

LCQ2: Celebrations for local traditional festivals

Following is a question by the Hon Daniel Lam and a reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, in the Legislative Council today (May 28):

Question:

Some members of the public have relayed to me that quite a number of traditional community events in various districts in the New Territories ("NT"), such as the Cheung Chau Bun Festival and the Tin Hau Festival Parade in Yuen Long, are very popular among members of the public in Hong Kong, and have even become one of the selling points used by the Hong Kong Tourism Board ("HKTB") in promoting Hong Kong to other places. These members of the public have also pointed out that similar ritual events can actually be found in many walled villages and villages in NT, and the fact that such traditional events have been held for hundreds of years without showing any sign of waning demonstrates that such customs are of great vitality and can also help promote the economy of the districts concerned. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (a) of the assistance the relevant government departments will provide to the organisations concerned in various districts in NT when such organisations are making preparations for the above events;
- (b) how the Government and HKTB will capitalise on the above events to strengthen the work on promoting Hong Kong to other places, so as to attract much more tourists from other places to Hong Kong; and
- (c) whether the Government will draw on the experience of the Macao Special Administrative Region Government in successfully bidding for the inscription of the Historic Centre of Macao on the World Heritage List, and promote the above events as

cultural activities representative of Hong Kong?

Reply:

Madam President,

While Hong Kong is a modernised city, it still retains quite a number of traditional festivals and customs that are rich in district characteristics. Being parts of our history and culture, these traditional traits are very attractive to both local people and overseas visitors.

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government has been supportive to local communities in organising different types of celebrations for traditional festivals. Among these activities, the Tai Ping Ching Chiu, Tin Hau Festival, Tam Kung Festival and Buddha's Birthday are well-known ones. In organising these activities, the organisers are always properly supported by relevant government departments to ensure that the activities will be implemented in a smooth manner. This includes offering government venues and sites, processing application for permit for parades, crowd control and management, road closure, etc.

Apart from assuming the role of a coordinator, District Offices at districts where traditional festivals are celebrated render much support to these activities. Assistance is provided in the form of funds allocated on the basis of District Council deliberations, publicity and promotion etc. One prominent example is the resumption of the Bun Scrambling Competition during the Tai Ping Ching Chiu on Cheung Chau Island. The activity was suspended for more than two decades. Owing to the active support of the Home Affairs Bureau and with the introduction of technical devices to provide better protection to safety, the activity has been resumed in the recent years. It is earning an international dimension as many tourists are attracted by its traditional features.

To enhance Hong Kong's appeal as a tourist destination, the Government is

committed to developing a diversity of tourist attractions. The Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) has been promoting Hong Kong's living culture, heritage, traditional festivals and celebrations through various channels, such as its website, publications and promotional videos. For example, the HKTB introduces to visitors from other places the history, architecture and scenery of the walled villages in the New Territories. It also works closely with the travel trade partners to develop special travel itineraries like "Heritage Tour", guided visits to the walled villages in the New Territories etc.

The HKTB also helps overseas media to give coverage to Hong Kong's heritage sites and traditional festivals, such as festive celebration and customs in the walled villages and villages in the New Territories. For example, arrangement was made for an Italian media crew to report on the Lo Tin Tai Chiu held in Yuen Yuen Institute last November, and it has become an annual event that overseas media are invited to enjoy casserole food in the walled villages for the Lunar New Year.

Regarding the application for inscription on the World Cultural Heritage List, the traditional festivals and ritual events in various districts in the New Territories are items of intangible cultural heritage. Unlike the Historic Centre of Macao, they are not covered by the Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

The UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (the Convention) which formally entered into force on April 20, 2006 applies to Hong Kong. One of the purposes of the Convention is to safeguard the intangible cultural heritage (ICH) endangered to preserve cultural diversity. The HKSAR Government is planning for a territory-wide ICH survey in accordance with the requirement of Article 12 of the Convention, so as to set up a database on the ICH in Hong Kong. The Government will commission local experts and scholars to conduct the survey, the scope of which will cover traditional festivals and ritual events celebrated by the various districts in the New Territories. Once the ICH inventory is in place, the Government will identify those of significant cultural value and apply for their inclusion in the ICH list at

national level. We will also examine the possibility of seeking UNESCO inscription for these items. The Government will continue to implement relevant measures to enhance research study and education on local ICH, as well as to strengthen its protection, development and promotion.

Ends/Wednesday, May 28, 2008