

OFFICIAL RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS

Wednesday, 17 January 2024

The Council met at Eleven o'clock

MEMBERS PRESENT

THE PRESIDENT

THE HONOURABLE ANDREW LEUNG KWAN-YUEN, GBM, GBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE TOMMY CHEUNG YU-YAN, GBM, GBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE JEFFREY LAM KIN-FUNG, GBM, GBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE STARRY LEE WAI-KING, GBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE CHAN HAK-KAN, SBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE CHAN KIN-POR, GBS, JP

PROF THE HONOURABLE PRISCILLA LEUNG MEI-FUN, SBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE MRS REGINA IP LAU SUK-YEE, GBM, GBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE PAUL TSE WAI-CHUN, JP

THE HONOURABLE MICHAEL TIEN PUK-SUN, BBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE STEVEN HO CHUN-YIN, BBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE FRANKIE YICK CHI-MING, GBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE MA FUNG-KWOK, GBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE CHAN HAN-PAN, BBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE KWOK WAI-KEUNG, JP

THE HONOURABLE ELIZABETH QUAT, SBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE MARTIN LIAO CHEUNG-KONG, GBS, JP

IR DR THE HONOURABLE LO WAI-KWOK, GBS, MH, JP

THE HONOURABLE JIMMY NG WING-KA, BBS, JP

DR THE HONOURABLE JUNIUS HO KWAN-YIU, BBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE HOLDEN CHOW HO-DING, JP

THE HONOURABLE SHIU KA-FAI, JP

THE HONOURABLE YUNG HOI-YAN, JP

THE HONOURABLE CHAN CHUN-YING, JP

THE HONOURABLE LUK CHUNG-HUNG, JP

THE HONOURABLE LAU KWOK-FAN, MH, JP

THE HONOURABLE KENNETH LAU IP-KEUNG, SBS, MH, JP

THE HONOURABLE VINCENT CHENG WING-SHUN, MH, JP

THE HONOURABLE TONY TSE WAI-CHUEN, BBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE DOREEN KONG YUK-FOON

THE HONOURABLE CHU KWOK-KEUNG

THE HONOURABLE STANLEY LI SAI-WING, MH, JP

DR THE HONOURABLE HOEY SIMON LEE, MH, JP

THE HONOURABLE ROBERT LEE WAI-WANG

THE HONOURABLE DOMINIC LEE TSZ-KING

IR THE HONOURABLE LEE CHUN-KEUNG, JP

DR THE HONOURABLE TIK CHI-YUEN, SBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE STANLEY NG CHAU-PEI, SBS, JP

DR THE HONOURABLE JOHNNY NG KIT-CHONG, MH, JP

THE HONOURABLE CHAU SIU-CHUNG

DR THE HONOURABLE CHOW MAN-KONG

DR THE HONOURABLE DAVID LAM TZIT-YUEN

THE HONOURABLE LAM CHUN-SING

THE HONOURABLE LAM SO-WAI

THE HONOURABLE NIXIE LAM LAM

DR THE HONOURABLE DENNIS LAM SHUN-CHIU, JP

THE HONOURABLE LAM SAN-KEUNG, JP

THE HONOURABLE ANDREW LAM SIU-LO, SBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE DUNCAN CHIU

THE HONOURABLE YIU PAK-LEUNG, MH, JP

DR THE HONOURABLE WENDY HONG WEN

THE HONOURABLE DENNIS LEUNG TSZ-WING, MH

THE HONOURABLE LEUNG MAN-KWONG, MH

THE HONOURABLE EDWARD LEUNG HEI

THE HONOURABLE KENNETH LEUNG YUK-WAI, JP

THE HONOURABLE CHAN YUET-MING, MH

THE HONOURABLE ROCK CHEN CHUNG-NIN, SBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE CHAN PUI-LEUNG

THE HONOURABLE CHAN YUNG, BBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE SUNNY TAN

THE HONOURABLE JUDY CHAN KAPUI, MH, JP

THE HONOURABLE MAGGIE CHAN MAN-KI, MH, JP

IR THE HONOURABLE CHAN SIU-HUNG, JP

THE HONOURABLE CHAN HOI-YAN

THE HONOURABLE JOEPHY CHAN WING-YAN

THE HONOURABLE CHAN HOK-FUNG, MH, JP

IR THE HONOURABLE GARY ZHANG XINYU

THE HONOURABLE LILLIAN KWOK LING-LAI

THE HONOURABLE BENSON LUK HON-MAN

DR THE HONOURABLE KENNEDY WONG YING-HO, BBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE EDMUND WONG CHUN-SEK

THE HONOURABLE KINGSLEY WONG KWOK, BBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE YANG WING-KIT

REVD CANON THE HONOURABLE PETER DOUGLAS KOON HO-MING,
BBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE TANG FEI, MH

THE HONOURABLE TANG KA-PIU, BBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE LAI TUNG-KWOK, GBS, IDSM, JP

PROF THE HONOURABLE LAU CHI-PANG, BBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE KENNETH FOK KAI-KONG, JP

THE HONOURABLE LOUIS LOONG HON-BIU

DR THE HONOURABLE NGAN MAN-YU

THE HONOURABLE CARMEN KAN WAI-MUN

DR THE HONOURABLE TAN YUEHENG, JP

DR THE HONOURABLE SO CHEUNG-WING, SBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE YIM KONG

THE HONOURABLE ADRIAN PEDRO HO KING-HONG

THE HONOURABLE SHANG HAILONG

PROF THE HONOURABLE CHAN WING-KWONG

PROF THE HONOURABLE WILLIAM WONG KAM-FAI, MH

PUBLIC OFFICERS ATTENDING

THE HONOURABLE KEVIN YEUNG YUN-HUNG, GBS, JP
SECRETARY FOR CULTURE, SPORTS AND TOURISM

THE HONOURABLE ERICK TSANG KWOK-WAI, GBS, IDSM, JP
SECRETARY FOR CONSTITUTIONAL AND MAINLAND AFFAIRS

THE HONOURABLE TANG PING-KEUNG, GBS, PDSM, JP
SECRETARY FOR SECURITY

DR BERNARD CHAN PAK-LI, JP
UNDER SECRETARY FOR COMMERCE AND ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT, AND
SECRETARY FOR COMMERCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

PROF THE HONOURABLE LO CHUNG-MAU, BBS, JP
SECRETARY FOR HEALTH

THE HONOURABLE LAM SAI-HUNG, GBS, JP
SECRETARY FOR TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS

THE HONOURABLE WINNIE HO, JP
SECRETARY FOR HOUSING

DR THE HONOURABLE CHOI YUK-LIN, JP
SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION

PROF THE HONOURABLE SUN DONG, JP
SECRETARY FOR INNOVATION, TECHNOLOGY AND INDUSTRY

MS LILLIAN CHEONG MAN-LEI, JP
UNDER SECRETARY FOR INNOVATION, TECHNOLOGY AND
INDUSTRY

CLERKS IN ATTENDANCE

MR KENNETH CHEN WEI-ON, SBS, SECRETARY GENERAL

MS DORA WAI, DEPUTY SECRETARY GENERAL

MS AMY YU, ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL

MS MIRANDA HON, ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL

LAYING OF PAPERS ON THE TABLE OF THE COUNCIL

The following papers were laid on the table under Rule 21(2) of the Rules of Procedure:

Subsidiary Legislation*Legal Notice No.*

Pesticides Ordinance (Amendment of Schedule 2)

Notice 2024.....

4 of 2024

Other Paper

Report No. 1/2024 of the House Committee on Consideration of Subsidiary Legislation and Other Instruments

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Questions. First question.

