立法會
Legislative Council

Ref : CB1/PL/ITB/1

Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting

**Minutes of meeting
held on Friday, 8 April 2005, at 4:00 pm
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building**

Members present : Hon SIN Chung-kai, JP (Chairman)
Hon Albert Jinghan CHENG (Deputy Chairman)
Dr Hon LUI Ming-wah, JP
Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, GBS, JP
Hon Howard YOUNG, SBS, JP

Members attending : Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung

Member absent : Hon Timothy FOK Tsun-ting, GBS, JP

**Public officers
attending** : Agenda Item IV

Mrs Betty FUNG, JP
Deputy Government Chief Information Officer
(Planning and Strategy)

Mr Dennis PANG
Assistant Government Chief Information Officer
(Industry Development and E-business)

Agenda Item V

Mr Stephen MAK, JP
Deputy Government Chief Information Officer
(Operation)

Mr CHEUNG Woon-hang
Chief Systems Manager
(Community and Industry Liaison)(G)
Office of the Government Chief Information Officer

Agenda Item VI

Mrs Marion LAI, JP
Deputy Secretary for Commerce, Industry and
Technology (Communications and Technology)

Mr Raymond NG
Deputy Director of Broadcasting

Mr Eddie CHEUNG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Commerce, Industry
and Technology (Communications and Technology) A

Clerk in attendance : Miss Polly YEUNG
Chief Council Secretary (1)3

Staff in attendance : Ms Debbie YAU
Senior Council Secretary (1)1

Ms Sharon CHAN
Legislative Assistant (1)6

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Action

I   Confirmation of minutes and matters arising

LC Paper No. CB(1)1197/04-05   -- Minutes of meeting held on
                                            14 March 2005

The minutes of the meetings held on 14 March 2005 were confirmed.

II   Papers issued since last meeting

LC Paper No. CB(1)1144/04-05(01) -- Submission from the Hong Kong Televisioners Association on CEPA (Television programme service)

LC Paper No. CB(1)1176/04-05(01) -- Consultation paper on assignment of the available spectrum in the 800 MHz and 1 800 MHz bands to the existing mobile network operators

2.   Members noted the papers issued since last meeting.

III   Date and items for discussion for next meeting

LC Paper No. CB(1)1196/04-05(01) -- List of outstanding items for discussion

LC Paper No. CB(1)1196/04-05(02) -- List of follow-up actions

3.   Members noted and agreed to discuss the following items proposed by the Administration at the next meeting to be held on 9 May 2005:

(a)   Partial commencement of section 8(1)(aa) of the Telecommunications Ordinance and creation of a class licence to regulate telecommunications services on a prepaid basis;

(b)   Proposed creation of a supernumerary Senior Principal Executive Officer post as Head of Hong Kong, China Secretariat for ITU TELECOM World 2006; and

(c)   Consultation exercise on assignment of the available spectrum in the 800 MHz and 1 800 MHz bands to the existing mobile network operators.

4.   At this juncture, Mr Howard YOUNG suggested that the Panel should follow up the progress of the proposed Broadcasting House at a future meeting. The Chairman said that while members could discuss with the Administration the reprovisioning of Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) under the relevant agenda item at today's meeting, the Panel could follow up the matter at a later meeting if necessary.

Papers provided by the Administration

5.   The Chairman informed members that the Administration's information papers for all the agenda items had only been received on 1 and 4 April 2005,

which was after the deadline of 31 March 2005. Pursuant to the decision of the House Committee on 26 November 2004, <u>the Chairman</u> consulted the Panel on whether the items should be discussed at the meeting as originally scheduled or removed from the agenda. <u>Members</u> agreed to discuss the items.

IV   Implementation of Computer Information System Integration Qualification Certification under CEPA II

LC Paper No. CB(1)1196/04-05(03) -- Information paper provided by Administration

6.   At the invitation of the Chairman, <u>the Deputy Government Chief Information Officer (Planning and Strategy) (DGCIO(P&S))</u> briefed members on the arrangements for Hong Kong suppliers of system integration services to apply for Computer Information System Integration (SI) Qualification Certification under the second phase of the Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA II). She introduced the background, the transitional arrangements and the application procedures for the Computer Information SI Qualification Certification and outlined the benefits of the liberalization measure to the IT enterprises in Hong Kong. In gist, as promulgated by the Ministry of Information Industry (MII) of the Central People's Government, there were four levels of SI Qualification Certification, namely Levels 1 to 4, denoting different levels of capability to implement computer information systems. As one of the liberalization measures under CEPAII announced on 27 August 2004, Hong Kong service suppliers were allowed to apply for SI Qualification Certification. In recognition of the differences in the business environment and mode of operation between the Hong Kong and Mainland IT enterprises, MII had agreed to institute a transition period of one year with effect from 1 January 2005, during which certain aspects of the application procedures and assessment criteria of the SI Qualification Certification were relaxed for Hong Kong service suppliers.

