

LCQ13: Government banquets

Following is a question by the Hon Kam Nai-wai and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, in the Legislative Council today (May 18):

Question:

It has been reported that banquets, including cocktail receptions and dinner parties, are hosted on the occasion of Spring Festival, Reunification Day and National Day, etc. by the Government, including the Home Affairs Department, and the 18 District Councils to entertain people from various sectors. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) of the total number of banquets hosted and fully funded by the Home Affairs Bureau and the Home Affairs Department in the past three years, together with a breakdown by the nature of the banquets, e.g. Chinese New Year's Eve dinner, Spring Festival gathering, reunification celebration and National Day celebration, etc.; the respective number of banquets hosted through the District Councils each year by the District Office in each of the 18 districts, and the amount of money spent;

(b) of the average attendance at the banquets in (a), together with a breakdown by the host unit, i.e. the Home Affairs Bureau, the Home Affairs Department and the 18 District Offices;

(c) of the total amount of entertainment allowances claimed by Directorate civil servants and Directors of Bureaux in the past three years; whether a ceiling is set for the entertainment allowances, and the percentage of the current expenditure when compared to the ceiling;

(d) whether the government departments had responded to the recommendations of "shark-free banquets", "sustainable seafood" and "six-course meals" advocated by environmental groups when they hosted the banquets in (a); if so, of the number and percentage of banquets which had adopted such recommendations; whether the officials receiving entertainment allowances in (c) have also followed such environmental recommendations;

(e) whether, in response to the advocacy of environmental groups, the authorities will

reconsider issuing internal guidelines in connection with the recommendations in (d) to set a good example of environmental protection and sustainable development for the general public; and

(f) whether the authorities have laid down specific guidelines for invitation of guests in connection with the banquets hosted by the 18 District Offices and of the respective guests lists for banquets at different levels?

Reply:

President,

(a) The Home Affairs Bureau (HAB), the Home Affairs Department (HAD), including the District Offices (DOs), and the District Councils (DCs) organise receptions/banquets to celebrate the Chinese New Year/Spring Festival, the anniversaries of the establishment of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the anniversaries of the founding of the PRC.

The HAB and the HAD (Headquarters) organised and fully funded four receptions/banquets in each of the past three years. A breakdown by the nature of these events is appended in Table 1.

In addition, 22, 21 and 21 receptions/ banquets were hosted by DOs or co-hosted by DCs and DOs in each of the past three years respectively. Of these receptions/banquets in each year, five to six were hosted and fully funded by DOs, five were co-hosted and jointly funded by DCs and DOs, and 11 were co-hosted by DCs and DOs and fully funded by DCs. The respective number and expenditure are set out in Table 2.

(b) The attendances for receptions/banquets for the past three years are listed in Table 3 and the attendance for receptions/banquets organised at district level are listed in Table 4.

(c) According to the guidelines issued by the Administration, the ceilings of expenditure on official lunches and dinners are \$350 per person and \$450 per person respectively. The annual expenditure on official entertainments depends on the actual need of individual bureaux and departments.

Please refer to Table 5 for the total official entertainment expenses of Directors of Bureaux and directorate civil servants over the past three years.

(d) and (e) The Government is committed to protecting endangered species. The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department implements the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance (Chapter 586) to strictly regulate the trade of species listed in the Appendices of Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) to fulfill the CITES requirements. The trade of shark and marine species which are already listed in the Appendices of CITES is already regulated under the laws of Hong Kong. With regard to the species not yet listed in CITES, the laws of Hong Kong do not restrict their commercial trade.

The Government has always abided by CITES and the local legislation. The Government does not think it is appropriate or necessary to lay down guidelines to regulate the kind of food items to be consumed in official entertainments (including those organised using the entertainment vote of directorate officers). However, in respect of using public funds on official entertainments, the Government has internal guidelines for officials to observe. When organising official entertainments, the Government emphasises that while the occasion should be decent, it should not give an impression that it is extravagant. Hence, when departments use public funds to organise official entertainments, the menus should not include expensive food or endangered species.

Furthermore, the Government strives to set a good example in reducing food waste. At the end of last year, the Environmental Protection Department issued internal guidelines to bureaux and departments, encouraging them to, as far as possible, order six or less dishes at official Chinese banquets; and also to take away leftovers in order to reduce wastage.

Separately, since the Government does not keep information on menus for official entertainments, we are not in a position to provide detailed information on food items consumed for those official entertainments.

(f) There are no specific guidelines for invitation of guests in connection with the receptions/banquets hosted by DOs or guests lists for receptions/banquets at different levels.

Ends/Wednesday, May 18, 2011

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