Mass transit systems in East Kowloon and Kai Tak

1. **MR YANG WING-KIT** (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. In the Hong Kong Major Transport Infrastructure Development Blueprint (“the Blueprint”) promulgated last month, the Government recommends the construction of smart and green mass transit systems in East Kowloon and Kai Tak respectively, and they are expected to be commissioned between 2034 and 2038. However, it has been reported that the East Kowloon Line and the Kai Tak rapid transit, which the Government initially proposed to construct, were originally expected to be commissioned in 2025 and 2023 respectively. Some members of the public are disappointed that having waited for 10 years for the commissioning of the relevant projects, they have to wait for another 10 years. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *given that the aforesaid East Kowloon and Kai Tak projects are smart and green mass transit systems and proposed alignments are in place,*

of the reasons why they still need at least 10 years to be commissioned;

- (2) whether it will accord priority to kick-starting the Kai Tak project, and expeditiously study the connection of its alignment to the MTR Yau Tong Station, so as to meet the transport demand of the Kai Tak Sports Park as early as possible; if so, of the details; if not, the ancillary transport facilities to be put in place to meet the relevant demand; and*
- (3) whether it will study a separate alignment covering Tsz Wan Shan and Chuk Yuen in the East Kowloon project, so as to respond to the transport aspirations of residents in the mid-levels of Wong Tai Sin; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?*

SECRETARY FOR TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS (in Cantonese):
President, having consulted the Highways Department, the Civil Engineering and Development Department and the Transport Department (“TD”), the reply to the question raised by Mr YANG is as follows:

- (1) In response to the public aspiration for an early commissioning of the smart and green mass transit systems in Kai Tak and East Kowloon, we have reviewed the required procedures and commenced the preparatory works on planning, investigation and design of the two projects proactively since the Chief Executive announced the proposed initiatives in the 2023 Policy Address. Specific tasks comprise the consultation of relevant District Councils and tender invitation for engagement of the consultants for carrying out the investigation and preliminary design in the first quarter of this year. We also plan to invite concerned suppliers and operators around the world to submit expressions of interest in the fourth quarter of this year in order to finalize the specific requirements and design of the systems and their associated infrastructure. Meanwhile, we will carry out the relevant statutory procedures, such as Environmental Impact Assessment, gazettal and authorization of scheme, and planning application for the proposed sites for the depots concurrently. Moreover, since the systems will be commissioned in Hong Kong for the first time, we will also need to work out the related

financial arrangement, operating requirements and regulatory framework. We will expedite the original work programme and strive to invite tenders for construction of the two projects in 2026 with an aim to award the contracts in 2027 respectively.

As mentioned above, it will be the first time for the proposed smart and green mass transit systems to be commissioned in Hong Kong. Apart from the procedures mentioned above, the project will also involve a number of technical challenges. The alignments of both systems will be subject to the existing or planned development along the corridors as well as the existing roads and underground utilities. Therefore, we need to sort out the spatial constraints of the proposed alignments, technical requirements and interfaces with the existing development. In particular, the East Kowloon project which is about 7 km long will have a very extensive scope of works and will run along hilly terrains, leading to higher engineering complexities and more design uncertainties. Part of the alignment and stations will have to be constructed on carriageways with congested underground utilities. We also need to avoid affecting the existing heavily trafficked New Clear Water Bay Road and Clear Water Bay Road during construction. In addition, part of the corridor and depot will be constructed on steep slopes with more extensive site formation works required.

Notwithstanding the above, we will strive to carry out more advance studies and design works in parallel and continue to actively explore technical proposals to shorten the construction period. For example, we may explore starting the advance works as early as possible, bringing forward the commencement of part of the system testing as well as adoption of Design for Manufacturing and Assembly, and Multi-trade Integrated Mechanical, Electrical and Plumbing, to strive for earlier completion of the works.

- (2) As mentioned in Part (1) of the reply, we endeavour to implement the smart and green mass transit system in Kai Tak as soon as possible. We have listened to opinions of local community for a wider coverage of the systems in Kai Tak and East Kowloon, including the one suggested by Mr YANG to extend the project in Kai Tak to MTR Yau Tong Station as well as extending the East Kowloon system to cover

areas around Tsz Wan Shan and Chuk Yuen. The Government has to further study the technical feasibility of the suggestions and the implications on the implementation programme and overall cost effectiveness of the projects. We will exchange views with the suppliers and operators on the feasibility to expand or adjust the alignments. We anticipate that upon completion of refining the studies of the projects, we will explore the feasibility of further expanding the projects in Kai Tak and East Kowloon more extensively.

As regards the transport arrangement of Kai Tak Sports Park (“KTSP”), KTSP is in proximity to nearby MTR Kai Tak Station and Sung Wong Toi Station with about 10 minutes’ walking distance from both stations. Apart from using the convenient railway network to and from KTSP, the public can take a number of bus routes at nearby bus stops, such as Shing Kai Road, to and from KTSP and different districts of Hong Kong Island, Kowloon and the New Territories. KTSP will also have facilities like taxi stands, public car parks, etc. to meet the travelling need of the public in different modes. When there are major events to be held at KTSP, depending on the scale of the events and the need of the participants, TD will arrange special bus services to meet the additional transport need arising from the events.

- (3) According to the preliminary technical feasibility study, no matter whether extending the East Kowloon system to Tsz Wan Shan or constructing an independent transit system to connect it to nearby railway stations, the space for constructing the elevated structures on narrow roads in Tsz Wan Shan area is very limited. Nevertheless, after we have received the expressions of interest from the concerned suppliers and operators, we will exchange views on the feasibility of expanding the system and again review the feasibility and the overall cost effectiveness of expanding the system to Tsz Wan Shan and Chuk Yuen areas.

At present, the major roads in Tsz Wan Shan and Chuk Yuen areas, such as Po Kong Village Road, Hammer Hill Road, Tsz Wan Shan Road and Chuk Yuen Road, have sufficient capacity to meet the road traffic demand in the areas. A number of franchised bus and green

minibus services are available in Tsz Wan Shan and Chuk Yuen for bringing the public to and from nearby railway stations (including Wong Tai Sin Station, Diamond Hill Station and Lok Fu Station) and other areas. The current public transport services can generally meet the demand. TD will continue to closely monitor the traffic situation and demand for public transport services in the areas. As mentioned above, we will further review if there is room for constructing a cost-effective smart and green mass transit system on top of the existing road infrastructure and public transportation services. Thank you, President.

MR YANG WING-KIT (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. Given that several major transport infrastructure projects will be carried out concurrently under the Blueprint in the future, how will the Government expedite these two projects to ensure that there will be no further delays or cost overruns? Thank you.*

SECRETARY FOR TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. The Member is right. There are quite a number of projects under the Blueprint, but they will not be carried out concurrently. We will pragmatically set a timetable for each project, taking into account the requirements and implementation of the projects. The cost-effectiveness of the projects is also one of the key considerations we will examine.

Members may recall that the Government has proposed in the Policy Address the establishment of the Committee on the Financing of Major Development Projects (“the Committee”). In addition to examining the financial arrangement and the technical feasibility study that I just mentioned, we will also make suggestions on, among others, the financing options in the light of the specific features and other requirements of each individual project, such as determining whether it should be classified as a public project or a PPP (public-private partnership) project involving private-sector participation. We will make suggestions in the light of the specific features of a project for the Committee’s consideration before arriving at a financing mode that best suits it. Hence, we will proceed with the projects in question in an orderly manner and in accordance with the procedures. Thank you, President.

MR ANDREW LAM (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. Having listened to the main reply, I think the key message is pretty clear, and that is, the Government seems quite confident that these first ever smart and green mass transit systems will certainly be a feasible option, even though a formal study has yet to be conducted. I believe this is because the Government has previously explored the related systems and designs in various places.*

However, the Government has also mentioned in the main reply that there are many technical challenges and difficulties, including various financial considerations. Is there a risk that, after considering various circumstances, these existing green mass transit systems are in fact unsuitable for Hong Kong? If there is such a risk, does the Government have an alternative proposal? Thank you, President.

SECRETARY FOR TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS (in Cantonese): Thank you, President, and I thank Mr Andrew LAM for his supplementary question. The Member's point is well-taken. The Transport and Logistics Bureau and its departments have all along been keeping track of the development of transport systems in other places, including not only Mainland but also global counterparts, as many similar mass transit systems have already been launched and are in operation around the world and in the Mainland.

Indeed, it would be difficult for us to obtain the data on the operation and maintenance of those systems if they are not already in operation. These data are one of the crucial parameters for us to assess the financial viability of the projects concerned. In fact, we have obtained the relevant data in our preliminary technical feasibility study. After reviewing the data, we are of the view that we should be able to identify several financially viable models. In fact, it was only after we had come to this conclusion that we made this recommendation in the Policy Address.

