

Legislative Council Panel on Constitutional Affairs

2007-08 Policy Agenda

INTRODUCTION

This paper briefs Members on the initiatives of the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau (CMAB) set out in the 2007-08 Policy Agenda¹.

POLICY AGENDA

2. Under the guiding principle of “Developing Democracy and Enhancing Governance”, we will pursue three new initiatives and will continue to implement three ongoing initiatives.

New Initiative

- (a) Implement further development of the Political Appointment System.
- (b) Work closely with the Electoral Affairs Commission to make practical arrangements to ensure that the 2007 DC election, the 2007 LegCo (LegCo) Hong Kong Island geographical constituency by-election and the 2008 LegCo election will be conducted in a fair, open and honest manner in accordance with the relevant legislation.
- (c) Strengthen our relationship with the relevant Mainland authorities so that HKSAR can take early action in complementing the preparation of the National 12th Five-Year Plan under the principle of “One Country, Two Systems”. This will help ensure that we can make necessary preparations to realise Hong Kong’s development potentials. This will also facilitate our timely and effective contribution to the Mainland’s social and economic development during the 12th Five-Year Plan period.

¹ Those initiatives relating to human rights policies and access to information have been covered in the paper submitted to the LegCo Home Affairs Panel separately.

Ongoing Initiatives

- (d) Continue to take forward constitutional development towards the ultimate aim of universal suffrage. After the close of the public consultation on the Green Paper on Constitutional Development, we will summarise the public views received. We will use this as the basis to take forward the next phase of work.
- (c) Continue to facilitate the implementation of “One Country, Two Systems” and to demonstrate its success; and to strengthen our efforts in promoting public awareness and understanding of the Basic Law.
- (d) Continue to strengthen regional co-operation between the Mainland and Hong Kong through our co-operation frameworks with the Pan-Pearl River Delta Region; the Guangdong Province; and the Municipalities of Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen.

Details of the above initiatives are covered in the following paragraphs.

Continue to take forward constitutional development

3. The three-month public consultation on the Green Paper on Constitutional Development has just closed. We will summarize the views of the community on the models, roadmap and timetable for implementing universal suffrage for the Chief Executive (CE) and the LegCo. We will then assess according to the views received within the public consultation period whether differences in opinions have narrowed sufficiently to provide a basis for consensus on implementation of universal suffrage to be formed.

4. During the campaign of the third-term the CE election early this year, the CE made it clear that he hoped to forge consensus within the community on the issue of universal suffrage within his new term, so as to implement universal suffrage as soon as possible. The CE has already fulfilled his electoral promise by issuing the Green paper on 11 July and embarked on the public consultation. In the past three months, we have been consulting the community widely and systematically through a variety of channels to encourage response to the issue of universal suffrage, and to listen to the views of different sectors of society on the Green Paper. For example, we have already attended the meetings of all 18 District Councils,

and public hearings organized by LegCo to listen to the views of over 150 deputations on the issue of universal suffrage.

5. Moreover, we have organized open and regional forums to allow the public and district personalities to express their views direct. We have also met with the LegCo functional constituencies and Election Committee sub-sectors, and attended forums organized by different organizations to listen to their views and concerns about the issue of universal suffrage.

6. After summarizing the views received, the Government will submit a report to the Central Authorities to reflect the views gathered during the public consultation period.

Implement Further Development of the Political Appointment System

7. In order to further develop the Political Appointment System, we have conducted a public consultation exercise on the proposals to create two additional layers of political appointees (namely Deputy Directors of Bureau and Assistants to Directors of Bureau). We plan to publish a report in the near future to set out the views received and our proposed way forward, and will seek the approval of the LegCo to create the positions.

8. The CE indicated in his election platform that he would implement the expansion of the Political Appointment System. Apart from providing stronger support to the existing team of politically appointed Principal Officials to undertake political work for better governance, the proposed creation of two additional layers of political appointees will complement the progressive development of a more democratic political system. To pave the way for universal suffrage, aside from the hardware of electoral arrangements, we also need to develop the software of political talents. The implementation of universal suffrage and further development of the Political Appointment System will complement each other. We would like to appeal to Members for their support to the Government's proposals.

Preparation for Elections

9. The Electoral Affairs Commission (EAC) and the Registration and Electoral Office (REO) are preparing the electoral arrangements for the 2007 District Council Election, the 2007 LegCo By-election for the Hong Kong Island geographical constituency, as well as the 2008 LegCo General Election. Updates on relevant preparatory work are set out in the following paragraphs.

