

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(1)2309/05-06
(These minutes have been seen
by the Administration)

Ref : CB1/PL/ITB/1

Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting

**Minutes of special meeting
held on Tuesday, 1 August 2006, at 2:30 pm
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building**

Members present : Hon Albert Jinghan CHENG (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP
Dr Hon LUI Ming-wah, SBS, JP
Hon Howard YOUNG, SBS, JP
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Hon Timothy FOK Tsun-ting, GBS, JP
Hon Ronny TONG Ka-wah, SC

Members attending : Hon Margaret NG
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung

Members absent : Hon SIN Chung-kai, JP (Chairman)
Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, GBS, JP

Public officers attending : Agenda Item I
Mr Eddie CHEUNG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Commerce, Industry
and Technology (Communications and Technology)A

Radio Television of Hong Kong

Mr CHEUNG Man-sun
Assistant Director of Broadcasting (TV)

Ms CHAN Man-kuen, Kirindi
Head/Corporate Communications Unit

Committee on Review of Public Service Broadcasting

Mr Raymond R. WONG
Chairman

Mr CHAN King-cheung
Member

Professor Judy TSUI
Member

Professor LEUNG Tin-wai
Member

Ms Alice LAU
Secretary

**Attendance by
Invitation**

: Agenda Item I

School of Communication, Hong Kong Baptist
University

Professor Leonard L CHU
Chair Professor

Hong Kong Human Rights Monitor

Mr LAW Yuk-kai
Director

Radio Television Hong Kong Programme Staff Union

Ms MAK Lai-ching, Janet
Chairperson

Mr LAM Kwong-to
Vice Chairman

Citizens' Radio

Mr TSANG Kin-shing
Convener

Mr CHEUNG Shoung-ming
Secretary

Individuals

Mr LEE Chi-wing
Member
Shatin District Council

Mr LO Tak-tsun
Student
La Salle College

Mr CHUI Ying-yan
Student
La Salle College

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

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

Ms Guy YIP
Council Secretary (1)1

Ms Vicky LEE
Research Officer 3

Ms Sharon CHAN
Legislative Assistant (1)6

Action

As Mr SIN Chung-kai, Panel Chairman, was out of town and unable to attend the meeting, Mr Albert Jinghan CHENG, Deputy Chairman, chaired the meeting.

I Issues related to the review on public service broadcasting

Meeting with deputations, the Committee on Review of Public Service Broadcasting (the Review Committee) and the Administration

2. Members noted that submissions had been provided by Asian Human Rights Commission, School of Communication of Hong Kong Baptist University, ELCHK Lutheran Secondary School, Metro Broadcast Corporation Limited not attending

the meeting (LC Paper Nos. CB(1)2070/05-06(02), 2070/05-06(03), 2075/05-06(02) and 2084/05-06(01)).

3. The Deputy Chairman welcomed the Review Committee, deputations and the Administration to the meeting. He then invited the Review Committee to brief members and deputations on the progress of the review on public service broadcasting (the Review). He also invited Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) and deputations to present their views on the development of public service broadcasting (PSB) in Hong Kong.

Briefing by the Review Committee and RTHK

4. Mr Raymond R WONG, Chairman of the Review Committee (C/RC) thanked the Panel for inviting the Review Committee to the meeting. He briefed members and deputations on the progress of the Review and highlighted the following:

- (a) The Review Committee had met with representatives from the broadcasting, media, and academic sectors and social organizations. It had also received the views of RTHK management and its Programme Staff Union in separate sessions. So far, the Review Committee had received some 120 written submissions from individuals and organizations.
- (b) An International Conference on PSB had been convened by the Review Committee on 21 June 2006. Eleven experts from Australia, Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States had shared their professional knowledge and experience on various PSB issues, including governance structure, funding, accountability measures and programming. It was their consistent advice that no one model fitted all, and Hong Kong should devise its own PSB model to suit local needs and circumstances.
- (c) The Review Committee was setting up three focus groups to explore possible options on PSB governance structure, accountability measures and funding arrangements. Individuals with a deep understanding and interest in these subject areas had been invited to join. A fourth focus group on programming would be formed later.
- (d) The Review Committee would convene a town-hall meeting in the second half of September 2006 to receive public feedbacks, and to share the broad findings of the focus groups.

Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK)

LC Paper No. CB(1)2084/05-06(03) -- Speaking note of Mr CHEUNG Man-sun, Assistant Director of Broadcasting (TV) of RTHK
(tabled and subsequently issued on 2 August 2006)

LC Paper No. CB(1)2084/05-06(04) -- Information paper on 'Radio Television of Hong Kong in the Digital Future'
(tabled and subsequently issued on 2 August 2006)

5. The Assistant Director of Broadcasting (TV) (AD of B (TV)) said that RTHK had been participating actively in the PSB review, such as by forming working groups within RTHK and attending relevant seminars and symposia. It had also held a public forum on 1 April 2006. AD of B (TV) highlighted that according to the views collected in the past few months, the public generally supported PSB and acknowledged its importance to society. In consideration that RTHK had been providing quality PSB, there was support from the public for RTHK to undergo structural change and to transform into a public service broadcaster independent of the Government. AD of B (TV) added that RTHK would send a detailed submission to the Review Committee by end of 2006. He would share RTHK's initial views with the meeting as follows-

- (a) RTHK strived to serve the public and promote public values. It would keep up with its quality service in the digital era and work closely with other broadcasters in enhancing Hong Kong's status as a regional broadcasting hub.
- (b) On digitalization, RTHK would pursue the strategy of "RTHK in the Digital Future" and continue to take on a pioneering role. It aspired to develop digitalization of broadcasting in radio and high definition television (HDTV), re-provision to a new broadcasting house, operate its own independent TV channel, reinforce its multimedia services to connect the Chinese communities around the world, digitalize the RTHK archives and streamline programme content policy, and enhance the professional development of public broadcasting.
- (c) With reference to the views received on the governance structure for PSB, RTHK considered that public accountability, institutional independence, operational flexibility and sustainability should form the core principles of good governance for a public service broadcaster. A governing board for the public service broadcaster independent of the Government should be set up and the broadcaster's chief executive officer (CEO) should serve as its chief editor. The public service broadcaster should take part in the selection of its CEO and the appointment of senior staff. The governing board should comprise 10 to 20 independent unofficial members possessing expertise in relevant fields such as broadcasting, education, arts, culture, technology, journalism and law. They should be elected or openly nominated by community organizations in the culture, arts and education sectors. Moreover, the Legislative Council (LegCo) should play a role in the nomination procedure.

- (d) RTHK maintained an open attitude on the PSB funding model. It was in favour of a hybrid model in which 80%-85% of the funding was derived from direct government subsidy appropriated on a 3 or 5-year basis and the remaining funding made up by sponsorships, donations and revenue generated from programme sales and commercial sources.
- (e) To ensure the continual provision of quality PSB to the community, the proposal to corporatize RTHK through legislation should be pursued. To ensure a smooth transition, it was of utmost importance that suitable arrangements should be worked out in consultation with the staff side.

Presentation by deputations

Professor Leonard L CHU from School of Communication, Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU)

LC Paper No. CB(1)2070/05-06(01) -- Submission

LC Paper No. CB(1)2139/05-06(01) -- Speaking note

(subsequently issued on 18 August 2006)

6. Professor Leonard L CHU, Chair Professor of the School of Communication, HKBU declared that he was submitting his views on PSB to the Panel in his personal capacity. He considered PSB a form of informal education which should be fully supported by the Government so as to build a pluralistic, inclusive, liberal and open civil society. In gist, his views were as follows-

- (a) Given Hong Kong's relatively small market, a single major PSB provider should be adequate and efficient. In addition, the Government should also consider assisting local universities that offer broadcasting degree programmes to set up their own PSB stations with a view to nurturing a critical mass of broadcasting professionals.
- (b) Government appropriations should constitute the major source of PSB funding while commercial sponsorships, donations, sale of services and products and acceptance of voluntary services should also be explored. While limited commercial sponsorship might be allowed, this must not compromise the editorial independence of the public service broadcaster. To avoid posing unfair competition to commercial broadcasters, commercial sponsorship should not exceed 15% of the total operational cost of the public service broadcaster.
- (c) The public service broadcaster should be established by legislation and its editorial independence guaranteed by law. To safeguard against government interference, the legislation should state clearly that no government official had the power to appoint or remove the CEO of the public service broadcaster without a two-third consent of the publicly elected legislators.