Transitional arrangements

7.   <u>Dr LUI Ming-wah</u> enquired whether and how the Hong Kong Assessment Centre of the Hong Kong Productivity Council (HKPC) would conduct assessment during the transition period in accordance with the relevant regulations and rules promulgated by the Mainland.

8.   In response, <u>DGCIO(P&S)</u> advised that to facilitate Hong Kong service suppliers to apply for SI Qualification Certification in Hong Kong, the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) had appointed the HKPC to conduct assessment for Levels 3 and 4 Qualification Certification from Hong Kong applicants. Upon receipt of an application for Levels 3 and 4 certification, the Hong Kong Assessment Centre would, similar to the two existing Mainland assessment centres which had been authorized by MII to assess applications for

all levels, conduct a detailed evaluation and then issued a report on the compliance or otherwise of the application with the assessment criteria agreed between MII and the OGCIO. As such, the assessment reports issued by the Hong Kong Assessment Centre would be duly recognized by MII. In reply to the Chairman, DGCIO(P&S) advised that subject to a review to be conducted before the end of the transition period, the operation of Hong Kong Assessment Centre of HKPC would continue.

9.   Noting that so far, the Hong Kong Assessment Centre had only received eight applications for SI Qualification Certification, Mr Jasper TSANG was concerned about the cost-effectiveness of the scheme. He enquired about the resources that had been provided to support the scheme.

10.   In response, DGCIO(P&S) remarked that the scheme had been launched in response to the request of the IT industry. Regarding the number of applications received so far, DGCIO(P&S) advised that since the transitional arrangements were launched on 1 January 2005, as at end March 2005 two service suppliers had submitted formal applications for SI Qualification Certification; and another six had submitted preliminary applications to the Hong Kong Assessment Centre at HKPC for initial screening. According to a survey conducted last year, several tens of IT companies providing computer information system integration services had potential to apply for the certification. The Administration expected that more applications for certification would be received by end 2005. On the resources to support the scheme, DGCIO(P&S) reported that around $750,000 had been allocated to HKPC for conducting assessment of Levels 3 and 4 Qualification Certification from Hong Kong applicants. She also informed members that the OGCIO had set up a management office through internal re-deployment of resources to oversee the implementation of the scheme.

Longer-term arrangements

11.   Mr Japser TSANG enquired about the way forward after the one-year transition period. He was concerned whether the IT companies concerned would need to re-apply for certification again based on the original criteria after a certain period of time.

12.   The Chairman appreciated the Administration's effort in implementing the transitional arrangements. However, as it was not the usual practice of the IT industry to obtain accreditation of their capability based on established criteria, he was worried that the industry might not be ready to submit formal application by end 2005. As such, the Chairman urged the Administration to request MII to extend the transitional period with a view to benefiting more IT companies.

13.   In response, DGCIO(P&S) said that the Administration would further discuss with the MII on the longer-term arrangements in about August 2005 having regard to the industry's response to the scheme. If the industry feedback

was that some IT companies would unlikely be able to submit applications for the SI certification in time, the Government would discuss with MII to see whether the transitional period could be extended. DGCIO(P&S) confirmed that the SI Qualification Certification, once approved, would be valid for four years; and that the original assessment criteria (vide Annex A of CB(1)1196/04-05(03)) would apply to local IT enterprises if they submitted their application for certification after the expiry of the transitional period. DGCIO(P&S) further advised that the Administration would continue to encourage Hong Kong enterprises to apply for the certification even after the expiry of the transition period. In the meantime, the Hong Kong Assessment Centre would organize training and conduct relevant examinations to enable local IT enterprises to meet the human resources capability criteria of the original assessment requirements.

