

Press release

LCQ7: Personalised vehicle registration marks

Wednesday, March 20, 2013

Following is a question by the Hon Ip Kwok-him and a written reply by the Acting Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury, Ms Julia Leung, in the Legislative Council today (March 20):

Question:

It has been reported that at the auction of personalised vehicle registration marks (PVRMs) held on February 16 this year, the Transport Department (TD) sold a PVRM with the combination of "CSD HK". Since that combination was very similar to the English abbreviation of the Hong Kong Correctional Services Department (CSD), CSD had requested TD to withdraw the PVRM from sale before the auction, but to no avail. Some CSD staff members had expressed the worry that had the PVRM been successfully bid by people with ulterior motives and the PVRM been displayed on a motor vehicle used in illegal activities, the image of law enforcement agencies would be tarnished, and law and order problems might even be caused. On the other hand, the vetting criteria of the PVRMs Scheme prescribe that an application will be refused if the PVRM in the application is likely to cause a reasonable person to believe that the motor vehicle on which the PVRM is displayed belongs to any department of the Government or any specified organisation, or to believe that the person using the vehicle represents such a department or organisation. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) how the authorities had vetted the application for the aforesaid PVRM in accordance with the established criteria; and

(b) in the light of the aforesaid incident, whether the authorities will review the vetting criteria for PVRMs and specify in the criteria that applications for PVRMs with a combination containing "CSD" will not be accepted?

Reply:

President,

(a) The application and vetting of personalised vehicle registration marks (PVRMs) are governed by the Road Traffic (Registration and Licensing of Vehicles) Regulations

(Cap. 374E) (the Regulations). The Transport Department processes the applications for PVRMs in accordance with the Regulations and established procedures.

Pursuant to regulation 12F(2)(c)(iii) of the Regulations, the Commissioner for Transport (the Commissioner) shall refuse an application if, in his opinion, the proposed personalised registration mark is likely to cause a reasonable person to believe that the motor vehicle on which the registration mark is displayed belongs to, or the person using the vehicle represents any public body. In accordance with regulation 2 of the Regulations, a public body includes any department of the Government.

In vetting and determining the applications for PVRMs, the Commissioner should, on a comprehensive, objective and cogent basis, take into account the views of the Vetting Committee which comprises members from various sectors, and the possible references of the combination of the marks. He should also pay due regard to the prevailing public perception of government department vehicles and the vehicle registration marks displayed on them, the freedom of expression by the public, as well as the intent of the PVRMs Scheme to offer more choices to vehicle owners.

As regards the registration mark "CSD HK", regulations 11(1)(a) to (i) of the Regulations have already provided that registration marks consisting of "A", "F" and "AM" or followed by numerals are designated for assignment to government vehicles. On the other hand, "CSD" can be the acronym of the names of various persons, organisations or associations. The combination "HK" is also a prefix of traditional vehicle registration marks, which should not necessarily be regarded as representing the Hong Kong Government. Having regard to the views rendered by the Vetting Committee, the general public perception of government department vehicles and the vehicle registration marks displayed on them, the freedom of expression by the public as well as other relevant considerations, the Commissioner considers that there is no sufficient ground to conclude that the registration mark "CSD HK" is in breach of the vetting criteria under regulation 12F(2)(c)(iii) of the Regulations.

(b) The existing legislation has stipulated clear vetting criteria for PVRM applications. As stated above, we consider that there is no sufficient ground to show that a reasonable person is likely to believe that the motor vehicle on which the registration mark comprising the above letters is displayed belongs to a specific government department, or to believe that the person using the vehicle represents that department. Hence, the Administration has no plan to amend the legislation to reject registration mark applications containing the term "CSD". The Transport Department will continue to consider and approve PVRM applications on a comprehensive, objective and cogent

basis in accordance with the prevailing statutory criteria and having regard to individual combinations under application.

Ends