2007 District Council Election

10. The 2007 District Council election will be held on 18 November 2007. The nomination period will run from 2 to 15 October. Legislative amendments have been introduced to put in place the following measures:

- (a) candidates will be allowed to have certain specified particulars relating to them (including their photographs and personal emblems, the names, abbreviations of the names and the emblems of prescribed bodies, as well as the words “Independent Candidate” or “Non-affiliated Candidate”) printed on the ballot papers;
- (b) the election expense limit has been adjusted upwards to \$48,000; and
- (c) financial assistance will be provided for eligible candidates. The subsidy rate is set at \$10 per vote, capped at 50% of the actual election expenses of the candidates.

11. The EAC released the Guidelines on Election-related Activities in respect of the District Council Election on 19 September. The Electoral Registration Officer released the final registers of electors for 2007 on 25 September. For the geographical constituencies, the final register comprises about 3.3 million electors, representing an increase of 3.45% over 2006.

12. Members were briefed on the details of the practical arrangements for the election at the meeting of the Panel on 21 June 2007.

13. In order to encourage nominations and polling in this election, and to publicise the importance of honest and clean election, we are running a publicity programme from mid-September to the polling day on 18 November. There will be TV and radio Announcements in the Public Interest, advertisements in major transportation networks, special TV programmes and other publicity activities.

2007 LegCo by-election for the Hong Kong Island geographical constituency

14. The 2007 LegCo by-election for the Hong Kong Island geographical constituency will be held on 2 December. Details of relevant arrangements are set out in the paper “Practical arrangements for the 2007 LegCo by-election for the Hong Kong Island geographical constituency”

for Members' reference.

2008 LegCo General Election

15. To prepare for the 2008 LegCo General Election, the EAC submitted to the CE a report on the recommended delineation of geographical constituencies in September 2007. Before making its final recommendations, the EAC had conducted public consultation on its provisional recommendations for 30 days from 5 July to 3 August, and had carefully considered the representations received. The EAC's report will be considered by the CE as soon as practicable in accordance with the law.

16. In addition, following established practice, we will update the composition of functional constituencies and review the election expenses limits.

Implementation of "One Country, Two Systems" and Promotion of the Basic Law

17. We will continue to assist bureaux and departments to enhance communication and to develop a good working relationship with the relevant Mainland authorities. We will further promote better understanding between the HKSAR Government and the Mainland authorities through visits and other contacts.

18. In accordance with "Qian Seven Principles", we will continue to promote economic and trade ties and cultural exchanges between Hong Kong and Taiwan, and brief Taiwan visitors on the latest developments in Hong Kong and the implementation of the "One Country, Two Systems". In the last few years, we have assisted in arranging visits to Hong Kong, including visits to Government departments, by representatives from various sectors in Taiwan. They include the business, media, academic, legal and medical sectors, as well as the Taipei Government and City Council and members of the legislature of different political backgrounds in Taiwan. The HKSAR Government will continue to strengthen such exchanges with various sectors of Taiwan, so that they will have a better understanding of the latest developments in Hong Kong.

19. To facilitate the conduct of Hong Kong's external affairs, CMAB 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 Hong Kong's external affairs in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Basic Law and the "One Country, Two Systems" principle

to facilitate Hong Kong's participation in international organizations and conferences.

20. We will step up our efforts in promoting the Basic Law, with a view to enhancing public understanding of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle and the Basic Law. For the 2007-08 financial year, relevant departments of the Government have earmarked over \$12 million for organizing promotional activities.

21. In the coming financial year, CMAB would devote more resources to the promotion of the Basic Law. We will further promote the important concepts of "One Country, Two Systems", "Hong Kong People ruling Hong Kong" and "a high degree of autonomy". This is to enhance public understanding on the position of Hong Kong as a special administrative region directly under the Central People's Government, the relationship between the Central Authorities and the HKSAR and the new room for development and advantages brought to Hong Kong by the "One Country, Two Systems" principle. We will continue to use electronic media as an important promotion channel, including TV documentary programme, Announcements of Public Interest and radio shows to enhance public understanding of the Basic Law. We will also organise other activities such as seminars and competitions to enhance the effect of promotion.

Complementing the Preparation of the 12th National Five-Year Plan

22. Since reunification, HKSAR has developed closer ties and relationship with the Mainland. Riding on Mainland's sustained growth and the trend of globalization, Hong Kong's future success depends on the extent to which we can capitalize on our unique position by leveraging on the Mainland and engaging ourselves globally. The 11th National Five-Year Plan states clearly that "support will be given to Hong Kong's development on fronts such as financial services, logistics, tourism and information services, and the maintenance of Hong Kong's status as an international centre of financial services, trade and shipping". This recognizes HKSAR's strategic position in the national development and signifies the country's support for our mainstay industries.