Other concerns

14.   Dr LUI Ming-wah enquired whether the Administration would support the IT industry to apply for similar qualification certification to access other markets. In response, DGCIO(P&S) pointed out that the regulations promulgated by MII required that enterprises providing computer information system integration services in the Mainland should possess the appropriate level of Computer Information SI Qualification. This would provide a formal recognition of the capability of the enterprises concerned. So far, the Administration was not aware of the need, nor had the IT industry put up any request, for similar schemes in order to access to other markets. Nevertheless, she assured members that the OGCIO would keep in view the needs of the industry and provide assistance where appropriate. In this connection, she informed members that a Capability Maturity Model (CMM) Assessment Grant project which aimed to assist local IT industry in adopting CMM (a world-recognised quality standard in software development) had been launched with funding provided by the Innovation and Technology Fund.

15.   Mr Jasper TSANG enquired whether the same set of assessment criteria would be applicable to Hong Kong and overseas IT companies when the Mainland market was further opened to other trading partners under its World Trade Organization (WTO) commitment. In response, DGCIO(P&S) said that hitherto, only enterprises registered in the Mainland could apply for the certification. As a result of the liberalization under CEPAII, Hong Kong service suppliers could now apply for the certification. As far as she understood, the provision of computer information system integration services was not one of the commitments made by China during its accession to the WTO, though the issue might be one of the subjects for negotiations under the new round of negotiations on multilateral trade in services.

V IT Easy Link Services

  LC Paper No. CB(1)1105/04-05(01) -- Power-point presentation material on "E-government – The Next Wave"

  LC Paper No. CB(1)1196/04-05(04) -- Information paper provided by Administration

  LC Paper No CB(1)1185/04-05 -- Background brief on IT Easy Link prepared by the Secretariat

16. At the invitation of the Chairman, the Deputy Government Chief Information Officer (Operation) (DGCIO(O)) briefed members on the review of the IT Easy Link Services (the Services) and the way forward. In gist, the review had reflected that there was a decreasing demand for the enquiry services from the general community but an increasing demand from businesses. On the way forward, DGCIO(O) said that the Hong Kong Computer Society (HKCS), which was responsible for operating the Services, proposed to transform the mode of operation of the service to better fill the service gap in the community by way of setting up an SME IT Support Centre; seeking sponsorship from and partnership with the private sector to continue providing service to the general community; and exploring cooperative opportunities to further expand the service to cover disadvantaged groups through non-government organizations and the Hong Kong Council of Social Service. HKCS proposed a nine-month period starting from July 2005 to transform the Services and finalize the detailed arrangements. It was seeking sponsorship to operate at a reduced level of service to the general community during the transition period from July 2005 to March 2006.

Incoming calls received by the Services

17. Noting that in the past two years, the daily average number of incoming calls for the general community was about 450, Mr Jasper TSANG was concerned whether the calls were from a small pool of enquirers who made frequent calls to the hotline. If this was the case, Mr TSANG was concerned that the enquiry services had in fact functioned as private tutorials for a small number of users to improve their IT knowledge.

18. In response, DGCIO(O) advised that according to the user profile of the IT Easy Link Services, callers were from different sectors of the community, including students, housewives, retirees, and employees from various industries. DGCIO(O) said that while data were not collected on whether certain callers had made repeated calls, this was possible given that the same callers might encounter different problems in IT usage. Nevertheless, he agreed to relay the concern to HKCS about the need to keep a close watch on the situation.

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19.   Mr Jasper TSANG sought explanation on why there was an average abandon rate of about 10% of incoming calls and asked whether staff of the Services had any difficulty in answering the enquiries.   In reply, DGCIO(O) explained that some enquiries were not dealt with because they were outside the scope of the service.   For example, the enquiries might relate to problems of specific application software which should more appropriately be dealt with by the hardware/software suppliers concerned.   In such cases, HKCS would refer the callers to contact relevant suppliers or vendors for assistance.   In this regard, the Chairman understood that staff members of HKCS manning the Services were only required to provide assistance for enquiries of a general nature in IT usage such as problems in relation to file management and word processing etc.

Funding support and transitional arrangements

20.   Noting that according to the Administration, the Services had apparently helped in encouraging the community to adopt IT and had raised their confidence in using IT in the past few years, Mr Jasper TSANG was concerned why the Administration had decided that the Services should become self-supporting and self-financing from April 2006, instead of being supported by the Administration.

