

LCQ11: The Government's work on public relations and dissemination of press information

Following is a question by the Hon Claudia Mo and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Lau Kong-wah, in the Legislative Council today (January 30):

Question:

Some media workers have relayed that in recent years, the Government's approach for disseminating press information and arranging media coverage, and even the performance of government officials in responding to the public, have all fallen short of public expectations and have time and again aroused criticisms, causing a far-reaching impact on the freedom of the press as the "fourth estate". The examples given by them include that: (a) the Government did not invite the media to report the handover of the Mainland Port Area of the Hong Kong Section of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link on September 3 last year, (b) the Government, on several occasions, did not release until late at night the coupler inspection results obtained after opening up the platform slabs and diaphragm walls of the Hung Hom Station Extension under the Shatin to Central Link project, and (c) the Secretary for Justice displayed a poor attitude when responding to media enquiries about the case concerning the allegations of corruption and misconduct in public office against the Chief Executive of the last term. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the current policies on and strategies for disseminating press information, liaising with the media, gauging public sentiments and measuring the pulse of society;

(2) of the specific measures in place to improve the immediacy of disseminating press information, media coverage arrangements, and the attitude of government officials in responding to the public; and

(3) whether it will, on an annual basis, conduct reviews of and make improvements to the Government's work on public relations and dissemination of press information, and submit the relevant reports to this Council, so as to manifest an open and transparent style of governance; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In its pursuit of "people-based" governance, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government formulates various policy initiatives that

are aimed to be known, understood, supported and monitored by the public. We therefore attach great importance to information dissemination strategies and their implementation.

The reply to Hon Claudia Mo's question is as follows:

(1) The Government has all along been adopting a proactive and positive approach and adhering to the principles of openness and transparency. Policy bureaux and departments are required to disseminate information promptly when announcing major policies and measures. Appreciating the importance of allowing the media to have thorough understanding of government policies and measures, the Government actively arranges for the convenient and effective dissemination of information.

In this regard, the Government disseminates information to the public through a variety of channels via the media, which include the issue of press releases, photos and videos; handling enquiries from the media and the public; organising media interviews; arranging government officials to attend radio and television public affairs programmes; and offering live broadcast of press conferences and briefings on government website and establishing a webcast archive for public access, etc.

The Information Services Department (ISD), together with the press officers at bureaux and departments, will pay close attention to feedback as reflected by the media so that officers responsible for the formulation and implementation of policies and measures can learn about the public opinions on their work as soon as possible.

(2) The Government attaches great importance to media feedback on our work of information dissemination. As the Chief Executive earlier pointed out in public, there was room for improvement in the dissemination of information of certain recent individual cases. The Chief Executive has instructed all bureaux and departments to be more proactive in facilitating the media in covering the announcement of major issues.

The Chief Executive had pointed out that in realising its pledge to accord importance to media work, the Government has to provide facilitation. To this end, the current-term Government has enhanced measures to assist the work of the media, including the admission of online media to government events and allowing more time for the media to raise questions by extending press conference durations. In addition, the ISD will continue to make use of the internet in disseminating government information. Through releasing government news on multi-media platforms under "news.gov.hk", the public can access the website via mobile phones and other mobile devices. The "news.gov.hk" website fully utilises social media platforms, including Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Sina Weibo and WeChat, etc., in disseminating updated information, features, photos and videos to all sectors of the community.

(3) The Government disseminates information to the public through the media and has maintained close and frequent contact with members of the media. The Government exchanges with professional news organisations from time to time

to listen to their views on the overall public relations and information dissemination work of the Government. As for individual dissemination arrangements, members of the media will reflect their views to relevant bureaux and departments immediately. The Government will continue to strive to enhance the accuracy, transparency and timeliness of information dissemination under public and media scrutiny.