Of course, as the projects progress, we will later invite suppliers and operators to submit expressions of interest and engage consultants to carry out detailed investigation and preliminary design. In addition to reviewing the technical feasibility, we will also continue to review the associated financial details. In fact, different systems have different specific features. Some systems may have higher construction costs, while others may have lower operational requirements or commitments. We will examine various systems and select the

most suitable option that aligns with our technical requirements, timeline and financial considerations. Thank you, President.

MR STANLEY LI (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. I think the authorities cannot deny the sluggish progress of their work in this regard. The railway development project in question was proposed back in 2014. At that time, the Government said that the East Kowloon Line would be extended to Po Lam Station in Tseung Kwan O, the constituency where I serve. Regrettably, in 2022, the Bureau rejected the idea on technical grounds. Fortunately, the Government put forth a proposal last month, suggesting the introduction of new mass transit carriers to provide a link with Ma Yau Tong Station in Sai Kung.*

I understand that the authorities will be inviting contractors to submit their expressions of interest for the tender process. Regarding the technical problems that are deemed difficult to solve, can the Bureau ascertain if potential contractors have viable solutions to address these problems? Can the Bureau take the invitation for expressions of interest as an opportunity to explore the technical feasibility of the project? Thank you, President.

SECRETARY FOR TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. Looking back at history, the East Kowloon Line was mentioned in 2014 in the Railway Development Strategy 2014. However, after rounds of studies and repeated refinements, we found that the heavy rail system was not cost-effective. We thus proposed to switch to the option of constructing a light rail system. This is because after finding out the approximate number of people to be served by the relevant project, we considered that it would be more cost-effective to adopt a light rail or medium-sized rail system, so we switched to the present option.

The Member mentioned certain circumstances that currently render the project not technically feasible. Actually, we will engage a consultant engineer to review it again. In addition to the proposed alignment, we aim to leverage the expertise of our consultant and future suppliers and operators, by drawing reference from the specific features of their systems, to overcome some of the problems we now find difficult to deal with. We will follow these procedures to comprehensively re-examine whether the difficulties mentioned by the Member

just now can be overcome. The issue in question will be addressed in our planning study to be conducted at a later stage. Thank you, President.

DR NGAN MAN-YU (in Cantonese): *President, I note from the main reply that the Secretary has mentioned that the invitation for expressions of interest will be conducted in the fourth quarter of this year. In this connection, I hope the Secretary can reconsider the possibility of inviting expressions of interest earlier, say in the second quarter of this year, so as to ascertain whether there are operators around the world who are capable of constructing this system, and to facilitate the making of technical and financial arrangements by the SAR Government. Thank you, President.*

SECRETARY FOR TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS (in Cantonese): Thank you, President, and I thank the Member for his supplementary question. As mentioned in the first part of the main reply, we will consult the relevant District Councils in the first quarter of this year, and we will strive to engage a consultant during the same period to initiate the invitation for expressions of interest from relevant parties.

As Members are well aware, there are established procedures for the engagement of consultants. If the progress is satisfactory, we anticipate that the consultant engagement exercise can begin this month or next month. There are certain procedures to be followed in the engagement of a consultant engineer, and I believe Members would expect those procedures to be conducted in a fair and impartial manner. We hope to engage the consultant engineer before the middle of the year, and their first important task is to invite expressions of interest from suppliers and contractors.

But please do not forget the importance of engaging a consultant engineer. Why do I say so? It is because apart from inviting expressions of interest, he has many other tasks to do, such as conducting investigation and dealing with the detailed alignment of the relevant systems or projects. This is the kind of work that any consultant engineer engaged has to handle.

Also, Members should not forget that this is a new system. In other words, its operational framework is yet to be finalized. So, we still have a lot of work to

do; but I hope that a number of tasks can be carried out in parallel. Thank you, President.

MS STARRY LEE (in Cantonese): *President, the Government has undertaken in the Policy Address to construct mass transit systems in Kai Tak and East Kowloon. The public has commented positively on these undertakings and hope that the Bureau will continue to find ways to reduce the time required for the relevant projects. Since the promulgation of the Blueprint, there have been serious doubts about the long time required for the projects and the need to wait for nearly 10 more years. I hope that the Bureau can further compress the timetable.*

My supplement question is about Tsz Wan Shan and Chuk Yuen. Residents in Tsz Wan Shan and Chuk Yuen were very disappointed to find that the initial alignment in question did not cover their districts. However, the Secretary has not ruled out in his reply today the possibility of conducting further study on connecting Tsz Wan Shan and Chuk Yuen to the system. May I ask when the final results of the study will be ready, so as to finalize whether a linkage system for Tsz Wan Shan or Chuk Yuen will be constructed in the first phase or in any phase?

SECRETARY FOR TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. The Member's supplementary question consists of two parts. The first part is about when a decision can be made on whether or not Chuk Yuen and Tsz Wan Shan will be connected to the system. Actually, I already provided an answer to this question just now. Regarding the timetable, I may not be able to provide a comprehensive response at this moment as the engagement of a consultant engineer has just commenced today, and we will re-examine the linkage with Chuk Yuen or Tsz Wan Shan. Our goal is to initiate the tender exercise in 2026, and we will strive to commence construction in 2027. So, we will probably re-examine this issue concerning Chuk Yuen and Tsz Wan Shan within this time frame before coming to a decision.

Of course, I will also strive to do one thing. While it may not be feasible to fully overcome certain technical problems today, we will explore the possibility of establishing criteria for early arrangements, so that the relevant system can be extended in the future. We will actively consider this matter. Thank you, President.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Second question.

Demand-side management measures for residential properties

2. **MR JEFFREY LAM** (in Cantonese): *President, the Chief Executive announced in the 2023 Policy Address that adjustments would be made to the demand-side management measures for residential properties (commonly known as “the harsh measures”), including shortening the applicable period of the Special Stamp Duty from three years to two years, reducing the respective rates of the Buyer’s Stamp Duty and the New Residential Stamp Duty from 15% to 7.5%, as well as introducing a stamp duty suspension arrangement for eligible incoming talents’ acquisition of residential properties. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *whether it has assessed the impact of the aforesaid adjustments on the transaction volume and prices of residential properties so far since the implementation of such adjustments on 25 October last year; if so, of the outcome; if not, the reasons for that;*
- (2) *given that following the implementation of the aforesaid adjustments, eligible incoming talents who purchase their first residential property in Hong Kong may apply to the Inland Revenue Department (“IRD”) for suspension of the relevant stamp duty payment, of the current number of such applications received by IRD; and*
- (3) *of the number of residential mortgage loans in negative equity last year, and whether it has assessed the resultant negative impact on Hong Kong’s economy; whether the Government will consider expeditiously assessing if it should further “reduce the harsh measures”, and make preparations in respect of the timing and strength for the related arrangements; if it will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?*

SECRETARY FOR HOUSING (in Cantonese): *President, maintaining the healthy and steady development of the private residential property market is one of the important objectives of the Government’s housing policies. With the increasing housing supply in Hong Kong in the coming years and having considered the overall situation, the Chief Executive announced the adjustments to the demand-side management measures (“DSMMs”) for residential properties in the 2023 Policy Address, including (i) shortening the applicable period of the*

Special Stamp Duty (“SSD”) from three years to two years; (ii) reducing the respective rates of the Buyer’s Stamp Duty (“BSD”) and the New Residential Stamp Duty (“NRSD”) from 15% to 7.5%; and (iii) providing a mechanism for suspension of payment of BSD and NRSD for incoming talents’ acquisition of residential properties in Hong Kong (“the Suspension Mechanism”). The relevant adjustments will be implemented through the Stamp Duty (Amendment) (Residential Properties) Bill 2023 (“the Bill”). I would like to express my gratitude to the Bills Committee for the completion of scrutiny of the Bill last week. The Bills Committee will present the relevant report to the House Committee of the Legislative Council this Friday (19 January), and the Government plans to resume the Second Reading debate on the Bill at the Council meeting on 31 January. In consultation with the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau and the Hong Kong Monetary Authority (“HKMA”), my reply to the various parts of the question raised by Mr LAM is as follows:

- (1) The residential property market is affected by many different factors, including the global and local economic outlook, interest rates trend and the local housing demand-supply situation. It is hence difficult to assess the impact of individual factors or individual measures on property prices and transaction volume. Hong Kong is a small and open economy susceptible to the influence of external economic environment. With the external environment remaining challenging at the moment and interest rates staying at a relatively high level, the market sentiment has been more cautious. We observed that since the announcement of the adjustments to DSMMs on 25 October last year, the number of sale and purchase agreements for residential property received by the Land Registry in December 2023 was 2 929. While the number may not be comparable to the monthly average of 4 370 cases in the first half of 2023, it represents an increase in two consecutive months as compared to 2 123 cases in October and 2 554 cases in November. As for property prices, the overall residential property prices continued to adjust downward slightly in recent months, with the month-on-month statistics in November falling by about 2% but the adjustments are still in an orderly manner.
- (2) With regard to the number of applications of the Suspension Mechanism, within two months from the announcement of the measure to 12 January 2024, the Inland Revenue Department has received 474 suspension applications from incoming talents, of which

394 applications have been approved. As demonstrated by these figures, the Suspension Mechanism is well-received by incoming talents, and helps increase the incoming talents' sense of belonging and propensity of staying in Hong Kong for development, and it also underlines the attractiveness of this city.

- (3) With regard to the figures of residential mortgage loans (“RMLs”) in negative equity, as we all know, the figure only represents an estimate of the situation where the assessed market value of the mortgaged property is below the outstanding loan amount. It neither means that the relevant owner could no longer continue to make mortgage repayment on schedule, nor the property concerned has already been sold at a low price. As property prices began to soften since the latter part of the second quarter of 2023, based on the statistics published by HKMA earlier, statistical estimation of RMLs in negative equity of the banking sector was 11 000 as at the end of September 2023. Among the number, the majority are RMLs under the Mortgage Insurance Programme, which generally have a higher loan-to-value (“LTV”) ratio that can be as high as 90%. Hence, in case of downward adjustment of property prices, those properties with higher LTV ratio are more prone to becoming so-called properties in negative equity under statistical estimation. It is worth noting that, even if the properties are statistically estimated to be in negative equity at the moment, the relevant repayment rate of RMLs has remained very high in recent years, standing at 99.98% as at the end of September 2023. As the vast majority of residential mortgage borrowers are able to continue making mortgage repayments on schedule, banks would not demand early repayment of RMLs merely due to a decline in the value of the mortgaged properties. As such, HKMA assessed that the current situation as reflected by the statistics would not cause significant impact on the local economy.

The adjustments to DSMMs in the 2023 Policy Address are pragmatic arrangements by the Government after careful evaluation of the overall economic and market situation. We consider that the relevant adjustments can strike a proper balance between responding to market changes appropriately under the current circumstances, and safeguarding the effectiveness of DSMMs while addressing the home ownership needs of Hong Kong permanent residents (young people

and young families in particular). After all, the current mortgage-to-income ratio (i.e. the home purchase affordability ratio) is 72%, which is higher than the long-term average of 51% over the 20-year period from 2003 to 2022. On the housing supply side, the projected supply of first-hand private residential units for the coming three to four years stayed at a high level of around 107 000 units, reflecting a stable supply in the private residential property market. The Government will continue to closely monitor the property market to ensure its stable and healthy development. Thank you, President.

MR JEFFREY LAM (in Cantonese): *President, since the Chief Executive took office, he has been determined to revitalize the Hong Kong economy, e.g. the arrangements related to the extension of land leases expiring in 2047 is definitely a benevolent policy, unanimously praised by market participants and the public. We earnestly hope that the Government can continue to implement more benevolent policies, including scrapping all the harsh measures and unleashing purchasing power. After listening to the Secretary's reply, I have learnt that the transaction volume seems not to have improved after the announcement of reducing harsh measures and property prices have continued to fall, which proves that the surge in property prices upon scrapping all the harsh measures as the Government has expected and worried will not happen.*

We all want to know whether the Government will scrap all the harsh measures as soon as possible so that the property market and the Hong Kong economy as a whole can be revitalized without delay. At present, "stability" holds paramount importance in Hong Kong, and I emphasize that "stability" is a must for the well-being of the city. For instance, the mere mention of exploring the introduction of a capital gains tax by the Financial Secretary has evoked genuine fear among Hong Kong people. The business community and investors ...

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr Jeffrey LAM, you have asked your supplementary question, please sit down.

MR JEFFREY LAM (in Cantonese): *This point is relevant to the question. The business community and investors ...*

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr Jeffrey LAM, you have already asked your supplementary question, please do not introduce any matter which is not related to the main question.

MR JEFFREY LAM (in Cantonese): *All right. The business community and investors have immediately responded and the stock market has plummeted for two days. I also want to know if the Bureau has studied whether there will be negative impacts on the property market if a capital gains tax is introduced. Thank you, President.*

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Secretary, you do not need to answer the question about capital gains tax because this is not related to the subject of the main question. Please answer the supplementary question just raised by Mr LAM which is related to the main question.

SECRETARY FOR HOUSING (in Cantonese): All right. Thank you, President. I have noticed that Mr LAM has repeatedly mentioned “stability”, which is very appropriate indeed. We want all policies formulated to be stable, healthy and balanced.

I have provided some data just now. There were over 2 900 property transactions in December, over 2 100 in October and over 2 500 in November, and there has been a steady increase within two consecutive months. The policy on the Suspension Mechanism has also been effective. Numerically, there were 474 applications within two months or so, which showed signs of consolidation in the property market. There was a month-on-month decrease of 2% in November, which was a slight decline. We did not see any rapid decline or the so-called “cliff fall”. We must deal with these situations very carefully; after all, many people in Hong Kong (including young people and young families) still have home ownership wishes. The Home Ownership Scheme (“HOS”) and the Home Starter Loan Scheme we introduced were oversubscribed by numerous times. I believe that achieving a balance is not only the responsibility of the current-term Government but also a crucial factor for fostering a healthy and stable development of the property market. Thank you, President.

MR LOUIS LOONG (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. I am really pleased to hear the Secretary say a while ago that policies should be stable and balanced. However, it seems that the Secretary has ignored that there is such a situation in the market, i.e. some owners in urgent need of cash flow or are unable to continue to make mortgage repayments due to changes in financial situations will take advantage of reducing the harsh measures to sell residential properties as soon as possible. On the other hand, the interested buyers will ask the owners for price reductions to offset some of the increased home ownership costs due to the harsh measures. As a result, the properties will be sold at even lower prices, which will lead to a further decline in the valuation of second-hand properties, thus pushing up the number of negative-equity properties. To avoid deterioration of the mortgage situation of negative-equity properties, I would like to ask if the authorities will consider scrapping all the harsh measures as soon as possible.*

SECRETARY FOR HOUSING (in Cantonese): Thank you, President, and I thank Mr LOONG for his supplementary question. Taking into account the various factors I mentioned just now, I consider that, at this juncture, reducing the harsh measures can be regarded as striking an appropriate balance. Of course, as we have noticed, some people hope that all the harsh measures will be scrapped. However, we have also noticed that for those who have home ownership needs, reducing the harsh measures can release a certain number of residential units. For example, when we shorten the applicable period of SSD from three years to two years, certain residential units will be released and supplied to the market. So, I believe that the current level of adjustment is highly appropriate.

As for negative equity, as I have just explained, under the present circumstances, negative equity is just a numerical estimation. Based on our current estimation on negative equity, the owners' repayment capacity remains significantly high. The whole system is healthy and steady, with 99.98% of the owners possessing repayment capacity and being able to make repayments on schedule. Thank you, President.

DR KENNEDY WONG (in Cantonese): *President, in the main reply of the Bureau, it was specifically mentioned that the residential property prices have adjusted downward slightly and they fell by about 2% in November last year, which was still an orderly adjustment. Nevertheless, the Secretary has also mentioned in her reply that the residential property market is actually affected by many*

different factors, including the global and Mainland factors as well as the local economic factors. According to some reports, Hong Kong's property developers have nearly 60 000 unsold units with an occupation permit in hand. While I am not sure if the number is accurate, it is roughly estimated that there are 50 000 to 60 000 such units. According to other reports, banks in Hong Kong have tightened the lending standards for small and medium developers. Coupled with high interest rates, will these developers be caused to dump their residential units in hand at reduced prices, leading to substantial adjustments in property prices? If there are substantial adjustments in property prices, has the Government assessed how serious the impacts will be?