21.   In response, DGCIO(O) advised that the IT Easy Link Services scheme was first launched in June 2002 on a pilot basis for one year to test the usefulness of such a service to the community.   The scheme was subsequently extended twice until June 2005 with an expanded scope of service to cater for users' needs. Notwithstanding that the Services had been well-received by the community, DGCIO(O) pointed out that the Administration was mindful of the need to avoid competing with the private sector for business opportunities.   In fact, similar enquiry services were provided by software or hardware vendors on a fee-charging basis or free of charge as a form of after-sale service.   As such, HKCS had approached major hardware/software suppliers with a view to seeking sponsorship and establishing partnership to continue a reduced level of service to the general community.   In addition, HKCS was also exploring the introduction of a subscription based service for the public.

22.   The Chairman recalled that during past Panel meetings, some members had considered the scheme highly useful and cost-effective because it did not incur substantial costs but could benefit a wide spectrum of the community. While appreciating that it was not the Government's plan to run the IT Easy Link Services on a permanent basis and with recurrent funding, the Chairman urged the Administration to consider withdrawing its funding support in a gradual manner and by phases in one to two years to ensure a smooth and amenable transition, in particular when there were plans to expand the service to the general community to cover disadvantaged groups.

23.   On the transitional arrangement, DGCIO(O) advised that HKCS had proposed a nine-month period starting from July 2005 to transform the Services and finalize the detailed arrangements with the potential sponsors and users. HKCS was seeking sponsorship from the private sector and the Government of

around $1 million to operate at a reduced level of service to the general community during the transition period. DGCIO(O) said that the Administration would maintain close liaison with HKCS during the transition period and provide assistance wherever necessary. On the support for disadvantaged groups, DGCIO(O) advised that if necessary, non-governmental and social service organizations could apply for the Digital Solidarity Fund, which was partly funded by Government, to provide IT user support services for their members.

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24.   In this connection, the Chairman pointed out that as far as he understood, the Digital Solidarity Fund was for organizing specialized IT-related projects and was therefore different in nature from IT Easy Link.   He reiterated his view and requested the Administration to actively consider extending the transition period to one to two years to enable a smooth transition and ensure that IT support to disadvantaged groups would not be unduly affected.

VI   Broadcasting services of Radio Television Hong Kong

LC Paper No. CB(1)1196/04-05(05) -- Information note on RTHK Listenership Survey 2004 provided by Administration

LC Paper No. CB(1)1198/04-05   -- Background brief on Broadcasting Services of RTHK prepared by the Secretariat

25.   The Chairman said that he was disappointed that the Administration had only provided an information note on RTHK's Listenership Survey 2004 for the meeting. As the Administration was aware of concerns raised by members during past meetings, he had expected that the Administration would, in its paper, address issues such as RTHK's role as a public broadcaster and update the Panel on other cost-effectiveness related issues previously discussed, including the proposed Broadcasting House and commercialization of RTHK's productions.

26.   In this connection, the Deputy Secretary for Commerce, Industry and Technology (Communications and Technology) DSCIT(CT) said that having regard to the scope of the agenda item, the Administration had taken the outcome of RTHK's Listenership Survey 2004 as the primary concern of the Panel for the agenda item.   However, she assured members that the Administration was prepared to discuss with members other issues related to RTHK as highlighted by the Chairman.

(*post-meeting note:* On the scope of the agenda item, the Panel Chairman has advised that the relevant part of the Panel's letter dated 13 March 2005 inviting the Administration to attend the meeting should be highlighted for members' information.   In the letter, the Administration has been advised

about the scope of discussion and issues to be addressed, which included RTHK's role as a public service broadcaster, its policy in programme production and the cost-effectiveness of RTHK's operation. The Panel has also requested the Administration to make available the latest survey report by AC Nielson and to include information on the findings of the aforesaid survey for the past three years.)

Listenership Survey 2004

27.   The Deputy Chairman observed that in response to his request for a copy of the survey report on the Listenership Survey 2004 commissioned by RTHK and conducted by AC Nielsen, the Administration had provided an information note (CB(1)1196/04-05(05)) which only contained findings on the listenership for RTHK's radio channels. The Deputy Chairman was gravely concerned that in the absence of findings on the listenership for other commercial radio broadcasters, Panel members and the public were unable to assess the performance of RTHK. He considered that as a publicly-funded broadcaster, it was incumbent upon RTHK to make available the survey report.

