

LCQ3: Legislative Council General Election

Following is a question by the Hon Stanley Ng and a reply by the Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs, Mr Erick Tsang Kwok-wai, in the Legislative Council today (October 23):

Question:

The National People's Congress passed a Decision on improving the electoral system of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region in March 2021 to fully implement the principle of "patriots administering Hong Kong". Subsequently, the SAR Government completed the work of amending the relevant local electoral legislation in accordance with Annexes I and II to the Basic Law as amended by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress. On the other hand, the current term of the Legislative Council (LegCo) will end on December 31 next year, and the LegCo General Election will be held at the end of next year. There are views that the LegCo General Election is an important aspect of implementing the principle of patriots administering Hong Kong and promoting good governance of the SAR Government, and there must not be any chance of a mishap. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) with reference to the overwhelming publicity for the 2023 District Council Ordinary Election, how the Government will further step up the efforts in the publicity for the LegCo General Election next year, so as to enhance the atmosphere of the election and call upon more electors to actively participate in voting to elect patriotic and capable people to participate in the work of LegCo;

(2) as the Government has indicated that it will expand the application of information technology to make elections more efficient and user-friendly, of the new information technology that the Government will consider applying in the LegCo General Election to be held next year, so as to enhance the effectiveness of the election; and

(3) with reference to past electoral experience, how the Government assesses and resolves the potential risks in the LegCo General Election to be held next year, so as to ensure that the election will not be subject to external interference and will be conducted in a safe, orderly and fair manner?

Reply:

President,

After the improvement of the electoral system in 2021 and the improvements in district governance and reforms to the District Councils in 2023, the electoral system of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

(HKSAR) has been improved. The HKSAR Government has successfully held five important elections, allowing Hong Kong to achieve good governance as well as entering the stage from stability to prosperity. As President Xi Jinping stated: "The new electoral system is a political and democratic system that aligns with the principle of 'one country, two systems', fits the realistic conditions of Hong Kong, and meets the developmental needs of Hong Kong, which must be treasured and adhered to in the long term."

In response to the questions raised by the Hon Stanley Ng, the replies are as follows:

(1) The HKSAR Government has emphasised time and again that the electoral system of the HKSAR is crucial to the stability of "one country, two systems", and to the good governance and long-term stability of the HKSAR. The improved electoral system not only safeguards the security of the country's political power, but also fully implements the principle of "patriots administering Hong Kong", which protects the jurisdiction of the HKSAR, as well as the harmony and stability of Hong Kong and the well-being of the public. The new electoral system has also demonstrated its characteristics and advantages of broad representativeness, political inclusiveness, balanced participation and fair competition, laying a solid foundation for the long-term and healthy development of democracy in Hong Kong. For this reason, the Government has spared no effort in publicising and promoting the new electoral system, so that members of the public can fully understand that the new electoral system is closely related to them and its importance. In particular, whenever large-scale public elections are held, the HKSAR Government will launch massive publicity campaigns to create a heated election atmosphere in the whole community, so that the public will be keenly concerned about and participate in the elections enthusiastically, so as to elect people who are trustworthy and genuinely committed to contributing to our country and Hong Kong to take up the relevant seats.

Take last year's District Council Election (DCE) as an example, a number of innovative and diversified approaches were adopted in the publicity work, such as the "Night Vibes DCE", "DCE into the Community" and the "Build a Better Community Gala", which were brand new, down-to-earth and in close proximity to the public; in addition to the distribution of thank you cards to voters and the setting up of "check-in" spots, which were well received by the public and had a very satisfactory effect on the overall publicity work. Various government bureaux and departments have also made concerted efforts to launch various forms of election publicity activities, resulting in a pervasive election atmosphere in the whole community, and the effectiveness of which is evident to all.

In view of the importance of elections and the successful experience gained in the past, the Government will continue to conduct publicity works for future public elections, such as the Legislative Council General Election (LCGE) to be held next year, through various innovative, diversified and down-to-earth means, with a view to launching more highlight activities to create a strong election atmosphere, so as to enhance the public's awareness of the elections on the one hand, and to increase their attention to and

participation in the elections on the other.

At present, we are conducting a detailed review and optimising the planning of the arrangements for the various processes of the election, including the publicity work for the LCGE, etc. We will consult the Legislative Council as soon as possible when we have any specific ideas at a later stage.

(2) Since the improvement of the electoral system, the HKSAR Government has also been striving to optimise and enhance the various arrangements for elections, so as to ensure that elections are conducted in a fair, just and honest manner, and at the same time, to have efficiency and user-friendliness constantly enhanced. For example, the Registration and Electoral Office (REO) has introduced an electronic poll registration system since 2021, which is much more efficient and accurate than the previous mode of manual ballot paper distribution, thus significantly reduced the time for electors to queue up for ballot paper distribution and casting their votes.

In addition, during last year's DCE, the REO set up an online booking platform for electors to register for the use of the near boundary polling stations, so as to facilitate members of the public to plan their itinerary for the election day well in advance. A dedicated website was also provided to allow electors to check the real-time queuing hours of the polling stations, so as to facilitate the planning of polling arrangements by electors. In addition, the REO has also set up additional electronic ballot paper checking devices at the polling stations for the electors of the District Council constituencies to ensure that the ballot papers are properly and validly marked. Starting from this year, the Government's "iAm Smart" application has been fully integrated into the voter registration process for providing a more convenient experience to the applicants.

At present, we are conducting a comprehensive review of the various electoral processes and considering the introduction of appropriate information and intelligent technologies in the light of the actual situation. However, when considering the specific arrangements, we shall give holistic consideration to the application of technology, enhancement of efficiency, safety and security, privacy protection and public perception, and strike a proper balance to ensure the safe and orderly conduct of the election. We will consult members of the Legislative Council again when we have come up with the specific arrangements later.

(3) With the electoral system improved and the principle of "patriots administering Hong Kong" fully implemented, the governance of the HKSAR is now firmly in the hands of the patriots. In regard to the LCGE to be held next year, the systemic safeguard of the political system can be categorised into the following four levels:

(i) candidates must be nominated by two to four members of the Election Committee from each sector. All Election Committee members are patriots who love Hong Kong and will exercise stringent gate-keeping in making nominations, so as to ensure that those who are not patriots and do not love

Hong Kong will be excluded;

(ii) the eligibility of candidates will be checked and confirmed by the "Candidate Eligibility Review Committee" to ensure that the statutory requirements of upholding the Basic Law and bearing allegiance to the HKSAR of the People's Republic of China (PRC) are met;

(iii) candidates will be required to take the oath to uphold the Basic Law and bear allegiance to the HKSAR of the PRC in accordance with the law when standing for election and assuming office, and the oath will be confirmed by the Commissioner for Oaths to be valid; and

(iv) even after the assumption of office, if the candidate concerned has acted in breach of the oath, the Government may activate the statutory procedures to disqualify the relevant person from the office in accordance with the law.

In respect of electoral arrangements, the REO has all along maintained close liaison with the police and other law-enforcement agencies, and has put in place an established mechanism for collecting and analysing intelligence to objectively assess the risk of an election being obstructed, interfered with, disrupted or seriously affected, and to take measures as appropriate to mitigate the relevant risks and hazards, as well as to draw up various contingency plans to cope with any unforeseen circumstances.

In addition, since the last DC election, the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau, in conjunction with the Information Services Department and other relevant departments, has set up a rapid response team before and after the election day to closely monitor and pay attention to various types of information during the election period, and to swiftly and effectively refute or clarify all kinds of false or inaccurate information or comments, so as to ensure that the election will not be affected.

Thank you, President.