

Press Releases

RTHK to fulfil mission as public service broadcaster

The Government today (September 22) announced that Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) would be tasked to be the public service broadcaster in Hong Kong, with new resources provided for service enhancement to enable it better to serve the community.

The new RTHK will continue to operate as a government department and the well recognised brand of RTHK would be preserved and enhanced.

The editorial independence of the new RTHK will be maintained and measures will be put in place to ensure greater public accountability and oversight of its programming.

"With more than 80 years of operation and as the guardian of much of the collective memory of the community, RTHK is best placed to be the public service broadcaster in Hong Kong," the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mrs Rita Lau, said.

"RTHK has been consistently ranked in public surveys as the most credible electronic media in Hong Kong. It is now perceived locally and internationally as a bellwether for the health of freedom of speech in Hong Kong - one of the core values of Hong Kong people," she said.

A recent Government survey showed that 60% of the respondents considered that RTHK should be maintained as it is or enhance its operation. Only 20% were in favour of establishing a new organisation to replace RTHK, while around 15% of respondents had confidence in the set-up of such a new organisation.

The Committee on the Review of Public Service Broadcasting (Review Committee) appointed by the Chief Executive (CE) submitted its review report to the Government in 2007. Mrs Lau expressed deep gratitude and appreciation to the review committee, saying that the key recommendations set out in the report provided a clear blueprint for the development of public service broadcasting in Hong Kong and lay the foundations upon which the Government would now take the matter forward.

To enable the new RTHK to fulfil its mission as a public service broadcaster, the key recommendations of the review committee will be implemented such that RTHK will serve the community with specific public purposes, strengthened corporate governance and greater accountability.

The Government will issue a charter covering all the main aspects of the operation of RTHK.

"The charter will set out the relationship between the Government and the new RTHK and entrench the editorial independence arrangements. To signify its significance, the charter will be issued under the name of the Chief Secretary for Administration," Mrs Lau said.

A broad-based board of advisers, comprising representatives from different sectors to be appointed by the CE, will be established further to enhance the new RTHK's corporate governance and accountability to the community.

RTHK will be given sufficient financial, staffing and spectrum resources to enable it to enhance its operation as the public service broadcaster, including the provision of digital radio and television channels as platforms for more local original content production. To broaden Hong Kong's international horizons, there will be more overseas co-operation to broadcast a greater variety of international radio and TV programmes. Use will be made of the spectrum to relay national radio and TV programmes to enhance understanding about Mainland developments.

RTHK will also provide a platform for community participation in broadcasting by non-governmental organisations. A Community Broadcasting Involvement Fund will be set up under RTHK to provide financial support for community groups to participate in broadcasting and contents production.

With a clear public mission for the new RTHK, the recruitment of civil servants to fill vacancies in the department will resume. Civil servants currently employed under agreement terms may be transferred to permanent terms in accordance with established procedures. Non-civil service contract staff may also apply for vacant posts according to prevailing civil service policy.

"To complement the new RTHK's expanded scope of service, we will proceed with the capital works project to re-provision RTHK's current inadequate headquarters to a new Broadcasting House in Tseung Kwan O.

"Public service broadcasting has been the subject of debate in Hong Kong for more than 20 years. The decision we are announcing today is a well-balanced set of proposals to address the concerns of various stakeholders. It will bring this long-running debate to an end and give new impetus for RTHK to build on its well established reputation for providing quality broadcasting service to the community," Mrs Lau said.

To seek public views on how best RTHK should fulfil the mission as a public service broadcaster, the Government will shortly launch a two-month public consultation exercise. This will enable the community to give their views on a wide range of issues, including the public purposes of RTHK, the programming direction that RTHK should take, the ways and means to evaluate its performance as well as to enhance its accountability. The Government will also arrange focus group discussions and consult the Legislative Council.

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