28.   In response, DSCIT(CT) explained that as in past years, RTHK had commissioned Listenership Survey 2004 to, inter alia, obtain data to compile one of the performance indicators for the Controlling Officer's Report under Head 160 - RTHK in the 2005-06 Estimates. She said that it had been RTHK's consistent practice to release data about the listenership for its radio channels only and that it might not be appropriate for RTHK to release the survey report which contained data about listenership for other commercial broadcasters' radio channels. On the performance of RTHK, DSCIT(CT) highlighted that the mission of RTHK was to inform, educate and entertain the general public through multi-media programming. Like all other public broadcasters worldwide, RTHK, with a stable source of government funding, was able to fill the market gap by producing diversified programmes which might not be of high commercial appeal but would cater to the needs of minority audience groups. Highlighting that RTHK 1 was the most often listened to channel among all radio channels in Hong Kong, DSCIT(CT) assured members that RTHK would continue to produce programmes serving a broad spectrum of audiences.

29.   The Deputy Director of Broadcasting (DD of B) supplemented that it was the practice of the broadcasting industry to commission listenership surveys to collect data for programming enhancement to better serve the needs of the audiences. As far as he understood, the other two commercial broadcasters also commissioned similar surveys the findings of which were also used for internal reference only.

30.   The Deputy Chairman did not agree that the survey findings were commercially sensitive information and could not therefore be released. He considered that the data on listenership for commercial broadcasters would enable Panel members to ascertain RTHK's cost-effectiveness vis-à-vis that of

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other broadcasters in the market. For example, the data might help reveal the popularity position of RTHK's top ten most listened to radio programmes as compared to other radio programmes of commercial broadcasters. In this connection, <u>DD of B</u> undertook to provide the number of audience for each of the top ten most listened to radio programmes for members' reference.

> (*post-meeting note:* The said information provided by RTHK has been circulated to Panel members on 18 April 2005 vide LC Paper No CB(1)1296/04-05.)

<u>RTHK's annual provision</u>

31. Noting that there had been a reduction in the annual financial provision allocated to RTHK during the last five financial years (from $515.1 million in 2001-02 to $428.5 million in 2005-06), <u>the Deputy Chairman</u> was gravely concerned that RTHK had to cope with the reduction in annual provision by lowering its programme quality and diversity. He cautioned that if RTHK's annual provision continued to diminish, it would not be able to fulfill its mission and cater to the needs of the public for quality broadcasting services. <u>The Deputy Chairman</u> further queried whether it was the Government's intention to undermine the independent operation of RTHK by reducing its level of resources allocation.

32. Sharing the Deputy Chairman's view, <u>the Chairman</u> was worried that reduction in the financial provision for RTHK might impede its development of new services such as RTHK ON INTERNET which had grown and gained popularity over the years. As a frequent user of RTHK ON INTERNET, in particular when he was outside Hong Kong, <u>the Chairman</u> was keen to ensure that the development of RTHK's broadcasting service on the web would not be affected due to insufficient resources.

33. In response, <u>DSCIT(CT)</u> stressed that due to fiscal deficits in the past few years and the need to reduce operating expenditure service-wide, all government departments had to cope with a reduction in their annual allocation and RTHK was no exception. <u>DSCIT(CT)</u> further advised that the extent of reduction in annual provision for departments under the purview of the Communications and Technology (CT) Branch of the Commerce, Industry and Technology (CITB) was broadly consistent. In the face of budgetary constraint, RTHK had, like other departments, reviewed its mode of operation, streamlined and re-engineered its work procedures to enhance efficiency and lower cost. She highlighted that the reduction in operating expenditure had been made possible as a result of various efficiency initiatives, not by way of reducing the quality or scope of services. The Bureau had also discussed with RTHK to ensure that the reduced provision would not affect the broadcasting services of RTHK.

34. <u>DD of B</u> informed members that like other government departments, RTHK had implemented various measures to enhance efficiency so as to cope

with the reduction in annual provision. For example, it had outsourced its mechanical and electrical services, as well as negotiated with PCCW for a lower administrative fee for the technical services agreement. To cope with further financial reduction in 2005-06, the total hours of TV programmes produced would be reduced from 583 in 2004-05 to 550 in 2005-06. RTHK would also merge the broadcast of some popular music programmes by different radio channels during evening hours when there were usually fewer listeners.

