

**Opening Statement by Secretary for Constitutional Affairs  
at Special Meeting of the Finance Committee  
on 31 March 2004**

Mr Chairman, I wish to brief Members on the estimates of the Constitutional Affairs Bureau (CAB) and the Registration and Electoral Office (REO) in 2004-05 as well as our priorities in the coming year.

**CAB's Estimate**

2. In 2004-05, CAB is allocated with \$34.4 million, which is about \$2.8 million or 7.5% less than the revised estimate for 2003-04.

**Priorities of CAB in Coming Year**  
**Constitutional development after 2007**

3. In the coming year, CAB will continue to participate in and support the work of the Constitutional Development Task Force. Yesterday, we published a report on the issues of legislative process and briefed the representatives of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPCSC) on the contents. After this Special Meeting of the Finance Committee, the Task Force will attend a special meeting of the Constitutional Affairs Panel to brief Members on the Task Force's meeting with the NPCSC representatives and the view of the SAR Government on the issues of legislative process.

4. The next stage of work of the Task Force is to consolidate the views of the Hong Kong community on the issues of principle. Our intention is to complete and publish the report around mid-April.

5. We will continue to make available resources to complement the work of the Task Force as required.

**2004 Legislative Council (LegCo) Elections**

6. The 2004 LegCo elections will be held in September 2004. The geographical constituencies and the functional constituencies will each return 30 Members in the elections. The Legislative Council (Amendment) Bill 2003 was enacted on 3 July 2003 to provide the legal basis for the elections.

7. Earlier in the year, the LegCo enacted a piece of subsidiary legislation to provide for the printing on ballot papers the photos and emblems of candidates or, if they are members of organisations, the names and emblems of the organisations. We will support political parties, political groups and independent candidates in the elections by means of financial assistance at a rate of \$10 per valid vote received. The relevant subsidiary legislation has already been passed by LegCo.

8. Other preparatory work for the elections is under way. Last Monday, the Electoral Affairs Commission (EAC) issued the draft electoral guidelines for public consultation. The public can express their views on the guidelines before the EAC finalises the document following the one-month consultation period.

9. The 2004 voter registration campaign will commence formally on 3 April 2004. At the meeting of the Constitutional Affairs Panel in March, we briefed Members on the major activities of the campaign. In response to the suggestion of some Members, we will issue appeal letters to the two million households in Hong Kong, urging their family members who are eligible to register as electors or to update their address records. In accordance with the statutory requirements, REO will publish the final register of voters by 25 July 2004.

### **Implementation of One Country, Two Systems**

10. Recently, in discussing the issue of constitutional development, a number of organisations and individuals have suggested that there is a need to further enhance the understanding among the public about the Basic Law. We will deepen our promotion efforts in three main areas.

- Firstly, we will promote the Basic Law in a more comprehensive manner by explaining to members of the public the drafting history and process of the Basic Law. Apart from promoting the characteristics of “Two Systems”, we will also incorporate the concept of “One Country” in our promotion activities.
- Secondly, we will strengthen the element of national education in promoting the Basic Law. We will enhance public understanding of the nation through different kinds of activities.

- Thirdly, we will encourage community organisations to play a part in promoting the Basic Law at the district level to dovetail with the overall strategy of the Government.

11. To facilitate the conduct of HKSAR's external affairs, CAB will continue to act as a focal point of contact between the HKSAR Government and the Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We will also continue to advise bureaux and departments on the conduct of the HKSAR's external affairs in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Basic Law and the "One Country, Two Systems" principle.

12. We will continue to assist bureaux and departments to establish channels of communication and develop an effective working relationship with the relevant Mainland authorities, as well as with the Government of the Macao Special Administrative Region, under the "One Country, Two Systems" principle. We will further promote better understanding between the HKSAR Government and the Mainland as well as Macao authorities through visits and other contacts.

13. CAB also provides support for the Hong Kong/Guangdong Cooperation Joint Conference and the Hong Kong/Shanghai Economic and Trade Cooperation Conference. We will continue to liaise with the Guangdong Provincial People's Government and the Shanghai Municipal People's Government respectively to strengthen cooperation.

14. In accordance with "Qian's Seven Principles", we will continue to enhance economic and cultural exchanges between Hong Kong and Taiwan. We will introduce to Taiwan visitors from the business and other professional fields the successful implementation of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle through briefings on the latest development in Hong Kong and visits to Government bureaux/departments. We will also continue to liaise with the Chung Hwa Travel Service on matters relating to Hong Kong/Taiwan relations.

### **REO's Estimate**

15. For the 2004-05 financial year, we propose to allocate \$336.2 million to REO, which is \$138.8 million or 70.3% higher than the revised estimate of the previous financial year. This relatively substantial increase in the financial provision is mainly due to additional funds required for making preparations for the 2004 LegCo elections.

16. For the 2004 LegCo elections, the total estimated expenditure to be incurred in this financial year is about \$267 million, while some \$8.5 million has already spent in 2003-04 for the purposes. In other words, the 2004 LegCo elections will cost a total of about \$275.5 million.

### **Conclusion**

17. My colleagues and I will continue to ensure that Government resources will be used in a proper and suitable way. We will also make our best endeavours to achieve the target of reducing expenditure within the Government internally.

18. Mr Chairman, perhaps before the question time, we may invite the Director of Beijing Office to brief Members about the work of his Office.

Constitutional Affairs Bureau  
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