- (d) It was desirable to provide public access channels as they helped aggregate public opinion and promote the development of democracy in Hong Kong.

To conclude, Professor CHU said that the provision of quality PSB was essential to a highly modernized international metropolis like Hong Kong. Furthermore, the development of a democratic political system, under which the Chief Executive and Members of the LegCo should be returned by universal suffrage, would be conducive to ensuring the efficiency, accountability and credibility of the independent public service broadcaster.

Hong Kong Human Rights Monitor (HKHRM)

7. Mr LAW Yuk-kai, Director of HKHRM declared that he had accepted the invitation of the Review Committee to join its focus group on PSB governance structure. He expressed the HKHRM's views as follows-

- (a) PSB played an important part in developing citizens' knowledge, broadening their horizons and enabling them to better understand themselves and the world.
- (b) Frequency spectrum for broadcasting was a scarce public asset and should not be utilized solely for deriving commercial gains. As such, commercial broadcasters should continue to be required to provide PSB programmes, in particular news and current affairs programmes.
- (c) There was concern that some commercial broadcasters might have taken side with big consortia and become biased in their reporting, as reflected in the broadcasters' news and current affairs programmes. In this regard, reference might be made to overseas practice of outsourcing the production of this type of programmes to achieve impartiality and freedom from undue commercial influence.
- (d) Being a government department and the sole publicly-funded broadcaster in Hong Kong, RTHK had all along been constrained by civil service administrative rules and regulations. To ensure a public service broadcaster's editorial independence and freedom from political influence, RTHK should hive off from the Government and undergo comprehensive organizational changes in terms of its structure, governance and financial arrangement. It should be provided with stable and adequate public funding to sustain its independent operation and forward planning. The Government should also provide additional financial support for RTHK to migrate to digitalization of services.

RTHK Programme Staff Union

LC Paper No. CB(1)2084/05-06(02) -- Submission

(tabled and subsequently issued on 2 August 2006)

8. Referring to the Union's submission, Ms Janet MAK Lai-ching, Chairperson of RTHK Programme Staff Union highlighted the following-

- (a) On PSB funding model, government appropriations should form the major source of funding of a public service broadcaster in order to ensure the broadcaster's impartiality and sustainability. Consideration might be given to apportioning a certain amount of the Government's income from tax, rates and telecommunications/broadcasting licence fees. A funding cycle of 3 to 5 years was desirable for providing greater certainty over the formulation of strategic plans.
- (b) On governance structure, RTHK should be hived-off from the Government and established as a statutory body through a piece of enabling legislation in which editorial independence and the broadcaster's public service mandate were enshrined. A governing board, comprising not less than 20 members drawn from the public from professional, educational, business, cultural and broadcasting fields should be set up to oversee the management of RTHK. One of the members of the governing board should be a staff representative. The board's Chairman, nominated by the governing board, should be empowered to steer strategic plans for RTHK and monitor the work of the governing board. The broadcaster's day-to-day administration and editorial matters should be vested with the CEO, a post comparable to the existing post of Director of Broadcasting.
- (c) On staff issues, the Union did not subscribe to the view that existing civil service staff of RTHK must give up their civil servant status if RTHK was corporatized. On the contrary, the job security of the civil service would enable RTHK staff to carry out their public duties in a professional and committed manner without the fear of losing their jobs easily. It was important that suitable arrangements should be worked out in consultation with staff over any organizational changes.

Citizens' Radio

LC Paper No. CB(1)2075/05-06(01) -- Submission

9. Mr TSANG Kin-shing, Convener of Citizens' Radio highlighted the following points-

- (a) On governance structure, he would not support the suggestion for two-thirds of LegCo Members to endorse nominations of members of the public service broadcaster's governing board since not all LegCo Members were returned by direct elections and hence, they could not fully represent the interest of the general public. Instead, members of

the governing board should be elected by the public through one-man-one-vote.

