

LC: Speech by SHA at Special Finance Committee meeting

Following is the speech by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Dr Patrick Ho, at the special meeting of the Finance Committee in the Legislative Council today (April 14) on the Budget 2005-06:

Chairman,

I am delighted to brief members on the work priorities of the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB) in the new financial year.

HAB is responsible for a diversified policy portfolio and is committed to enriching the quality of life of people in Hong Kong as well as building a vibrant, caring and harmonious community. It steers the work of Home Affairs Department and Leisure and Cultural Services Department whilst facilitating the work of many non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Today I will specifically talk about several subjects which are our priority areas in 2005-06. The subjects include the Race Discrimination Bill, the Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Unit, funding for elite sports and enhancing the role of the 18 District Officers.

Race Discrimination Bill

Members will, I am sure, wish to know about the state of progress with the proposed law against racial discrimination. The position is that, in September last year, we initiated what was intended to be a three-month consultation period on our detail proposals. Subsequently, in response to public demand, we extend that period to five months, ending on February 8. By the conclusion of the exercise, we had attended 66 meetings with the public and received over 240 written submissions. My staff are now completing the analysis of the findings, which they will submit to the Home Affairs Panel. And I am pleased to tell Members that the law drafting process is now well advanced. It remains our intention to introduce the Bill into the Legislative Council later this year.

The Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Unit

On the human rights front, we are putting more resources into the area of

gender identity and sexual orientation. We have already set up a Sexual Minorities Forum. In 2005-06, our initiative is to set up a Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Unit as a two-year pilot scheme. This is modelled on our existing "Race Relations Unit".

The unit will handle gender identity and sexual orientation issues and conduct activities to further promote equal opportunities of persons of different sexual orientation. The unit will also maintain a hotline for enquiry and complaints about discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation and to liaise with relevant NGOs and government departments. We are in the process of recruiting the necessary staff to run the unit.

Funding for Elite Sports

We have all along attached considerable importance to elite sports development in Hong Kong. The Government is committed to promoting and developing a strong sporting culture in the community as well as raising our international profile in sports.

Hong Kong athletes have continued to achieve good results in major national and international games. The success of our athletes is the result of their years of hard work and the excellent coaching that they received. The Government, in partnership with the Sports Federation and Olympic Committee of Hong Kong (SF&OC) and the National Sports Associations (NSAs) will continue to provide the necessary technical and other support to our elite athletes.

To assist the development of elite sports, we would continue to provide recurrent subvention to the SF&OC, the NSAs as well as the Hong Kong Sports Institute Limited. We would continue to work closely with the reconstituted Hong Kong Sports Institute to ensure the smooth running and efficient delivery of elite training functions. To strengthen support to elite sports training, we propose to increase the recurrent subvention to Hong Kong Sports Institute Limited to \$97.3 million in 2005-06, representing an increase of \$6.37 million (about 7%) compared with 2004-05.

Enhancing the role of the 18 District Officers

I will then give an account of the work on enhancing the role of the 18 District Officers -

* The District Administration Scheme has been in operation for more than 20 years. The scheme has successfully helped promote public participation in district affairs and strengthen social cohesion in the local community. The scheme has also helped ensure that we respond promptly to district needs and problems.

* District Officers (DOs) have been playing a very important role in co-ordinating the operation of the District Administration Scheme in the district. As stated in the 2005 Policy Address, Government attaches great importance to how the 18 DOs may better play their role. In this connection, we will consider how to strengthen the role of DOs in resolving community problems and co-ordinating district work in a more effective manner.

* Director of Home Affairs and myself will, through our regular meetings with DOs, identify and escalate where necessary complicated district issues/problems that cannot be resolved at the district level to the relevant Principal Officials to help expedite resolution of these issues/problems.

* We will also enlist the support of the senior directorate of all the core departments to work together towards achieving the objective of "people-based" governance at both Headquarters and the district level. We will also organise special training workshops and seminars for the representatives of these departments who attend District Council meetings to strengthen their knowledge and skills on how to resolve community problems in a pragmatic and people-oriented manner.

* Home Affairs Department will at the same time review the core business of DOs by re-prioritising their work and revising some of their work procedures to ensure that staff and resources are deployed in the most cost-effective manner to meet the needs and aspirations of the community.

The above only outlines some of our main tasks this year. Members are welcome to raise questions about these or other areas of work. My colleagues and I will be pleased to provide you with the answers. Thank you.

Ends/Thursday, April 14, 2005

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