

LCQ12: Ensuring libraries' collections comply with requirements of Hong Kong National Security Law

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Priscilla Leung and a written reply by the Acting Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Jack Chan, in the Legislative Council today (April 6):

Question:

It has been reported that since the implementation of the Hong Kong National Security Law, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) has, on several occasions, reviewed whether the collections of its public libraries comply with the requirements of the Hong Kong National Security Law, and removed some of the books from the shelves. In addition, the Education Bureau has issued a circular to schools to remind them to remove from their libraries' collections those books which are suspected to be in breach of the Law. On ensuring libraries' collections comply with the requirements of the Hong Kong National Security Law, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of items of library materials in the LCSD's public libraries that the LCSD has reviewed in the light of the implementation of the Hong Kong National Security Law, and set out, by the title of such materials, the categories (e.g. books, videos, e-books) to which such materials belong, as well as the authors/speakers and the review results of such materials;

(2) as some government-subsidised organisations (e.g. schools and social welfare organisations) have set up libraries, whether the Government has made available a list of those library materials which the public libraries have already removed from the shelves for reference by the operators concerned, or conducted inspections on such libraries so as to ensure their collections comply with the requirements of the Hong Kong National Security Law; and

(3) whether it has grasped the current number of private libraries in Hong Kong which are open to the public, and the situation of their operators' compliance with the Hong Kong National Security Law; if so, of the details; if not, whether it will expeditiously conduct a review, and the ways for ensuring the collections concerned comply with the requirements of the Law?

Reply:

President,

The reply to the various parts of question raised by Dr the Hon Priscilla Leung is as follows:

(1) To ensure the vitality and usefulness of library collections, as well as

their compliance with the law, the Hong Kong Public Libraries (HKPL) reviews and withdraws from time to time materials which do not conform to the collection development, including but not limited to those which are obscene or indecent, allegedly illegal or infringing copyright, or contrary to the interests of national security.

In tandem with the implementation of the Law of the People's Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (the National Security Law), the HKPL of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) has re-examined and updated the procedures for and guidelines on purchasing library materials and accepting donations of books and periodicals. Safeguarding national security has now been included as one of the considerations to ensure that the library collections for loans by members of the public free of charge conform to the laws of Hong Kong. If any library material is suspected of breaching the laws of Hong Kong or being contrary to the interests of national security, the LCSD will handle the matter in a serious manner and suspend the lending and other services of the library material concerned to examine whether its content has violated the relevant law or the provision of service related to such library material is contrary to the interests of national security. The LCSD does not make available the list of library materials removed from library shelves or withdrawn for allegedly breaching the National Security Law or other Hong Kong legislation or for being contrary to the interests of national security, because such announcement may lead to wide circulation of such library materials with malicious intent by other parties or organisations and is thus unfavourable to safeguarding of national security

(2) Due to the reason stated above, the LCSD does not provide the list of library materials removed from the shelves of public libraries to government-subsided organisations for reference.

Upon implementation of the National Security Law, the Education Bureau (EDB) has provided schools with detailed administration and education guidelines. Schools are reminded to ensure that the words or objects displayed within the campus, such as books (including library collections), publications and leaflets do not contain content that endangers national security. Schools are also required to establish/strengthen their school-based monitoring mechanisms for regular review of the implementation of measures on safeguarding national security and national security education, including the content and quality of learning and teaching resources (including library collections) for various learning areas and across different subjects. To safeguard the wellbeing of students, schools should ensure the books/publications in the school library meet the cognitive ability and development needs of students in different stages of learning. The EDB has all along been seeking to understand and monitor schools on the implementation of related measures through different channels such as inspections, school visits and daily communication. The EDB will seriously follow up on any complaints received, including investigating the case to see whether the allegations are substantiated, reviewing schools' monitoring mechanisms and when necessary, issuing advisory/warning letters to schools to ensure schools' compliance with the relevant requirements.

In addition, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) has since September 2021 required non-governmental organisations (NGOs) providing subvented welfare services to be conversant and comply with the National Security Law; and has included NGOs' performance in this respect in the regular performance assessment of their welfare service units. If an NGO falls short of meeting this standard after self-assessment or inspection visits by the SWD, the SWD will require the concerned NGO to rectify the shortcomings with an action plan. The SWD will remind the welfare organisations which provide library services to stay vigilant as to whether there are any matters that may breach the laws of Hong Kong or would be contrary to the interests of national security, and handle such matters in a serious manner.

(3) Whilst the Government does not have relevant information on private libraries, collections of private libraries shall comply with the requirements of the National Security Law and other Hong Kong legislation.