

LCQ1: Governance and management of RTHK

Following is a question by the Hon Yung Hoi-yan and a reply by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau, in the Legislative Council today (March 24):

Question:

Last month, the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau (CEDB) released the Review Report submitted by a dedicated team to review the governance and management of Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK). Regarding the governance and management of RTHK, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the details of RTHK's plan for implementing the recommendations made in the Review Report in respect of its mechanisms for editorial management and complaints handling, performance measurement and evaluation, as well as management of its workforce (including the implementation priority and schedule of the various recommendations);

(2) whether the CEDB has comprehensively reviewed its role and performance in monitoring RTHK, and if any senior staff of the CEDB and RTHK should be held responsible for RTHK's previous governance and management problems; how the CEDB will strengthen its role in monitoring RTHK in future; and

(3) how the CEDB will, in the coming three years, instruct the Director of Broadcasting to lead RTHK to strictly comply with (i) the Charter of Radio Television Hong Kong (the Charter) (in particular to fulfill the following purposes of RTHK as the public service broadcaster as stipulated in paragraph 4 of the Charter: providing accurate and impartial news, information, perspectives and analyses; promoting the public's understanding of "one country, two systems" and its implementation in Hong Kong; and engendering a sense of citizenship and national identity through programmes that contribute to the understanding of the community and nation), (ii) the Communications Authority's code of practice on programme standards, and (iii) RTHK's internal Producers' Guidelines; whether the CEDB has plans to update the Charter in order to reflect the latest situation of Hong Kong (including the National Security Law for Hong Kong having been implemented in Hong Kong)?

Reply:

President,

Our consolidated reply to the Hon Yung Hoi-yan's question is as follows:

The roles of Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) are clearly defined in the Charter of Radio Television Hong Kong (the Charter). RTHK is both a government department and the only public service broadcaster in Hong Kong.

The Charter specifies RTHK's relationship with the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau (CEDB) and the RTHK Board of Advisors (BoA), as well as the role of the Communications Authority (CA) in regulating RTHK's programme contents. The three parties will discharge their respective functions and responsibilities.

The CEDB has been overseeing whether RTHK, as a government department, complies with all applicable government rules and regulations, including those on financial control, human resources management and procurement matters. The BoA advises the Director of Broadcasting (D of B) on all matters pertaining to editorial principles, programming standards and quality of RTHK programming, and receive reports on complaints against such matters. In addition, RTHK must ensure that all of its programmes comply with the relevant codes of practices issued by the CA for regulating the standards of programmes broadcast by broadcasting licensees. The CA adopts consistent standards and procedures in handling complaints about programmes of commercial as well as public service broadcasters in accordance with the established mechanism.

The management and individual RTHK programmes have been a cause of public concern in recent years. RTHK's programmes have been subject to complaints repeatedly and ruled by the CA to have breached the relevant codes of practices in the past two years. In light of the above, the CEDB established a dedicated team to review the governance and management of RTHK in the middle of last year. The Governance and Management of Radio Television Hong Kong Review Report (the Review Report) was released on February 19 this year and passed to RTHK for follow up. The CEDB and the D of B also briefed and discussed with Legislative Council (LegCo) members about the Review Report at the LegCo Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting.

As regards the follow up work, the CEDB has requested RTHK to study in detail and implement the recommendations of the Review Report by drawing up priority improvement measures, an action plan and a timetable so as to fully implement the recommendations, and to seek advice from the BoA and other stakeholders in a timely manner. RTHK has already commenced the implementation work, which includes enhancing editorial management, devising a clearer editorial process and improving the complaint handling mechanism. On the recommendation of enhancing editorial governance, RTHK has introduced a new editorial management mechanism under which the D of B and RTHK's senior management would hold editorial meetings so as to ensure the programmes comply with the requirements stipulated in the Charter and the Producers' Guidelines. Other recommendations will be implemented progressively.

The roles and functions of RTHK are clearly stipulated in the Charter. The Charter has also specified RTHK's public purposes and mission, including promoting the public's understanding of "one country, two systems" and its implementation in Hong Kong, and engendering a sense of citizenship and national identity. To enhance the public's sense of national identity and their understanding of national security, RTHK has recently produced a new programme chronicling the modern history of China over the past 100 years. Since the promulgation of the Hong Kong National Security Law, RTHK has

introduced programmes to explain its provisions. In the coming year, RTHK will produce programmes on life in the Greater Bay Area, Lingnan culture as well as scenery of our country to further cultivate the sense of national identity and improve the understanding of our national culture.

RTHK and its staff, as the whole society, have to abide by all Hong Kong laws. In this connection, it is not necessary to make changes to the Charter arising from new legislation.