- (b) RTHK had served the public for 78 years and had built up its reputation in delivering quality PSB. The recent criticisms made against RTHK about its non-compliance with government rules and regulations were far from significant if compared to the more serious misconduct committed in other publicly-funded organizations, such as obtaining housing allowance by deception and the building problems of public housing estates. To avoid political interference and safeguard editorial independence, RTHK should hive off from the Government and operate independently with stable public funding.
- (c) There was a trend that commercial broadcasters had come under growing consideration. For instance, the hosting of phone-in programmes by Mr Albert CHENG and Mr WONG Yuk-man was terminated despite their popularity. There was also little coverage on the views of some political organizations.
- (d) The Government should promote digitalization and set up public access channels in Hong Kong. Hong Kong was lagging behind other advanced economies in the development of public access channels. In Taiwan, some 150 such channels had been established providing platforms for civic exchanges. On the contrary, Hong Kong's existing legislative framework was not conducive to encouraging the setting up of public access channels, as evidenced by the difficulty experienced by the Citizens' Radio in its application for a radio broadcasting licence and the fact that to date, no licence had been granted. The Government was urged to open up frequency spectrum for public access channels and to devise a streamlined licensing regime so that interested parties could apply without difficulty to operate such channels.
- (e) The Citizens' Radio appreciated that the Review Committee had invited it to give views on PSB as a member of the broadcasting industry. The Review Committee was urged to include in its PSB review the feasibility of devising a mechanism for the public to apply for the use of frequency spectrum to cater for their broadcasting needs.

Mr LEE Chi-wing, a member of the Sha Tin District Council (STDC)
LC Paper No. CB(1)2139/05-06(02) -- Submission
(subsequently issued on 18 August
2006)

10. Declaring his attendance at the meeting in his personal capacity, Mr LEE Chi-wing, a member of STDC, pointed out that a distinction should be drawn between public service broadcasters and state broadcasters. The former was mandated to serve the public, not the state or any commercial interests; while the latter was more often mandated to promote government policies and information.

He opined that, over the past years, RTHK had evolved from a government broadcaster to a PSB provider. To resolve RTHK's role conflict arising from being a government department-cum-public broadcaster, he supported re-structuring RTHK into an independent public service broadcaster. Its remit should include the carriage of programmes on government policies and on public views, and the provision of PSB programmes on political, current affairs, social and educational aspects.

11. On funding, Mr LEE Chi-wing proposed that the public service broadcaster should be supported by public funds and at the same time, be allowed to seek advertising revenue, accept commercial sponsorships and subsidies. He expressed reservation on the suggestion of requiring the public to pay a fee to fund the public service broadcaster. Mr LEE considered that a licensing regime for PSB should be put in place whereby the public service broadcaster, like their commercial counterparts, should be subject to the Broadcasting Authority (BA)'s regulation. On carriage platform, he considered that RTHK should be provided with its own TV channel to broadcast its programmes. Even so, transitional arrangement should be made for commercial broadcasters to continue to carry RTHK's television programmes during the initial operation of the future independent broadcaster in order that RTHK could establish its position in the market and build up its audienceship.

Mr LO Tak-tsun and Mr CHUI Ying-yan, students of La Salle College
LC Paper No. CB(1)2139/05-06(03) -- Submission
(subsequently issued on 18 August 2006)

12. Mr LO Tak-tsun and Mr CHUI Ying-yan, students of La Salle College considered that a public service broadcaster should be impartial, serve niche interests, promote local culture and achieve distinctiveness. With its long history in providing PSB to the people of Hong Kong and its track record in producing quality PSB programmes (such as the television series "Success Stories on Outstanding Chinese" and the radio programme "Talkabout", RTHK had been fulfilling the role of a public service broadcaster despite its status as a government department. They concurred that RTHK should hive off from the Government to resolve the conflict of roles.

13. On funding, Mr LO and Mr CHUI considered that instead of government appropriation or commercial sponsorships which might have the risk of subjecting the public service broadcaster to political and commercial influence, a more preferable option would be licence fees payable by the public in possession of devices capable of receiving radio or television broadcasts. They explained that licence fees provided a stable source of funding and at the same time, involve the public as the public service broadcaster's stakeholders. Referring to the UK experience, they said that having witnessed the development of the British Broadcasting Corporation for decades, the public had found the payment of licence fees more acceptable than before. On governance structure, they considered that in order to ensure the public service broadcaster's accountability and credibility, the majority of the members of the governing board should be elected by the public

through one-man-one-vote with candidates drawn from the legal, educational and cultural fields; while the other members were to be appointed by the Government.

14. The Deputy Chairman requested the deputations to provide their written submissions to the Panel after the meeting, if they had not already done so.

