

眾怒難犯

zhong4 nu4 nan2 fan4

The house of ICAC is on fire. Its decision not to confirm the promotion of head of operations Rebecca Li Bo-lan and her subsequent resignation has kicked up a big controversy.

Outside, critics allege there has been behind-the-scenes political intervention. Inside, the graft-buster had to cancel its annual dinner, reportedly because of a mass boycott.

Meanwhile, a similar storm is brewing at RTHK concerning the delay in confirming the promotion of an acting head.

In the absence of full information, it is hard for outsiders to say who is right and who is wrong. But one thing for certain is that the hiring, firing, promotion and demotion of top people of an organization are a matter that must be handled with the utmost sensitivity and care.

This is true even if the “staff” being fired is a cat. The city council of Texas town White Settlement actually had to “reinstate” Browser the cat after its decision to remove it

Idiom by Lon Yan

from the town library sparked an international outcry and a petition signed by over 10,000 people.

Browser, after all, has been dutifully keeping the library free of rodents and acting as its ambassador since 2010.

Clearly, a decision, no matter how correct, could cause a huge problem if it is unpopular. This is the old wisdom embodied by the idiom “眾怒難犯” (*zhong4 nu4 nan2 fan4*).

“眾” (*zhong4*) is “the crowd”, “怒” (*nu4*) is “anger,” “fury,” “難” (*nan2*) “difficult” and “犯” (*fan4*) “to offend,” “to violate”. Literally, “眾怒難犯” (*zhong4 nu4 nan2 fan4*) is “offending a crowd can end up being a difficult matter.” It means “no one can afford to incur public wrath,” “it is dangerous to incur the anger of the masses.”

Terms containing the character “犯” (*fan4*) include:

犯罪 (*fan4 zui4*) – to commit a crime

犯人 (*fan4 ren2*) – a convict

犯錯 (*fan4 cuo4*) – to err

犯規 (*fan4 gui1*) – to break a rule