23. On the above basis, we will continue to coordinate efforts among concerned government bureaux. We will also strengthen liaison with the relevant central authorities and discuss how the HKSAR can complement the preparation of the National 12th Five-Year Plan.

24. HKSAR's proactive participation in complementing the

preparation of the National 12th Five-Year Plan helps provide an important platform for promoting cooperation with the Mainland and sustaining Hong Kong's long-term development. During the process, we can better grasp the social and economic trends of the Mainland with a view to devising timely, effective and complementary measures to contribute to the national development. This will also help consolidate Hong Kong's irreplaceable role in the future development of our country.

Regional Cooperation

25. The HKSAR Government has been making strenuous efforts to promote regional cooperation with the Mainland with a view to complementing Hong Kong's positioning in the 11th National Five-Year Plan and capitalizing on our strengths. We will continue to foster closer cooperation with the various Mainland provinces/regions/municipalities under the established cooperation mechanisms, including the Hong Kong/Guangdong Cooperation Joint Conference, Pan-Pearl River Delta Regional Cooperation and Development Forum, and the Hong Kong/Shanghai and Hong Kong/Beijing Economic and Trade Cooperation Conferences.

26. With the establishment of the third-term government on 1 July 2007, we have changed our name from Constitutional Affairs Bureau to Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau to reflect more accurately our work on Mainland affairs. This will also facilitate our liaison and further cooperation with the various Mainland provinces/regions/municipalities.

27. Since the commencement of the PPRD regional cooperation, we have been working on a number of initiatives to promote regional development and cooperation by capitalizing on the advantages of Hong Kong. For example, we have enhanced the linkage between Hong Kong and the Mainland by facilitating the flow of people and goods in the PPRD region through the implementation of appropriate policies and provision of transport infrastructure. The Individual Visit Scheme has been extended to cover all provincial capitals in the PPRD region since 1 May 2006.

28. In addition, we have been developing new cross boundary transport infrastructure projects, including the Hong Kong-Shenzhen Western Corridor which commenced operation on 1 July 2007. To develop cooperation and business opportunities in the PPRD region, the CE led business delegations to visit Guangxi, Hunan, Guizhou and Jiangxi in June, September, November 2006 and January 2007 respectively. Together with the extension of the coverage of Hong Kong Economic and

Trade Offices (ETO) in Guangdong and Chengdu to all PPRD regions, the ties and cooperation between Hong Kong and PPRD region will be further strengthened.

29. We will continue to capitalize on our strengths by making use of the PPRD region as a cooperation platform. To complement the national policy of adjusting the industrial structure and promoting industrial upgrading, restructuring and relocation, we plan to organize a seminar in Hong Kong in November 2007 to provide an opportunity for the trade and PPRD governments to exchange views on the subject. In addition, we will establish a web-based information exchange platform to distribute information about industrial upgrading, restructuring and relocation in the PPRD region.

30. On co-operation with Guangdong, we will endeavour to maintain close ties with Guangdong and strengthen our co-operation on various fronts, including the co-ordination of the development of cross-boundary infrastructural projects, facilitating people and cargo flows at boundary control points, protecting the environment, protecting food safety, as well as enhancing co-operation in economic and trade, tourism, innovation and technology, and social welfare etc.

31. We will also strengthen our partnership with Shenzhen, including jointly exploring the feasibility of developing Lok Ma Chau Loop to mutual benefits, and steering further research and planning work on other cross-boundary issues like border crossings and the development of the boundary restricted areas. We will also promote closer co-operation between the Hong Kong International Airport and Shenzhen Airport and study the feasibility of establishing direct rail link between the two airports.

32. To complement the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the HKSAR, our Mainland offices have re-doubled their efforts on public relations, commercial relations and investment promotion, and made full use of this invaluable opportunity to launch a series of promotion and publicity events to showcase the strengths of Hong Kong and promote mutually beneficial regional cooperation in the areas under their respective coverage, including the Circum-Bohai Sea, Chengu-Chongqing and Yangtze River Delta regions. Such activities include seminars and talks, roving exhibitions and cultural performances etc. A large-scale exhibition entitled "A Decade of Achievements" was held in June and July at the Capital Museum of Beijing to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the HKSAR. The 20-day exhibition, showcasing the success of Hong Kong in the various areas of economic, infrastructural, cultural and sports

developments, attracted some 120,000 visitors. In addition, in July this year, the CE visited Tianjin, one of the focused developing areas of the Country, to meet senior local officials and explore opportunities for future cooperation.

CONCLUSIONS

33. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau
October 2007