

LCQ15: Supporting villages in organising mega events

Following is a question by the Hon Kenneth Lau and a written reply by the Secretary for Youth and Home Affairs, Miss Alice Mak, in the Legislative Council today (March 19):

Question:

It is learnt that every year, numerous festive and cultural events take place in villages throughout the New Territories. These events are hosted by the Rural Committees (RCs) and attract a large number of visitors from the Mainland and overseas for sightseeing. However, there are views pointing out that the organisation of such events requires significant human, material and financial resources, which places a considerable financial burden on the resource-constrained RCs. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether the Government provided financial and manpower support for the following rural mega events in the past three years: (i) the Lam Tsuen Wishing Festival, (ii) the Cheung Chau Bun Festival, (iii) the Tin Hau Festival Parade of Yuen Long, (iv) the Hau Wong Festival of Tung Chung, (v) the Dragon Boat Races during the Dragon Boat Festival, and (vi) the Jiao Festivals of various villages; if so, of the details, and set out in a table the funding amount and number of support staff for each event; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether, in order to fully implement the concept of "Tourism is everywhere in Hong Kong", the Government will provide direct funding to various RCs and consider introducing a new project type of Rural Festive and Cultural Events under the Countryside Conservation Funding Scheme, so as to subsidise villages to organise events with distinctive festive characteristics; if not, of the reasons for that;

(3) as there are views that the development of rural mega events and tourism in the New Territories requires the participation of various RCs, and yet it is learnt that the monthly subvention granted by the Government to each RC ranges from \$15,300 to \$16,700, with the last adjustment to the subvention amount made in 2018, whether the Government will adjust such amount upwards based on changes in the Composite Consumer Price Index; if not, of the reasons for that; and

(4) whether, in addition to strengthening the promotion of rural mega events through the Tourism Commission and the Home Affairs Department, the Government will draw on the Mainland's experience and use means such as live streaming and short video clips by rural online influencers to showcase the natural scenery, traditional culture and lifestyle of New Territories villages, so as to deepen the understanding of the public and tourists about

the motherland and the New Territories, thereby promoting the development of rural mega events?

Reply:

President,

In respect of the question raised by the Hon Kenneth Lau, in consultation with the Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau and the Environment and Ecology Bureau, a consolidated reply is as follows:

The Government has always been supportive of the organisation of major rural events, with a view to promoting and preserving traditional culture. Among other things, the Home Affairs Department implements the Community Involvement Programme through which eligible organisations, including non-governmental organisations such as Rural Committees (RCs) and district organisations, may apply for funding support to organise projects featuring local characteristics and popular festive celebrations as well as cultural, artistic and recreational activities to promote district harmony. In the past three years, more than \$14 million has been allocated under the Community Involvement Programme to subsidise RCs and other district organisations in the New Territories in organising some of the major rural events mentioned in the question. In addition, all District Offices (DOs) in the New Territories have been in close liaison and collaboration with RCs and relevant district organisations, including the provision of manpower support to assist the organisers in carrying out relevant activities upon their invitation. Other government departments have also made concerted efforts to provide assistance for the activities in accordance with their respective duties and remit, including venue arrangements, crowd management, traffic diversions and road closures, environmental hygiene and public order. All of the above work is undertaken by the DOs and other departments concerned with their existing resources and manpower. Hence, a breakdown of the subsidy amount and manpower involved is not available.

Besides, the Countryside Conservation Office under the Environment and Ecology Bureau also subsidises local non-profit-making organisations to organise diverse and innovative countryside conservation and revitalisation projects through the Countryside Conservation Funding Scheme (CCFS). One of the project types funded under the CCFS is Cultural Rehabilitation/Revitalisation Projects, which aims at enhancing public appreciation and awareness in conservation of target cultural assets. This project type encompasses elements of organising countryside festive events for attracting villagers to return to their villages for gatherings. For instance, festive activities were organised in Kuk Po last year for the Kuk Po Spring Equinox Festival in celebration of the new year, introducing the public to the Hakka culture, the features of Hakka cuisine and other Chinese New Year traditions.

With regard to the promotion of major rural events, the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTb) has been promoting mega events and festivals through various channels, including social media posts and invitation to KOLs for

experiencing Hong Kong in person, as well as production of a series of promotional content, including videos, outdoor advertising, programmes in collaboration with renowned media, to carry out promotion in different source markets around the world and boost promotion impact by complementing with contents on HKTb's one-stop travel information platform Discover Hong Kong. These include "Hong Kong Great Outdoors", a promotional platform featuring hiking, beaches and outdoor activities, leisure and sightseeing, as well as island hopping. It also promotes traditional festivities, such as Cheung Chau Bun Festival, Dragon Boat Water Parade of Tai O, Hung Shing Festival. These promotional contents introduce to tourists the natural scenery, traditional culture and lifestyle of villages in the New Territories and attract them to come to Hong Kong. Efforts are also made by the DOs concerned in promoting activities in their respective districts through different channels, including websites, social media platforms and local networks.

The Government has always attached great importance to rural affairs and, through the provision of monthly subvention to RCs since the 1960s, to recognise and support their work. The rates and Government rents of RCs are also paid in full by the Government. The subvention to RCs is not subject to an adjustment mechanism approved by the Legislative Council. In 2018, the Government increased the subvention to RCs with reference to the changes in the Composite Consumer Price Index. There are three levels of RC subventions at \$15,300, \$15,800 and \$16,700 per month respectively, which were set according to factors like the size of the RCs to cover their daily operating expenses. RCs may also apply for government subsidies for eligible rural activities through the various funding programmes mentioned above.