SECRETARY FOR HOUSING (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. Thank you, Dr WONG. According to the available figures, the supply of private residential units for the coming three to four years will still be abundant, i.e. around 107 000 units. As for the sales strategies of individual developers and how they decide on the prices, the situation of each developer is actually different; thus, we cannot make sweeping generalizations and they will make decisions based on their assessment of the market and the economic, financial management and overall situation of their companies. Thank you, President.

MRS REGINA IP (in Cantonese): *President, of course, I definitely support the Secretary's remarks just now, i.e. the Government wants to assist Hong Kong's permanent residents (especially young people and young families) in home ownership. However, can the Secretary share with us her estimation of the level to which lower property prices should have reached before young people and young families can achieve home ownership?*

For example, given my income years ago, I only bought my first home when I was 40. Based on past experience, around 20 years ago in 2002 or 2003, many young people could afford home purchases because of an economic recession. Has the Government considered the relations between a substantial decline in property prices and an economic recession?

SECRETARY FOR HOUSING (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. Thank you, Mrs Regina IP. About the ardent aspirations of young people for home ownership, I can share some data. I believe Members should have noticed, HOS

has recently been oversubscribed by 18 times; the Starter Homes for Hong Kong Residents (“SH”) Project of the Urban Renewal Authority (“URA”) has been oversubscribed by 13 times; and some subsidized housing schemes of the Hong Kong Housing Society have also been oversubscribed by more than 20 times. According to our analyses of these figures, it can be seen that under URA’s SH Project, 85% of the applicants are young people aged under 40 or young families; and under the HOS Secondary Market Scheme, 80% of the applicants are young people aged under 40. These figures told us that young people and young families have extremely strong desires to buy their homes. This is precisely the reason why we have said that we should strike an appropriate balance when formulating the harsh measures under the housing policies. The Policy Address proposed reducing the harsh measures but not scrapping all of them, I believe this is a good decision made after considering numerous circumstances. Thank you, President.

REVD CANON PETER DOUGLAS KOON (in Cantonese): *President, as we all know, when the Government initially introduced the harsh measures, it said that they were temporary measures taken due to the constant increase in property prices. However, we have not heard the Secretary illustrate whether the Government will scrap the harsh measures at a certain time due to objective factors. The Secretary has only been talking about various factors just now. I would like to ask the Government, under what objective situations or based on what data will scrapping the harsh measures be considered. Thank you, President.*

SECRETARY FOR HOUSING (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. As I have explained in the main reply, the property market is affected by many different factors. Based on the current global geopolitical factors, we have to pay particular attention to the possible changes in the overall economic situation. The interest rate change is certainly a major factor and our economic situation also affects the investors’ sentiments and they may consider property transactions more prudently. I have just given figures to illustrate that there is still a keen local demand and quite a lot of people still need or desire home ownership. These various factors will work together, and some of them will act as balancing forces to counteract each other. Hence, it is difficult for us to decide upon the measures to be taken solely on the basis of a certain factor or figures at a certain level. On the whole, we will dynamically observe the effects of various factors before making a decision. Thank you, President.

MR JIMMY NG (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. The Government has started to take actions to reduce the harsh measures, which is a good start. However, in respect of urban renewal, I have noticed that, when the developers acquire units in old buildings, they will be subjected to stamp duties and get the refund later, which is very unfavourable to urban redevelopment as it delays the recovery of their funds until the buildings are demolished. Will the authorities further reduce the harsh measures in this respect, e.g. adjusting the relevant arrangement and even scrapping the stamp duties to speed up urban renewal and increase housing supply?*

SECRETARY FOR HOUSING (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. Thank you, Mr NG. We have one more factor for consideration in urban renewal, i.e. we want the redevelopment projects to be implemented as early as possible. Therefore, we have adopted the aforesaid approach to encourage the developers who have obtained ownership of the sites to be redeveloped to obtain approval from the Buildings Department as soon as possible. If they have obtained the consent to commence any work, or if they are ready to demolish the buildings and have obtained approved plans for demolition, they can apply for the refund. In relation to urban renewal, I think this is a special factor for consideration as we want to avoid situations where developers who have acquired ownership of sites for redevelopment delay launching the redevelopment projects in the market for an extended period, which goes against our original intention of promoting ongoing urban renewal and redevelopment. Thank you, President.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Third question.

Ensuring the normal operation of government electronic systems

3. **MS YUNG HOI-YAN** (in Cantonese): *In the evening of the polling day for the 2023 District Council Ordinary Election, voting at polling stations was once suspended due to a failure of the Electronic Poll Register system; and earlier on, the Government's sports and recreation services booking and information system, "SmartPLAY", also experienced "double bookings" and system failure. There are views that these incidents reflect the Government's failure to ensure the normal operation of its electronic systems. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *of the inspection and testing procedures undertaken by the Government in respect of the Electronic Poll Register system; whether it will review and improve the relevant procedures to prevent the recurrence of similar incidents in the future; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;*
- (2) *of the Government's new plans to ensure the normal operation of its electronic systems, including the new measures to enhance cyber security and upgrade the technical standard of relevant personnel; and*
- (3) *whether a mechanism is currently in place to penalize contractors providing electronic systems to the Government for incidents caused by their faults; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that, and how it ensures that contractors will improve the stability of the electronic systems?*

SECRETARY FOR INNOVATION, TECHNOLOGY AND INDUSTRY (in Putonghua): President, the Government has been striving to drive the adoption of technologies by Policy Bureaux/departments (“B/Ds”) to enhance operational efficiency and improve public services, as e-government services and governmental operations are closely related to citizen’s livelihood. We envisage many challenges as the Government presses ahead with the digitalization of services and rolls out more electronic services. Recent cases of malfunction of individual systems at the time of launch serve as a reminder that we must adhere to the original purpose of the digitalization of public services and take them as lessons to constantly improve the effectiveness of the Government’s work.

In response to three parts of Ms YUNG Hoi-yan’s question, in consultation with the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau and other relevant B/Ds, my reply is as follows:

- (1) The Registration and Electoral Office (“REO”) has conducted three levels of monitoring and testing for the Electronic Poll Register (“EPR”) system, including: internal testing conducted by REO’s Information Technology Management Division; independent testings conducted by third parties entrusted by REO; and final review by the

Technical Advisory Committee under the Electoral Affairs Commission (“EAC”).

Regarding the malfunction of the EPR system occurred on the polling day of the District Councils Ordinary Election held on 10 December 2023, EAC has, pursuant to the instructions of the Chief Executive, established a dedicated investigation group to investigate the causes of the incident comprehensively so as to ensure that similar incidents will not happen again. The investigation work of the group is ongoing. The findings of the investigation will later be reported in detail in the report to be submitted to the Chief Executive within three months after the election as required by the law.

- (2) The Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (“OGCIO”) is responsible for the Government’s central backbone systems and interdepartmental information technology (“IT”) service projects, including the government cloud services, the big data analytics platform and the recently launched initiatives on cross-boundary data flow and Cross-boundary Public Services. Other government IT system projects with a focus on services offered by individual departments are spearheaded by responsible B/Ds such that the system development and operation cater for the respective policy and the needs of the public service recipients.

OGCIO has been working closely with B/Ds and renders support to departments in implementing their e-government services at different stages. These include providing policy guidance and technical standards at project initiation stage, and assigning officers on a need basis to participate in the Project Steering Committees set up by B/Ds for their large-scale projects to provide departmental management with professional advice during system development.

As for cybersecurity, the Government has formulated the Government IT Security Policy and Guidelines, which set out the requirements applicable to B/Ds for the establishment, implementation, maintenance and continuous enhancement of their information security management system. OGCIO also regularly reminds B/Ds to adopt measures to protect government information systems and data. Meanwhile, OGCIO organizes departmental cybersecurity

drills, seminars, solution showcases, etc. Over 3 400 staff members of government departments attended relevant events last year.