Discussion

Funding

15. Noting from some deputations that a public service broadcaster should not be allowed to seek advertising revenue although consideration might be given for it to accept limited commercial sponsorships, Mr Howard YOUNG sought RTHK's view as to how the public service broadcaster could be free from commercial interference while accepting commercial sponsorships.

16. In response, AD of B (TV) recapped the importance for the public service broadcaster in Hong Kong to be provided with stable and adequate public funding. He said that while maintaining an open attitude on the future PSB funding model, RTHK was in favour of a hybrid model in which 80% to 85% of the funding would be derived from direct government subsidy while the remaining funding could be from other sources including commercial sponsorships subject to certain restrictions. AD of B (TV) drew on the experience of the Special Broadcasting Service Corporation in Australia, which was allowed to generate income from advertising and sponsorships but the advertisements and sponsorship announcements it could broadcast were subject to certain guidelines to ensure editorial autonomy. For instance, the airtime for such announcements was limited to five minutes in any hour. AD of B (TV) therefore suggested that a set of guidelines should also be developed on the permissible sponsorship announcements that a public service broadcaster could broadcast. He added that consideration might be given for the public service broadcaster to receive commercial sponsorships for programmes that were not or rarely provided by commercial broadcasters (e.g. classical music programmes) as commercial sponsorship for this kind of programmes would unlikely pose any direct competition to the commercial broadcasters. AD of B (TV) also pointed out that there should be a clear understanding that in providing sponsorships, the commercial sponsors could not impose any undue requirements on the editorial/ programming decision of the public service broadcaster.

Work plan of the Review Committee

17. On the timetable for the Review Committee to submit its report to the Administration, C/RC said that when accepting the appointment to chair the Review Committee in January this year, he had already made it clear that it would not be realistic to prescribe a rigid timeframe of nine months for completing the Review. He stressed that the Review Committee should be given adequate time to complete its task instead of being asked to meet a certain deadline. In response to

the Deputy Chairman's further enquiry, C/RC pointed out that as the Review covered highly complicated issues which required careful study, he found it difficult to commit the Review Committee to a definite date at this stage. He added, however, that it remained a working target of the Review Committee to complete its work by end 2006.

18. In reply to members, Principal Assistant Secretary for Commerce, Industry and Technology (Communications and Technology) (PASCIT(CT)) said that when the Review Committee was established in January 2006, the Administration had expected that the Review Committee would take some nine months to complete its work. However, upon reviewing its work plan soon after the commencement of the Review, the Review Committee had indicated to the Administration that it would require more time. PASCIT(CT) advised that in the light of the review progress, it was expected that the review would be completed by the end of 2006.

Informed public discussion on PSB

19. Ms Emily LAU thanked the deputations for their valuable input. Referring to the Economic Development and Labour Bureau's plan to prepare a public discussion document on the way forward for the competition policy in Hong Kong having regard to the recommendations of the Competition Policy Review Committee, Ms LAU considered this arrangement a good practice in mapping out the future policy. She therefore suggested that for PSB, the Commerce, Industry and Technology Bureau should also take into consideration the Review Committee's recommendations and publish a consultation paper to set out the background and relevant information (such as overseas PSB models), and put forward some policy options on how PSB should be developed in Hong Kong. This would enable the community to focus their discussion on pertinent issues, such as governance, funding methods and the public service remit of PSB etc. Ms LAU further pointed out that unlike other places, there had been little informed public discussion on PSB in Hong Kong. Hence, the Government should make available more information on the subject to encourage more public discussion.

20. On the Administration's subsequent courses of action, PASCIT(CT) referred members to the speech of the Secretary for Industry, Commerce and Technology (SCIT) in January 2006 announcing the appointment of the Review Committee that based on the review outcome, the Government would formulate a roadmap for the development of PSB for consultation with the public before implementation. C/RC believed that having considered the report submitted by the Review Committee, the Government would follow up the matter as appropriate.

21. Mr TSANG Kin-shing of Citizens' Radio expressed his support for the suggestion to conduct public consultation on the development of PSB in Hong Kong. He noted with disappointment the lack of wide public participation in events such as the International Conference on PSB convened by the Review Committee and at Panel meetings when the subject of PSB was discussed. Hence, he urged the Administration to consider holding public hearings on PSB.

