

LCQ5: Functions of Radio Television Hong Kong and the Information Services Department

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Junius Ho and a reply by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Algernon Yau, in the Legislative Council today (April 2):

Radio Television Hong Kong and the Information Services Department are government departments under the purview of the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau and the Home and Youth Affairs Bureau respectively. There are views that the aforesaid two departments, both being official media agencies, have overlapping functions. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the specific functions and staff establishment of the two departments;
- (2) whether it will, under the financial philosophy of keeping the expenditure within the limits of revenues while exploring new sources of income and managing costs, review how the structure of the two departments can be streamlined to reduce expenditure; and
- (3) whether it has explored ways to further enhance the compatibility of the two departments and the feasibility of their merger; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the Home and Youth Affairs Bureau and the Information Services Department (ISD), our consolidated reply to the question raised by Dr the Hon Junius Ho is as follows:

As a government department and the only public service broadcaster in Hong Kong, Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) firmly implements the public purposes and mission under the Charter of RTHK, including promoting understanding of "one country, two systems", proactively assisting in strengthening the dissemination of government information, engendering a sense of citizenship and national identity, and promoting sports and culture and social inclusion. RTHK currently operates five digital television channels and eight AM/FM radio channels. Unlike commercial broadcasters, programmes produced and broadcast by RTHK have to cater for the needs of the mass audience as well as the minority groups including ethnic minorities and the non-Chinese speaking group etc. In this connection, apart from disseminating government information, the radio and television programmes of RTHK also cover various aspects including news, public affairs, national

education, sports, culture, lifestyle and education programmes etc.

As for the ISD, it is responsible for the Government's public relations, news dissemination, publicity and publication matters, and serves as a communication link between the Government and mass media including newspapers, television, radio, and magazines. The ISD also makes good use of the Internet, disseminating government information to the public directly by multi-media content so as to enhance the public's understanding of and support for the Government's work. In addition, the ISD also provides professional public relations advice to the Government and promotes government policies and services through different communication platforms and means (including RTHK), with a view to projecting an accurate image of Hong Kong within and outside the city while telling the good stories of Hong Kong.

In view of the above, although RTHK and the ISD are both government departments and both carry the responsibility of disseminating government information, RTHK, as the public service broadcaster; and the ISD, being responsible for the Government's public relations, perform different duties. There is no overlapping of their functions. As regards staff establishment, the establishment ceilings of RTHK and the ISD in 2024-25 are 762 and 451 posts respectively. Most of the civil service posts of RTHK belong to the Programme Officer grade while most of the civil service posts of the ISD belong to the Information Officer grade. The requirements for work nature, skills and experience of the two grades are different and hence merging the two departments with distinct functions may not be the most effective way to increase revenue and reduce expenditure in terms of overall operations. In addition, regardless of whether the merge would be implemented by having the Director of Information Services or the Director of Broadcasting to oversee both the ISD and RTHK, it would be difficult for the head of the merged department to manage the work of the two departments of which their missions, scopes of services and modes of operation are distinctly different. On the contrary, the merge may confuse the public with the role of RTHK as a public service broadcaster and the ISD in promoting the Government, which may be counterproductive to the Government's overall public relations works.

Notwithstanding the above, in response to the Productivity Enhancement Programme announced in the 2025-26 Budget, both RTHK and the ISD will comprehensively review their staffing and operation. In particular, RTHK will introduce appropriate measures including streamlining its structure and utilising technology for programme production etc to reduce manpower without affecting the quality of RTHK's programmes and services. At present, RTHK has been committed to deploying artificial intelligence (AI) in developing smart broadcasting. Last year, RTHK officially launched the AI Lab, streamlining production flow with AI technology, as well as adopting various AI-generated tools to enhance productivity. This will not only improve the quality of programmes but also result in a more cost-effective use of manpower. Besides, the ISD will continue to make effective use of existing platforms of the Government while keeping in view market developments and global trends to step up the Government's work in policy promotion and information dissemination. The ISD will also closely monitor the implementation of

programmes under its purview and review their effectiveness regularly for the sake of more flexible and effective use of resources.

Despite the different roles of RTHK and the ISD, we agree that the two departments can co-operate with each other and leverage their strengths, to promote government's policies and disseminate government information more effectively. As such, both sides will continue to strengthen collaboration, for instance, the ISD is actively planning to work with RTHK on programme production under the theme of "Commemorating the 80th Anniversary of Victory in the War of Resistance" to promote patriotism through storytelling in a vivid manner. RTHK can leverage the ISD's strength in running a wide range of platforms and make use of those platforms to enhance the reach of its programmes, taking advantage of the synergy to tell good stories of the country and Hong Kong. Meanwhile, RTHK will continue to solidify its role as the public service broadcaster, including striving to strengthen its partnership with different broadcasters in the Mainland and other regions, continuing to produce different types of programmes on various themes in order to provide diversified radio and television programme choices for the public.