

LCQ5: Activities and measures for boosting sense of national identity

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Junius Ho and a reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Caspar Tsui, in the Legislative Council today (November 4):

Question:

Some members of the public have pointed out that since the 2019 District Council Ordinary Election, the Government has often been "at odds" with the District Councils (DCs) in promoting districts affairs. For instance, individual DCs have refused to organise or allocate funding to subsidise this year's activities in celebration of the National Day and the reunification of Hong Kong. Such members of the public consider that in the absence of DCs' collaboration, the Government, being an executive-led one, should take the initiative to organise related activities in various districts, so as to boost the sense of national identity and the sense of belonging to the country among members of the public. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has, in the light of the aforesaid situation, formulated corresponding plans to enable activities in celebration of the Reunification Day and the National Day to be held smoothly in various districts; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether it will consider taking the lead in flying the national flag/regional flag along the roadsides in various districts on the aforesaid days, or designating suitable locations in various districts for members of the public to fly the national flag/regional flag so as to enhance the festive atmosphere; if not, of the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it has introduced new measures since January last year to boost the sense of national identity and the sense of belonging to the country among members of the public; if so, of the details?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the Chief Secretary for Administration's Office, the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau and the Education Bureau, the consolidated reply to the question raised by Dr the Hon Junius Ho is as follows:

(1) The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government attaches great importance to the celebration events for the anniversary of establishment of HKSAR and the National Day. With a view to celebrating the

HKSAR Establishment Day and the National Day, as well as enhancing the festive atmosphere at district level and people's sense of national identity and sense of belonging to the country, 18 District Offices (DOs) organise or co-organise various activities every year. For instance, the Home Affairs Department (HAD) and its DOs organised more than 100 and 200 activities for the celebration of the HKSAR Establishment Day and the National Day respectively last year. Concerning community involvement projects processed by District Councils (DCs), we note that the number of applications received, and the amount of funding approved dropped significantly this year. Around 60 per cent of HKSAR Establishment Day celebration activities and around 40 per cent of National Day celebration activities were rejected by DCs. 2020 is a special year, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the activities this year had to be cancelled or postponed in order to safeguard people's health and maintain social distance. Nevertheless, 18 DOs organised or co-organised more than 22 and 35 activities for celebrating the HKSAR Establishment Day and the National Day respectively this year.

In order to enhance festive atmosphere, we will keep the arrangement under review, continue to facilitate organisation of appropriate celebration activities in districts, and possibly consider different ways to celebrate the HKSAR Establishment Day and the National Day.

(2) There are views in the community that the national/regional flag should be displayed on the National Day and the HKSAR Establishment Day. Some people further suggest that the national/regional flag should be displayed prominently, such as in the middle of or on both sides of the road. We must highlight that while celebrations of the anniversary of establishment of HKSAR and the National Day are worth supporting, public safety is also important. Taking into consideration that displaying flags on both sides of the road may pose danger to road users, the Government does not arrange or approve the display of national/regional flags by the roadside in general, so as to avoid traffic accidents.

Members of the public who wish to display the national/regional flag at public places or within Government buildings should first submit applications to the departments concerned and comply with the requirements stipulated under relevant regulations and ordinances. In accordance with the National Flag and National Emblem Ordinance and the Regional Flag and Regional Emblem Ordinance, the national/regional flag should be displayed at a suitable location with dignity and respect. For example, using a damaged national/regional flag and desecrating the national/regional flag by publicly and wilfully burning, mutilating, scrawling on, defiling or trampling on it, etc. are prohibited.

With regard to the display of the national/regional flag by Government departments and public bodies, the "Stipulations for the Display and Use of the National Flag and National Emblem and the Regional Flag and Regional Emblem" (the Stipulations) has been made by the Chief Executive (CE) under section 3(2) of the National Flag and National Emblem Ordinance and section 3(1) of the Regional Flag and Regional Emblem Ordinance. The first two paragraphs of the Stipulations set out the locations where the national

and/or regional flags shall be displayed each day or on each working day, National Day, HKSAR Establishment Day and New Year's Day. Since the national flag is a symbol of national sovereignty, the HKSAR Government must be very cautious in the choice of location to ensure that the national flag will be hoisted at a suitable location with dignity and respect. At present, the national and regional flags are displayed every day at the official residence of the CE, Government House, boundary control and check points of the HKSAR, Hong Kong International Airport and the Golden Bauhinia Square. The flags are also displayed on each working day and on the three specified days at all major Government buildings, such as the Office of the CE, the Executive Council, the Legislative Council, the Central Government Offices, law courts in the HKSAR, major Government departmental headquarters, Government composite buildings and public sports and cultural venues, as well as various public bodies such as the Airport Authority Hong Kong, Hong Kong Monetary Authority, Hospital Authority and Hong Kong Housing Authority. Individual Government departments and public bodies may consider displaying the national and regional flags at other suitable locations and on days other than those specified after considering operational needs, actual circumstances and whether the location at which the flag is displayed is a solemn and appropriate setting, etc. Currently, Government departments and public bodies display the national and regional flags at over 350 locations on the specified days.

Certainly, the HKSAR Government also wishes that the territory is filled with festive atmosphere on the HKSAR Establishment Day and the National Day and is willing to consider different suggestions and options. For example, after reviewing the existing arrangement, HAD will work out the appropriate procedures with relevant Government departments for local/community organisations to apply for approval for displaying banners in celebration of the HKSAR Establishment Day and the National Day.

(3) The HKSAR Government attaches great importance to the HKSAR Establishment Day and the National Day. To celebrate the festive occasions, as well as enhance the festive atmosphere and foster people's sense of belonging to the country, the HKSAR Government organises various activities every year, including the flag-raising ceremonies, receptions, National Day Fireworks Display, etc.

The HKSAR Government is committed to the promotion of and education on the Constitution and the Basic Law to enable the public to have a more comprehensive and thorough understanding of the Constitution, the Basic Law and "one country, two systems" principle, so as to strengthen their national awareness and sense of belonging to the country. The Basic Law Promotion Steering Committee (BLPSC), chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration and with the support from and coordination of the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau, provides advice and steer on the overall strategy and key aspects for promoting the Constitution and the Basic Law, and monitors, evaluates and reviews promotional programmes undertaken by Government departments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Five working groups are being set up under the BLPSC and are assisted by the Home Affairs Bureau, Education Bureau, Civil Service Bureau, Trade and Industry Department and

Information Services Department respectively in planning and organising various types of activities to promote the Constitution and the Basic Law on various fronts.

2020 marks the 30th anniversary of the promulgation of the Basic Law. The HKSAR Government has organised a series of special publicity and education programmes to enhance the public's understanding of the Constitution and the Basic Law. They include webinars, thematic exhibitions, quiz competitions, etc.

Looking forward, the HKSAR Government will continue to promote the Constitution and the Basic Law through various channels and collaborations with different territorial and district bodies/NGOs, via websites, social media and other platforms, and by various methods including quiz competitions, seminars, thematic exhibitions, publications, interactive games, writing contests, colouring competitions, story-telling competitions, etc. with a view to enhancing the public's sense of national identity.

Thank you, President.