35.   The Deputy Chairman maintained his concern that with the reduction in resources allocation, RTHK might not be capable of delivering the same output and quality of services as before. Noting that from time to time, RTHK had been criticized for not defending government policies, the Deputy Chairman stressed that the Government should not manipulate the level of resources allocation as a means to erode RTHK's editorial independence. Reiterating his support to uphold editorial independence for RTHK, the Deputy Chairman considered that RTHK, which was a cornerstone for the freedom of expression in Hong Kong, should not be subject to any further reduction in resources allocation.

36.   Echoing his view, Ms Emily LAU was gravely concerned about some arguments that being a government department, RTHK should serve as the Government's mouthpiece to promote its policies. She urged that RTHK should be provided with the necessary financial support in order to maintain editorial independence and to produce high quality programmes. Referring to news reports that RTHK was among the departments with the highest cut in financial provision, Ms LAU requested the Administration to provide further information in writing on the extent of reduction in annual provision for the past few years for all government departments to facilitate comparison with RTHK. She requested the Administration to make available the information by 11 April 2005 when the Finance Committee would examine the relevant Estimates of Expenditure 2005-06 at its special meeting. She said that the Administration should be prepared to provide an explanation if there was great variation in the extent of reduction in annual provision among different government departments.

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37.   In response, DSCIT(CT) recapped that the extent of reduction in annual provision for departments under the purview of the CT Branch of CITB was broadly consistent. Nevertheless, DSCIT(CT) undertook to provide the information in respect of the departments under the purview of CT Branch of CITB. As regards the comparison with other government departments, DSCIT(CT) said that it might not be possible to come up with the information in the time available but undertook to relay the request to the Permanent Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury (Treasury).

> (*post-meeting note:* The information provided by CITB on the extent of reduction in annual provisions for departments under its purview has been tabled at the Special Finance Committee meeting held on 11 April 2005 and subsequently circulated to Panel members on 12 April 2005 vide LC

Paper No CB(1)1245/04-05(01).)

38.   Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung considered that CITB should recognize the development needs of RTHK, in particular the development of RTHK ON INTERNET which was very popular both in Hong Kong and overseas.   He was worried that the level of its services would be adversely affected if the financial provision for RTHK would continue to diminish.   Mr LEUNG was of the view that the Government should draw up a development plan for RTHK.   He asked whether RTHK had submitted any development proposal for the consideration of CITB and if yes, he considered that the proposal should be made available for the comment of members and the public.

39.   In response, DD of B informed members that each year, RTHK would discuss with CITB on the requirement and use of resources allocated to it.   He confirmed that notwithstanding budgetary constraints, RTHK had re-deployed its resources internally to develop and launch new services such as RTHK's Internet service.

Programming policy

40.   In response to members' concern on the types of programmes produced by RTHK, DD of B highlighted that RTHK had adjusted its programming strategy recently.   Under the new strategy, it would strengthen the output on news, current affairs and information programmes on Channel 1 and continue to produce programmes on life-long learning, healthy living, civic education, national education, culture and arts.   To increase the appeal to young audience, RTHK had re-deployed resources to launch the "Teen Power" radio station on the web which had been well-received by young audience.   DD of B was pleased to report that non-government organizations such as the Action Committee Against Narcotics and the Hong Kong Council on Smoking and Health had invited "Teen Power" to co-produce programmes on the web.   He assured members that RTHK would continue to review its programming strategy and report to the Panel where appropriate.

41.   The Chairman recapped Panel members' concern that RTHK should cease to be actively engaged in productions of programmes which the market could take over, such as horse-racing reports, investment advice, etc.   He stressed that he had no intention to interfere with RTHK's programming policy but remarked that instead of competing with other broadcasters in the production of such programmes, RTHK should consider producing programmes of educational nature such as those promoting anti-gambling messages.   While he considered it acceptable for RTHK to produce programmes such as those featuring the music of different places, he said that RTHK should avoid presenting top Chinese songs awards and related contests.   The Deputy Chairman shared his view.

42.   Ms Emily LAU questioned whether the popularity rating of RTHK's programmes (such as those reflected in the listenership surveys) had a direct

bearing on the level of resources allocated to it. She was concerned that if this was the case, then RTHK might be inclined to produce popular programmes in competition with the commercial broadcasters at the expense of programmes catering for minority interest groups. In response, DSCIT(CT) stressed that there was no direct linkage between popularity rating of RTHK's programmes and the level of resources allocated to it.