22. Mr LAW Yuk-kai of HKHRM agreed with the need for the Government to conduct public consultation in order to deepen discussion of PSB in the community. He considered that due to the lack of comprehensive information on PSB, even some relatively active concern groups might not command a good understanding of the subject. As such, it would be helpful if the consultation document would outline the relevant international standards on PSB laid down by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Article 19, or other authoritative bodies. He added that very limited resources had been provided to the Review Committee in undertaking the review and urged the Administration to strengthen resources for the Review Committee to enable it to set up a comprehensive database on PSB.

23. As the development of PSB involved the consideration of many complex policy issues which should not be taken lightly, Ms Janet MAK of RTHK Programme Staff Union expressed her full support for comprehensive consultation. She shared the view that there had been very little informed public discussion on PSB and said that she had learnt about the progress of the Review mainly from newspaper reports.

24. Mr LEE Chi-wing, a member of STDC also agreed with the need to conduct formal consultation after the Review Committee had submitted its report to CE at the end of the year. On the information available in the public domain, Mr LEE referred to the consultation note issued by the Panel which he considered very useful in facilitating consideration of the subject in a focused manner. He called on the Administration to publish pamphlets on relevant information on PSB for the reference of the public.

25. On behalf of the Review Committee, the Secretary of the Review Committee (S/RC) informed the meeting that to promote public understanding, the Review Committee had posted relevant information on PSB at its website: www.psb.org.hk, the launch of which had been publicly announced through different media. She highlighted that apart from providing basic information on PSB and hyperlinks to websites of overseas public broadcasting organizations, the website also hosted consultation synopsis, videos of the full proceeding of the International Conference on PSB and an overview of various PSB models. The public would also be able to access information on future public activities hosted by the Review Committee, such as the town-hall meeting in September. Acknowledging the importance of public consultation, S/RC said that the Review Committee had met with many organizations and individuals to hear their views, and had received about 120 written submissions. Some 200 local participants took part in the aforesaid International Conference. The Review Committee would continue to canvass public views through various means in subsequent stages of its work.

26. Mr Ronny TONG considered that major policies involving complex issues such as the development of PSB in Hong Kong would inevitably attract controversial views. He agreed that it was necessary to seek the views of experts on PSB in devising details of the PSB model, as well as the views of the

community on the broad direction and objectives of PSB. To facilitate early consideration by the public, Mr TONG said that if the Review Committee needed more time to complete the Review, it was strongly advisable for it to consider issuing an interim report on its findings and observations. Where there was consensus on certain issues, such as the hiving-off of RTHK from the Government, Mr TONG was keen to see that such consensus would be implemented without delay. He was very concerned whether the Government would attach due importance to the recommendations of the Review Committee. He pointed out that if the Administration conducted a fresh consultation without regard to the Review Committee's findings and consensus reached, the development of PSB in Hong Kong would be unduly delayed.

27. In this connection, PASCIT(CT) said that members of the Review Committee were esteemed professionals and experts in the media and broadcasting fields and that their findings and recommendations should be given serious consideration by the Government, LegCo and the public.

28. AD of B (TV) pointed out that the present Review was a major exercise since the last review conducted by the Broadcasting Review Board over two decades ago in 1984. The outcome of the Review would have a far-reaching impact on the future of RTHK and the development of PSB in Hong Kong. While recognizing the need for thorough public consultation, AD of B (TV) pointed out that it was also crucial to reach a decision early on the implementation of PSB in Hong Kong to facilitate forward planning by RTHK for projects like digitalization of broadcasting. Protracted consultation without conclusion might not be in the interest of all stakeholders.

29. Referring to the specific issues that had been considered by the Review Committee, C/RC said that members of the Review Committee had agreed in principle that RTHK or the future public service broadcaster should be separate from and independent of the Government structure. However, there was a diversity of views among committee members on some other issues such as the funding models for PSB in Hong Kong. C/RC took note of Mr TONG's suggestion for the Review Committee to issue an interim report. He cautioned, however, that any interim report must be very carefully worded in order to be informative without pre-empting the final recommendations or causing public confusion.

30. Mr Ronny TONG recalled that some of his constituents had reflected to him their reluctance to pay licence fees to support the future public service broadcaster. He therefore agreed that certain pertinent issues such as PSB funding would require more detailed study and consultation. As such, Mr TONG considered that an interim report issued by the Review Committee, which would likely set out the consensus (if any) reached and a broad indication of the future direction of PSB, would be highly useful in facilitating more focused public discussion to take place in parallel. This would help expedite the process of PSB development in Hong Kong. The Deputy Chairman said that the Review Committee might wish to consider if it would need to conduct public consultation on a more extensive basis.