To assist departments in strengthening preparedness before the launch of their major e-government systems, the Government introduced a new measure in November 2023 requiring respective departments to subject their large-scale electronic systems to additional capacity and load tests to be conducted by an independent third party arranged by OGCI O.

To support the important mission of building a digital government in the future, the Government is formulating new policies, with a view to strengthening the governance measures of OGCI O, or the future Digital Policy Office (“DPO”), at different work junctures such as project initiation, tendering, formulation of technical options, system development, testing and risk assessment. These are aimed at providing more professional support to B/Ds and further enhancing the stability and security of government electronic service systems under a multi-pronged approach. The relevant new measures will soon be announced.

- (3) Government information systems are based on the public services individual departments provide. Hence, B/Ds will initiate, invite tenders and take forward the IT projects in accordance with their policies and requirements of their service clients.

To assist departments in managing and monitoring their IT service contractors, OGCI O has issued the Practice Guide to Project Management for IT Projects under an Outsourced Environment, covering project initiation, planning, implementation and completion. The Practice Guide also recommends a set of good practices for B/Ds to follow. B/Ds would monitor their contractors with reference to the contracts. If the performance of contractors fails to fulfil the service requirements and standards specified in the contracts, departments may take actions based on the contractual clauses. These actions include warning, demand for compensation or even early termination of contract. To further support departments in engaging and identifying quality contractors, the Government is actively exploring how to strengthen the role of OGCI O in B/Ds’

assessment and selection of service contractors, and formulating specific enhancement proposals.

For some smaller-scale projects with a budget not exceeding \$20 million, OGCIO implements the Standing Offer Agreement for Quality Professional Services scheme (“the SOA-QPS scheme”) to facilitate their speedy implementation. Under the SOA-QPS scheme, B/Ds can directly invite contractors having passed OGCIO’s pre-qualification to submit proposals for B/Ds to select suitable service contractors. Contractors with continuous subpar performance may be suspended from further bidding under the SOA-QPS scheme until their performance improves.

MS YUNG HOI-YAN (in Cantonese): *President, the 2023 District Council Election, being the first election following the improvement of the electoral system, was a brand new election to all of us, so citizens, organizations and political groups had very high expectations of it. Thus, we were all slightly disappointed when the electronic system failed to operate normally that evening, and voters who had gone to the polling stations but failed to cast their votes were particularly disappointed. Hence, my main question is primarily about how to ensure the normal operation of government electronic systems.*

In the main reply, Secretary Prof SUN has mentioned the effectiveness and operation of OGCIO, letting us know that OGCIO actually plays a significant role in central databases or in data collation, analysis and application. My supplementary question is: Is it possible to enhance the functions of OGCIO, including assigning OGCIO to handle future system development work, especially the work relating to important elections? In addition, can the existing tasks of centralized handling of tenders and ensuring outsourced contractors’ quality be handed over to OGCIO as well? Thank you, President.

SECRETARY FOR INNOVATION, TECHNOLOGY AND INDUSTRY (in Putonghua): I would like to thank Ms YUNG Hoi-yan for her supplementary question. As I have mentioned earlier, OGCIO is primarily responsible for coordinating the central backbone systems and interdepartmental IT service projects via platform interface at present. Basically, individual departments are focusing on the services they offer, and many of the systems rolled out are closely

related to the policies of the individual departments. Individual departments need to understand the targets of their own departmental operations and service requirements, so they are currently tasked to spearhead their system development and operation.

I very much concur with the proposal made by the Member just now regarding whether the role of OGCIIO can be enhanced as a next step. In fact, the Government is now formulating new policies, including strengthening the functions of OGCIIO in several aspects, including project initiation and tendering. In the past, OGCIIO basically provided guidance, so will it be able to get deeply involved in the future? It only gave advice in the past, but it will need to give advice and be “hands-on” in the future. Next, it is project development. Currently, at the project development stage, individual departments basically lead the development, whereas OGCIIO conducts inspections on a regular basis. So, could OGCIIO’s functions be further enhanced with respect to project development? Of course, the most important thing is independent risk assessment. While OGCIIO already issued new guidelines in November last year, we also hope that the future DPO can set up a new department with additional resources to specifically take charge of the management of some major projects, including cybersecurity work. We are currently formulating the relevant policies. Thank you.

MR SUNNY TAN (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. I am very pleased to hear the Secretary talk about the new measures to be taken by OGCIIO in the future and that it will coordinate the work among different departments, so as to ensure the normal operation of electronic systems.*

Regarding the normalization of electronic systems, we hope that the electronic systems currently under development can also be launched on time for use by citizens or small and medium enterprises (“SMEs”). Both the industrial and commercial sectors and I are very concerned about the development of “iAM Smart”, especially the services thereof which are available for use by SMEs. I would like to ask the authorities how they monitor the relevant progress and ensure that the system can operate in a high-quality and normal manner so that SMEs can be benefited.

SECRETARY FOR INNOVATION, TECHNOLOGY AND INDUSTRY (in Putonghua): I thank Mr TAN for his supplementary question. Regarding “iAM

Smart”, according to the current progress requirements, we aim to realize a “single portal for online government services” by the end of next year. In the first half of this year, we will roll out an upgraded version of “iAM Smart”, with a significant change being the provision of more facilitation for citizens’ registration. Over the past year, many citizens have found the registration procedures under “iAM Smart” very complicated. Since the security of the system has to be ensured, the existing measures cannot be changed. However, new approaches such as the Consented Data Exchange Gateway, successfully rolled out at the end of last year, allow data to be shared and interacted with among departments under this mechanism.

Moving forward, one of our important directions is to utilize the information that citizens have already registered with various government departments, so that the relevant information can be directly retrieved without the need for citizens to go through complicated registration procedures again, which can greatly simplify the registration procedures for them. Therefore, we will soon introduce new measures. I can tell the Member that OGCIO is currently making every effort to advance the related work for “iAM Smart”. Of course, while “iAM Smart” is spearheaded by OGCIO, the participation of various government departments is also required. As it involves the services of all government departments, it is an interdepartmental and centrally coordinated initiative. We wish to do our best and live up to the public’s expectations of the Government. Thank you.

MR DENNIS LEUNG (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. The Government’s implementation of electronic services is very important for moving towards e-government, but system maintenance is even more crucial. For some time in the past, some citizens have used government services on the relevant web pages, but the browsers of the web pages, including Google Chrome and Microsoft Edge, are frequently updated. In September last year, I was going through the application procedures for “Northbound Travel for Hong Kong Vehicles” on the relevant web page when I suddenly encountered a system problem. Usually, when members of the general public cannot resolve a problem, they will call 1823 or lodge a complaint by email; however, the reply I received was that OGCIO found no problem after it had conducted tests using its computers. In the end, I had to contact the Political Assistant of the Transport and Logistics Bureau, and the problem could only be resolved after the government department had conducted tests to find out the real cause.*

I would like to ask how the Government will improve the experience in this regard in the future, so that problems can be resolved promptly when citizens lodge complaints or seek assistance, and that the normal operation of systems can be ensured when electronic services are implemented, so as to let citizens truly experience the smooth operation of electronic services.

SECRETARY FOR INNOVATION, TECHNOLOGY AND INDUSTRY (in Putonghua): Promoting Smart Government electronic services is an all-encompassing system engineering task that requires close cooperation among various government departments. At the same time, it also relies on the healthy development of Hong Kong's overall IT ecosystem. The future DPO will play a crucial role in spearheading the advancement of digital government and optimizing digital governance, which I believe will be a long and arduous process.

Regarding specific systems, various departments must conduct multiple tests and audits on the systems before launching them, including functional tests, integration tests, user acceptance tests, system capacity and stress tests, as well as the recently included IT security audits conducted by independent third parties and related measures. I believe the past year was the first year in which we expeditiously promoted the building of a digital government. Throughout the year, we launched over 200 projects, of which 122 are closely related to citizens. Fairly speaking, the SAR Government has made certain achievements in promoting this aspect over the past year. Of course, there is no such thing as the best; the best is yet to come. In particular, the relevant departments have encountered some obstacles when rolling out certain systems. However, I believe that we will be able to improve our work and do the related tasks even better in 2024. Thank you.

