultation. In reply, DS(HA)1 explained that the format of the Bill was very similar to the other three pieces of anti-discrimination legislation already enacted. Besides, a similar bill on racial discrimination put

forward by a former Member had provided a useful framework for the present Bill. Although the consultation on racial discrimination had not been completed, no major difficulties were anticipated in incorporating the views of the public into the draft Bill as the consultation document was prepared along the framework of the drafting instructions. The present arrangement would speed up the drafting process.

16.22 In response to Mr Albert HO's view that the consultation should be on major policy principles rather than implementation details, DS(HA)1 pointed out that the general framework and directions of the Bill had in fact been laid down because the principles of anti-discrimination legislation in common-law countries were similar and were based on the relevant case law. There was not much leeway for fundamental changes. Notwithstanding, anti-racial discrimination efforts were very different from those against other kinds of discrimination. Consultation was therefore required to work out the implementation details. For example, there was a need to find out whether the definition of racial discrimination should cover discrimination against new arrivals from the Mainland. There was also a need to decide whether EOC or a new body should be responsible for implementing the Bill upon its enactment as in the case of the United Kingdom. As a result, the draft of the Bill would need to be finalized according to the outcome of the consultation.

16.23 Mr Albert HO opined that implementation details could affect the way the Bill was drafted. He therefore expressed concern that the present approach might lead to waste of resources. DS(HA)1 reiterated that the drafting process should be an interactive one. In his opinion, the drafting process would become even more effective if it was done in parallel with public consultation, as amendments could be proposed as a result of the public consultation.

16.24 Mr James TO enquired whether there were plans in 2004-05 to allocate funds for studies on the establishment of an independent human rights committee in Hong Kong. In response, DS(HA)1 said that there was no plan to conduct a consultancy study on this subject because the United Nations already had clear instructions in this regard in the form of the "Paris Principles". Moreover, Hong Kong already had EOC and other organizations which dealt with matters relating to human rights. The drafting of the Racial Discrimination Bill was also one major step in advocating human rights.

Creative industries

16.25 Mr Albert CHAN expressed his disappointment at the bureaucracy and lack of co-ordination within the Government in responding to local initiatives to develop creative industries, such as proposals to set up a buffalo centre in Pui O and Hakka villages in the New Territories. He urged the Administration to ensure that sufficient resources would be allocated to encourage the development of creative industries. SHA responded that the Government's role in this regard was to provide an environment conducive to the healthy development of creative industries, such as by protecting intellectual property, ensuring fair competition, enhancing arts education, nurturing creative talents, liaising with the cultural sector and enterprises, and promoting regional partnerships. As such, manpower resources of HAB would be devoted to such efforts, but no specific provisions had been made in this regard.

16.26 In response to Mr Albert CHAN's suggestion for clear delineation of responsibility at Principal Official level for co-ordinating, planning and promoting the development of creative industries, SHA said that he and another deputy secretary were responsible for efforts in this regard.

16.27 Messrs Albert CHAN and James TO questioned why initiatives such as "Café at Lantau Link View Point", which was by no means new, could be regarded as creative industries. In reply, DDHA(1) explained that it had been so described because it was one of the Local Community Economy projects to showcase Hong Kong's creative business ideas.