If a comprehensive public consultation had been conducted, it would not be necessary for the Administration to repeat public consultation on the grounds that the public consultation conducted by the Review Committee had not been extensive enough.

31. To enable the community to focus their discussion on pertinent issues of PSB, Professor Judy TSUI, Member of the Review Committee informed members that three focus groups to examine the governance structure, accountability measures and funding arrangements of a public broadcaster would soon be set up under the Review Committee. The broad findings of the focus groups would be shared with the public at the forthcoming town-hall meeting highlighted by S/RC.

RTHK to provide a platform on PSB

32. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung suggested that RTHK should consider producing a special programme to provide a platform for the public to acquire the knowledge of and to voice their views on PSB. He also considered that the commercial broadcasters should also be required to allocate air time for the Review Committee to gauge public views on various issues of PSB, such as whether RTHK should serve as government's mouthpiece and whether the Director of Broadcasting should continue to play the role of RTHK's chief editor while being a civil servant.

33. Expressing his support for the establishment of public access channels for the public to voice their views, Mr LEUNG disapproved of the present legislative arrangement which was not conducive to the setting up of community/public access channels. In Mr LEUNG's view, the current licensing requirement was an impediment to the freedom of broadcasting. He urged the Government to open up frequency spectrum for public access channels and to devise a streamlined licensing regime so that interested parties could apply without difficulty for approval to set up these channels. Moreover, he said that currently, some commentators or certain individuals with political background were not given the opportunity to express their views through the airwaves. He therefore called on the Review Committee to ensure that the future public service broadcaster would not be subject to political interference and be deterred from inviting certain personalities to host or take part in programmes.

34. Sharing Mr LEUNG's view, Ms Emily LAU considered that the broadcasting industry in Hong Kong had increasingly refrained from producing programmes which involved the view points of some political figures.

35. On Mr LEUNG's suggestion for RTHK to produce a programme for the Review Committee to solicit public views on PSB, Mr TSANG Kin-shing of Citizens' Radio said that if RTHK was not prepared to do so, the Citizens' Radio would be pleased to host such a programme.

36. In this connection, AD of B (TV) informed the meeting that RTHK had set up a discussion zone on its website featuring relevant materials on PSB. All along,

it had been RTHK's programming policy to produce programmes on topical issues of wide public concern. In fact, when the Government announced the establishment of the Review Committee in January this year, the subject of PSB had been highlighted in a number of RTHK programmes during the week in question. In reply to the Deputy Chairman's further enquiry, AD of B (TV) advised that as RTHK's public affairs programmes were meant to cover a broad range of topical issues, the production of a programme devoted to one particular issue would require careful consideration. Moreover, the public might perceive a conflict of interests if RTHK put a lot of emphasis on PSB development in its programmes. Nevertheless, he took note of the Members' suggestion for consideration.

37. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung did not subscribe to the explanation of AD of B (TV). He remarked that RTHK should collaborate with the Review Committee to systematically introduce PSB to enhance public understanding and to encourage more focused discussion. AD of B (TV) supplemented that overseas PSB models had been introduced systemically at one of the episodes of the programme "Media Watch".

38. Given that RTHK had merged the broadcast of some of its radio programmes at night, the Deputy Chairman considered that RTHK should make available its surplus channel capacity to provide a platform over the airwaves for the public to exchange views with the Review Committee on the important subject of PSB development in Hong Kong. He sought the views of C/RC on the idea of hosting a programme on PSB over one of RTHK's radio channels.

39. In response, C/RC indicated that the Review Committee was prepared to exchange views with the public through different means, including at RTHK's programmes as appropriate. On the avenues available to the public to express views on PSB, S/RC referred to the discussion forum set up at the website of the Review Committee which provided an open platform for members of the public to freely express and exchange their views on PSB. Moreover, the public might also send their views and input to the Review Committee via email. In this connection, Mr CHEUNG Shoung-ming of Citizens' Radio pointed out that some members of the public might not be well-versed in using the computer and communicating via the Internet.

II Any other business

40. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 4:30 pm.