PROF WILLIAM WONG (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. We cannot rely too much on outsourcing to build a digital government. May I ask whether the authorities have any plans to improve the training in technologies for civil servants, and whether they have recruited more technology staff? Besides, in view of the Government's demand for technology staff, have the authorities considered fostering closer collaboration with higher education institutions? Will universities of applied sciences be included in the planning for the Vocational and Professional Education and Training in Hong Kong?*

SECRETARY FOR INNOVATION, TECHNOLOGY AND INDUSTRY (in Putonghua): I would like to thank the Member for his supplementary question. Building a smart community and a smart government hinges on the enhancement of the overall technology literacy of the whole community, especially government staff. The Government has listened to the Member's suggestion. Additionally, we also need to step up specific IT measures in the area of cybersecurity and enhance staff training.

In fact, to attract talents from all over the world to Hong Kong, the Innovation and Technology Commission rolled out the Technology Talent Admission Scheme ("TechTAS") in June 2018, which has greatly simplified the procedures for technology talents to apply for entry to Hong Kong for undertaking research and development work. Recently, 62% of the quotas under TechTAS have essentially been allocated to individuals in the IT sector, and the Talent List of Hong Kong has also clearly specified the fields from which some eligible individuals come.

Additionally, OGCIO works closely with partners such as the Hong Kong Computer Emergency Response Team Coordination Centre, the Hong Kong Internet Registration Corporation Limited and the Hong Kong Police Force to deepen the cybersecurity and IT knowledge of local young people and enhance their relevant skills through various activities and competitions. As a next step, the Government will enhance the technology literacy of the entire Hong Kong community on all fronts. Particularly, we will have to enhance the technology literacy of the personnel within the Government. While we say that Hong Kong is facing a talent shortage, there is in fact a talent shortage within the Government too. We are at our wits' end in trying to recruit some good IT staff. However, with the passage of time and the gathering of more talents, we hope there will be a greater talent pool in this area. Thank you.

IR CHAN SIU-HUNG (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. According to the Secretary's main reply, it was only in November last year that OGCIO required respective departments to subject their designated systems to additional system capacity and load tests to be conducted by an independent third party arranged by OGCIO before the launch of their major e-government services in the future. This inevitably raises concerns about which of the so-called "major electronic systems" had not undergone sufficient load and stress tests before this new requirement was in place.*

I would like to know: How do the authorities define “major electronic systems”? What criteria are adopted for selecting independent third parties to conduct the tests? How are the load and stress test indicators which are required to be met by the relevant electronic systems set? Thank you, President.

SECRETARY FOR INNOVATION, TECHNOLOGY AND INDUSTRY (in Putonghua): The “major service systems”, as defined by us, are mainly those which are large in scale, involve a wide range of areas, and are closely related to people’s livelihood. These are all major projects under our definition. Of course, before the launch of the systems, we have defined these projects as high-risk ones. Despite the incidents last year where several system rollouts were not smooth, we will proceed with the gradual implementation of a number of major projects this year. The relevant B/Ds, which certainly include OGCIO and the future DPO, will have to be deeply involved and do their utmost to ensure that this year’s major projects can be launched steadily and smoothly.

That said, having all systems launched without any technical problems is very difficult. I can tell Members that when we rolled out more than 200 projects last year, there were problems with many of the systems; however, the problems were relatively minor and thus undetectable by the public, or we could resolve them expeditiously upon their launch. Some system problems that necessitated a substantial amount of time, say, exceeding half an hour, to resolve and were noticeable to the public were classified as major problems. Therefore, we have to try our best to do a good job of enhancing coordination.

I would also like to point out that although problems were encountered in the launch of individual systems in the past year, we still encourage various departments to reflect deeply on the lessons learned and remain undeterred by those incidents. This year, we will expeditiously launch various smart city projects as planned and on schedule. Thank you.

PROF PRISCILLA LEUNG (in Cantonese): *President, on 10 December, when the voter turnout rate reached 24%, everyone witnessed the malfunctioning of the system all of a sudden, rendering them unable to cast their votes. At one of the polling stations, I saw over 200 citizens leaving in great disappointment. So, I believe the voter turnout rate should have been at least 29% to 30%. Incidents of this kind have taken place successively, including the loss of voter registration*

particulars, which involved more than 3 million voters. This time, the system suddenly halted when the voter turnout rate reached 24%. The government officials in charge of the technical aspects said that this incident was definitely not related to external interferences. Though we are laymen, I have great doubts about this issue. So, why did the officials say for sure that it had nothing to do with external interferences even though the three-month investigation had not yet begun?

In fact, the Secretary has answered many questions earlier, but I wish to know whether the Government has any backup plans. Although the voter turnout rate of this election was low, and we are all disappointed, does the Government have a backup plan in case of a sudden system breakdown in the future when major issues relating to people's livelihood are involved? Has there been any consideration of getting Mainland experts or departments involved to formulate backup plans for major systems?

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Which official will reply? Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs, please reply.

SECRETARY FOR CONSTITUTIONAL AND MAINLAND AFFAIRS (in Cantonese): President, first of all, I would like to thank Prof Priscilla LEUNG for her supplementary question. What Prof Priscilla LEUNG has mentioned earlier should refer to whether there are backup plans in place for system failures in all government departments in a general sense. Here, I am sorry that I cannot make a response on behalf of all departments. However, generally speaking, to ensure the smooth operation of the Government, we will prepare a backup plan, or sometimes even more than one backup plan, when making any arrangements.

Regarding the last District Council election arrangement, we immediately activated the paper-based polling arrangement as a backup when the computer failure occurred. This was one of the backup plans we had prepared before the election. The requirement at that time was that we had to decide whether or not to adopt the backup plan within half an hour of the computer failure.

After the incident occurred on that day, we did immediately decide to adopt a backup plan within about half an hour when the system could not be restored to normal after rescue operations. Of course, after we decided to adopt the backup

plan, we also needed some preparation time. For example, the colleagues concerned had to take out the paper ballots and arrange the counters for paper-based polling. Similarly, it also took time for the staff to activate the backup mode. We had conducted a rehearsal before, so that colleagues would be prepared when a situation that necessitated the use of the backup mode arose.

However, depending on the circumstances of individual polling stations, the exact time for implementing the paper-based polling arrangement may not be entirely the same. We understand that it is necessary to further enhance the training and rehearsal arrangements for our colleagues in future, so that should a similar situation which necessitates the adoption of a backup plan arise, the preparation time will be shortened as far as possible, so as to minimize the impact on the public. Thank you, President.

(Prof Priscilla LEUNG indicated a wish to speak)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Prof Priscilla LEUNG, please follow up on other occasions.

Fourth question.

Measures to attract visitors to Hong Kong

4. **MS ELIZABETH QUAT** (in Cantonese): *President, there are views that since the resumption of normal travel between the Mainland and Hong Kong early last year, the pace of recovery of visitor arrivals to Hong Kong has fallen short of expectation, and this, coupled with the change in tourism experience patterns of inbound Mainland visitors and the craze for going north for spending among Hong Kong people, has resulted in slackened consumer spending momentum locally, with the catering and retail sectors, among others, not achieving full recovery as expected. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *whether the Government will explore with the relevant parties in the Mainland increasing the number of cities covered by the Individual Visit Scheme in order to further attract the massive consumer groups*

in the Mainland to visit Hong Kong, and raising the duty-free shopping quota for inbound Mainland visitors to accelerate the recovery of the local consumption market;

- (2) *as it is learnt that many visitors from the member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and Middle East countries are keen to visit Hong Kong, whether the Government will introduce measures to attract more visitors from those countries to visit Hong Kong; and*
- (3) *as there are views in society pointing out that Hong Kong's tourist receiving capacity is still relatively inadequate, in particular, the relatively high accommodation cost which dampens the desire of visitors to stay overnight, while there are also occasional reports on inhospitable services provided by business operators which create a negative impact on Hong Kong's tourism industry, of the measures put in place by the Government to expeditiously enhance the standard and capacity of Hong Kong in receiving tourists?*

SECRETARY FOR CULTURE, SPORTS AND TOURISM (in Cantonese): President, tourism industry is one of the important pillars of Hong Kong's economy, accounting for about 4.5% of our Gross Domestic Product before the pandemic and provided over 250 000 employment opportunities. The local tourism industry started to resume in February 2023 and recovered at full speed with number of visitor arrivals gradually increasing. The Hong Kong Tourism Board ("HKTB") forecasted 25.8 million visitor arrivals in the beginning of 2023. With the concerted efforts of the Government and the travel trade, visitor arrivals reached 34 million last year, far exceeding the previous estimate. During the previous New Year's Eve and New Year holidays, we recorded a total of around 430 000 Mainland visitor arrivals and a daily average of over 140 000, which was 16% and 6% higher than that of the Labour Day and National Day Golden Weeks in the same year respectively and reached about 73% of the average of the same period in 2017 and 2018.

