

LCQ11: Tree at Hang Ha Po

Following is a question by the Hon Choy So-yuk and a written reply by the Secretary for Education and Manpower, Professor Arthur K C Li, on behalf of the Secretary for Home Affairs, Dr Patrick Ho, in the Legislative Council today (March 14):

Question:

Two years ago, the trunk of the Wishing Tree in Lam Tsuen in Tai Po snapped off as it was unable to bear the weight of the heavy paper placards, resulting in substantial depletion of its vitality. It has been reported that some members of the public have recently moved to make wishes at Hang Ha Po, which is only a few minutes' walk from Lam Tsuen. Loads of paper placards with oranges are being hanged on a big tree at the roadside there. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) whether it has advised the owner of the land on which the above tree at Hang Ha Po is situated to protect the trees; if it has, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(b) whether it has deployed professionals to inspect the condition of that tree; if it has, of the details of the inspection; if not, the reasons for that;

(c) whether it has investigated the source from which the paper placards hanging on that tree were purchased; if it has, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(d) in order to prevent that tree from suffering the same fate as the Wishing Tree, whether the authorities will, apart from stepping up education and publicity efforts, adopt measures with greater deterrence (including stepping up patrol, clearing unlicensed hawkers who sell paper placards, or even considering imposing a total ban on the sale of paper placards attached with heavy objects) with a view to curbing the act of throwing paper placards with oranges onto that tree; if it will, of the details of the measures concerned?

Reply:

Madam President,

(a) According to Tai Po District Lands Office, the tree at the roadside of Hang Ha Po village is located on government land. It is a deciduous tree and is commonly known as "Chinese Hackberry". As regards the recent hanging of paper placards with oranges on the tree, the government departments concerned have taken appropriate action. For example, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) had deployed staff to clear the paper placards on the tree when informed of the incident. It had also erected notices to remind members of the public not to throw objects onto the trees or damage the plants. The department has also stepped up inspection of the trees maintained by it in the vicinity.

(b) LCSD has also checked the health condition of the tree and is satisfied with its condition. The government departments concerned, including LCSD and Tai Po District Office, will continue to closely monitor the health condition of the tree and the development of the issue.

(c) In response to the incident, officers of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) had conducted site visits to the nearby Fong Ma Po Lunar New Year Fair ("the Fair"). However, it did not find any stall selling paper placards tied with heavy objects (including fruits) during their inspections. As a matter of fact, FEHD had set out clearly in the licence agreement for the Fair that successful tenderers for the hire of the stalls in the Fair were prohibited from selling paper placards tied with heavy objects including fruits. Breach of this condition would result in the termination of the licence agreements. FEHD, in conjunction with the Police, had issued reminders to the stall operators before the commencement of the Fair. Notices against the sale of paper placards tied with heavy objects were also displayed.

(d) FEHD had prohibited stall operators at the Fair from selling paper placards tied with heavy objects and warned that the licence agreements of offenders would be terminated. It had also collaborated with the Police in the issue of reminders to stall operators in the area and relevant notices were displayed before the Lunar New Year. FEHD staff will continue to conduct raids against illegal hawkers on government land after the Fair.

Ends/Wednesday, March 14, 2007

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