

RTHK seeks to extend probation period of Hong Kong journalist known for hard-nosed questions to public officials

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by Danny Mok (South China morning Post)

<https://www.scmp.com/print/news/hong-kong/society/article/3103263/rthk-seeks-extend-probation-period-hong-kong-journalist>

Journalist Nabela Qoser came to prominence for her sharp questioning of officials over their handling of last year's protests.

She has reportedly been told to either accept an extended probation period or leave her job amid an unprecedented investigation, sources say.

Hong Kong's embattled public broadcaster is seeking to extend the probation period of a journalist known for her confrontational approach to questioning officials amid a re-examination of public complaints filed against her last year, sources have said.

Assistant programme officer Nabela Qoser, who works for government-funded RTHK, will have until Tuesday to either accept an extension of her three-year probation as a civil servant by another 120 days from October 2, or leave her post on Wednesday, a source close to the situation said.

The extension for the co-host of RTHK's show *This Week* came as the outlet reopened an investigation into complaints made by members of the public against Qoser from July to November last year, the source added.

- Amen Ng Man-ye, head of corporate communications and standards at RTHK, said there was a mechanism for processing probation extensions for civil servants, but she declined to comment on individual cases.

- Nabela Qoser on Sunday also declined to comment on the development.

In a message texted to the Post she said: *"Thank you for your concerns. We will continue to work hard. Please keep up your support for RTHK."*

According to the inside source, complaints of the kind filed against Qoser would generally be cleared in six months, and it was believed the fresh review of the closed files would be conducted by officials from "above" the station. The source added they had never heard of a review of this kind taking place before.

RTHK's Programme Staff Union, meanwhile, said in a statement that evaluations for civil servants had been based on their appraisal reports, adding it was extremely unusual to extend a probation not based on the appraisals, but rather under the auspices of an investigation. The union also questioned whether the move amounted to unreasonable suppression.

It went on to say it was urging the management to disclose who had triggered the reinvestigation and on what grounds.

The Commerce and Economic Development Bureau, which oversees the public broadcaster, also

declined to comment on individual cases.

Qoser, a graduate of Baptist University who formerly worked with the Chinese-language TVB Jade channel and Ming Pao Daily, became known for her rapid-fire, often-blunt questioning of officials over their handling of the city's anti-government protests last year. Her confrontational approach was praised by many, but also denounced as aggressive and biased by the pro-establishment bloc.

Perhaps her most noteworthy questions were directed at Chief Executive Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor and then-police chief Stephen Lo Wai-chung over the force's sluggish response to the Yuen Long station mob attack on July 21 last year, famously demanding in a press conference that Lam *"answer like a human being"*.

On the night in question, a major turning point in last year's protests, a group of white-clad men armed with rattan canes and metal rods beat passengers and protesters returning from a Hong Kong Island march at Yuen Long MTR station. At least 45 people were injured in the onslaught. Police, who took nearly an hour to respond to the attack, said they had been delayed because their resources were stretched thin by the protest. They have since been accused of trying to rewrite the history of the night after arresting several people – including an opposition lawmaker who was beaten – whom they accused of inciting the violence.

The inside source said thousands of complaints were received in response to Qoser's sharp questions, but there were several times more letters praising her.

Pro-Beijing media have accused her of being *"rude to government officials,"* while some within the camp have urged RTHK to fire her.

A staff member from RTHK who spoke on condition of anonymity said it was frustrating to see management assessing staff based on external pressure rather than the merits of their work.

"We've been fighting on the frontline, but the management are now working with some external force to suppress us," they said

The employee noted that Qoser had passed all six of her appraisals over the past three years, and challenged the rationale of the review, which had apparently overruled them.

Last year's polarising protests made RTHK a lightning rod for public criticism, particularly from the pro-establishment camp. The broadcaster is presently the subject of a management review led by civil servants after a series of controversies over its programming.

RTHK reporter who grilled Hong Kong Chief Exec. Carrie Lam investigated again, probation extended

by Tom Grundy (Hong Kong Free Press)

<https://hongkongfp.com/2020/09/27/rthk-reporter-who-grilled-hong-kong-chief-exec-carrie-lam-investigated-again-probation-extended/>

Hong Kong public broadcaster RTHK is reopening an investigation into journalist Nabela Qoser, who is well known for her tough, rapid-fire questioning of top government officials.

On Sunday, the broadcaster's staff union said on Facebook that RTHK had reopened its probe over her conduct at government press conferences so that complaints made against her during last year's pro-democracy protests can be re-examined.

Qoser hit the headlines last July when she grilled Chief Executive Carrie Lam and then-police

commissioner Stephen Lo over the Yuen Long mob attack. Qoser confronted the embattled leader over the delayed police response: *"Did you learn about it only this morning? Were you able to sleep well last night?"* she asked.

In November, she repeatedly pressed the police over their potential involvement in the death of protester Chow Tsz-lok who died following a fall from a car park.

Probation extended

Qoser – a Baptist University graduate – previously worked at TVB and Ming Pao. RTHK requires a three year probationary period for staff, but the union said that Qoser has been told that her probation will be extended for 120 days.

In January, Hong Kong's Equal Opportunities Commission hit out against racially-charged comments aimed at Qoser. A statement condemned comments on social media *"attacking the race and skin colour of a female journalist."*

Head of the University of Hong Kong's journalism department Keith Richburg raised concerns over press freedom in response to the news: *"Since when is asking tough questions to officials 'aggressive' & biased'? This is another step on the slippery slope to media repression. Journalists' job is to hold power to account. After the police action last week, another blow to press freedom in HK,"* he said on Twitter.

RTHK spokesperson Amen Ng told the broadcaster that they would not comment on individual cases, but the government has established mechanisms to deal with employment related matters involving civil servants.

RTHK is fully funded by the Hong Kong government but maintains that its news coverage is independent and impartial.

Last week, Lam backed a controversial new police decision to recognise journalists only from government-registered news outlets.