43. To enhance RTHK's public accountability, Ms Emily LAU recapped her view that RTHK should conduct pubic hearings to gauge the community's views on its services, in line with the current practice of commercial broadcasters in connection with licence renewal. In this regard, DD of B said that RTHK had set up advisory panels such as the Radio Audience Panel and the TV Advisory Panel to canvass public feedbacks on its programme development. Nevertheless, he said that RTHK would consider Ms LAU's suggestion of conducting public hearings.

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Proposed Broadcasting House

44. In reply to members' enquiry on the way forward for reprovisioning RTHK to a new Broadcasting House in Tseung Kwan O Area 86, DSCIT(CT) advised that the project was currently in Category C of the Public Works Programme following a review conducted last year.

45. The Chairman and the Deputy Chairman recalled that in January 2005, the Administration had advised the Panel that the project was in Category B of the Public Works Programme. Now that it had been downgraded to Category C, they were gravely concerned that the proposed project would be put on hold indefinitely. Recapping his view urging the Administration to take forward the project and put up the prime site currently occupied by RTHK at Broadcast Drive for sale in order to raise revenue to drive the project, the Chairman drew the Administration's attention to the fluctuating property market and urged it to make a timely decision now to reprovision RTHK to Tseung Kwan O so that the site could be released for sale. He considered that the Administration should expedite the project to tie in with the implementation of new technologies such as digital terrestrial broadcasting in the coming years.

46. The Deputy Chairman was gravely concerned that further delay in building the proposed Broadcasting House might impede the development of RTHK and affect the quality and diversity of its services. Noting that the site of 1 Broadcast Drive had been included in the Application List for land sale, the Deputy Chairman highlighted that if the adjacent site (i.e. RTHK's Television House at 1A Broadcast Drive) could also be included in the Application List for acquisition by developers, the Government would be able to generate a much higher land premium by putting up the adjoining sites for sale. He believed that the revenue raised from the land sale could well finance the proposed Broadcasting House project, which had been estimated to cost about $1.1 billion. The Deputy Chairman believed that the Administration should have taken into

account the accommodation needs of RTHK in planning the development of Tseung Kwan O Area 86 in 2000-01. He also agreed that there was urgency for RTHK to upgrade its facilities to prepare for the implementation of digital terrestrial broadcasting. As such, the Deputy Chairman remarked that instead of downgrading the project to Category C, the Administration should upgrade the project to Category A of the Public Works Programme.

47. Mr Howard YOUNG agreed with both the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman. Notwithstanding that the income from land sale would form part of the Government's general revenue, Mr YOUNG opined that the case of RTHK merited special consideration and urged the Administration to expedite the reprovisioning project with a view to furthering the development of RTHK. Mr YOUNG recapped his earlier suggestion that the Panel should re-visit the matter again.

48. Recalling the overcrowded conditions and out-dated facilities she had observed during the Panel's visit to RTHK on 13 January 2004, Ms Emily LAU considered that the reprovisioning of RTHK to the proposed Broadcasting House should be taken forward without any further delay. Ms LAU considered that there was general agreement among Members that the Administration should take forward the reprovisioning project.

49. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung remarked that the Government should explore and take opportunities to raise more revenue to support further developments of RTHK. He considered it vital for RTHK to develop and serve as a multi-channel broadcasting platform for the community. As such, he considered that there was an urgent need to reprovision RTHK to a new Broadcasting House to enable RTHK to perform its role more effectively.

50. In response, DSCIT(CT) advised that the status of a proposed project in the Public Works Programme would be subject to ongoing review having regard to the Government's financial position and the relative priorities of all proposed public works projects. DSCIT(CT) assured members that the Administration had duly noted members' concerns and views and would examine RTHK's accommodation needs and follow up as appropriate in due course.

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51. The Chairman recalled that during the downturn of the property market a few years ago, the Administration had expressed reservation to take forward the proposed project for reason that the reprovisioning cost would exceed the income derived from the sale of the site. He reminded the Administration to capitalize on the flourishing property market now and put up the site for sale in a timely manner.

The way forward

52. To enable members to keep track of the latest development of RTHK, the Chairman suggested that the Administration should revert to the Panel on the way

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forward for the proposed Broadcasting House by July 2005 (or on an earlier date, if practicable), as well as provide a comprehensive progress report on the issues discussed at the meeting.   Members agreed.

VII   Any other business

53.   There being no other business, the meeting ended at 5:40 pm.

Council Business Division 1
Legislative Council Secretariat
4 May 2005