The reply to the question raised by Ms Elizabeth QUAT is as follows:

- (1) The Individual Visit Scheme ("IVS") has been implemented since 28 July 2003, and is currently covering 49 designated Mainland cities.

In 2023, the number of visitors arriving in Hong Kong through IVS accounted for 60% of the total Mainland visitors, which is comparable to the situation before the pandemic.

Expanding visitor sources to attract more high value-added overnight visitors has all along been one of the key strategies for developing Hong Kong's tourism. Regarding various proposals to enhance IVS in an orderly manner and adjust the duty-free allowance of the Mainland visitors arriving in Hong Kong, the Government will continue to maintain communication and discuss with the relevant Mainland authorities in due course to provide Mainland visitors with more convenient and flexible ways to visit Hong Kong and enriching travel experience to facilitate the vibrant development of tourism-related industries.

- (2) Member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (“ASEAN”) are Hong Kong's target source markets. HKTB has been launching various tourism promotions, including launching Announcement in the Public Interest to tie with the Airport Authority Hong Kong and airlines' distribution of free tickets in source markets last year, as well as cooperating with key opinion leaders (“KOLs”) and the travel trade on promotion to attract visitors to Hong Kong.

HKTB organized a large-scale ASEAN familiarization trip in late 2022, receiving nearly 60 trade representatives from Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines and Singapore. It is hoped that they will launch novel tourism products in ASEAN source markets and attract visitors to visit Hong Kong after experiencing Hong Kong's brand new tourism elements and winter ambience. HKTB invited more than 40 trade representatives of Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions (“MICE”) from ASEAN to visit Hong Kong in October 2023 to take part in the Hong Kong Wine and Dine Festival organized by HKTB, and to visit the new World of Frozen of the Hong Kong Disneyland, try out Hong Kong's local cafes and cuisines, etc. to promote MICE tourism. HKTB also participated in a number of travel trade shows in the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia, and organized briefings to promote Hong Kong's tourism appeals.

Besides, HKTB, together with the Department of Culture and Tourism of Guangdong Province and the Macao Government Tourism Office, organized the first large-scale overseas promotional campaign for the Greater Bay Area (“GBA”) in Bangkok, Thailand, titled “The Greater Bay Area - Fusion of Exciting Experiences”, which introduced the GBA tourism experience, and launched a new one-stop website for tourism in GBA, as well as a series of programmes and promotions.

Since cross-boundary tourism has started to resume, the number of visitors from ASEAN member states has recovered to 73% of the average of the same period in 2017 and 2018, higher than the recovery rate of overall visitors in the same period. Among them, visitor arrivals from the Philippines and Thailand recorded a significant growth, and the number of visitor arrivals in November and December equals to 114% and 104% of the average of the same period in 2017 and 2018 respectively.

The Middle East markets are source markets with significant potential. HKTB will continue its promotional work on various fronts, such as organizing briefings to introduce new tourism products to the local travel trade, promoting special tourism offers on travelling to Hong Kong and launching travel packages in collaboration with tourism brands, with a view to attracting visitors from the Middle East to visit Hong Kong.

In the meantime, HKTB has been actively promoting Hong Kong’s tourism in the Muslim source markets and invited media representatives from Muslim regions to come to Hong Kong to visit local “Muslim-friendly” establishments. The Muslim familiarization trip organized in September let the incoming trade know that Hong Kong welcomes and is suitable for Muslim visitors. In addition, HKTB also consolidated a series of information about Hong Kong on its DiscoverHongKong.com website which catered for Muslim visitors, ranging from cuisine, hotel accommodation, local culture to activities suitable for Muslim visitors, etc., so as to attract them to visit Hong Kong and enhance their travel experience in Hong Kong.

HKTB will continue its publicity efforts in various aspects to promote Hong Kong’s tourism appeals to the ASEAN and Middle East source markets to attract visitors.

- (3) The SAR Government attaches great importance to the travel experience of visitors arriving in Hong Kong and has been continuously reviewing Hong Kong's capacity to receive visitors.

Regarding tourist attractions, the Hong Kong Disneyland Resort, the Ocean Park, the Peak Tram, the Ngong Ping 360, among others, have launched many new facilities in the past two years. Moreover, various cultural spots including Hong Kong Palace Museum, M+ museum and Hong Kong Museum of Art have been built or renovated, which helped to attract visitors.

On the receiving capacity of hotels, there were currently a total of more than 100 000 rooms offered by hotels and guesthouses, representing an 8% increase in comparison to the figure recorded at the end of December 2018. Besides, the actual average hotel room rate was about HK\$1,500 in November, which is similar to the average level in the same period of 2017 and 2018.

Based on the findings of HKTB, the average length of stay of overnight visitors has extended from 3.1 nights before the pandemic to 3.5 nights in the third quarter of 2023. The proportion of overnight visitors has also increased. Over 50% of visitors stayed overnight last year, surpassing the average of 46% of the same period in 2017 and 2018. The proportion for non-Mainland overnight visitors remained at 66%, similar to the average of the same period in 2017 and 2018.

On enhancing service quality, HKTB took the initiative to establish the Professional Quality Tourism Services Pledge in July 2023, gathering nearly a hundred representatives and frontline practitioners from tourism-related sectors to pledge on delivering the best experience to visitors. Moreover, HKTB will continue to enhance local service quality and hospitality through the Quality Tourism Services Scheme and organize the Outstanding Quality Tourism Service Merchant and Service Staff Awards to recognize efforts of high performing merchants and frontline practitioners. HKTB, together with the trade, will gradually organize a series of training videos and promotional activities this year and plans to launch new campaigns to mainly promote courtesy and service quality to

consolidate Hong Kong's position as an international tourist destination and to encourage them to provide excellent services to customers. Thank you, President.

MS ELIZABETH QUAT (in Cantonese): *President, to enhance our competitiveness in attracting tourists from both the Mainland and overseas, Hong Kong cannot compete by offering a lower price, we must upgrade our quality and develop Hong Kong into a high-quality tourist destination. In order to provide quality services, there must be sufficient manpower. The Government must provide adequate support and expedite the importation of workers. To provide tourists with unique, novel and unforgettable travel experiences, innovation and change must be promoted in the business sector. Hong Kong must organize more events and activities that integrate tourism with culture, sports, ecology and innovation, and vigorously launch effective publicity in the target markets. President, what strategies does the Government have to accomplish the above tasks?*

SECRETARY FOR CULTURE, SPORTS AND TOURISM (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. As I have pointed out in the main reply, in order to enhance the travel experience of inbound visitors, we have added a number of new attractions, and we have introduced new facilities in various scenic spots or key tourist attractions even during the epidemic period. In addition, we have also provided new cultural facilities to attract visitors who now prefer in-depth travel or exploring the cultural characteristics of Hong Kong. These facilities have been completed one after another.

I have also mentioned in the main reply that in respect of the receiving capacity of the hotel industry, the number of hotel rooms has increased as compared with that before the epidemic. Certainly, I very much agree with Ms QUAT that to enhance our competitiveness, we must provide better services and upgrade the attractiveness of our scenic spots and the level of our services, so that tourists visiting Hong Kong can feel the unique appeal of Hong Kong. We are working in these directions.

Therefore, as I mentioned in the main reply, we will launch more targeted publicity campaigns in the future in response to different visitor source markets. At present, we are working with KOLs and online influencers on social networking

platforms to promote Hong Kong's cultural characteristics and unique and special tourism experiences in different visitor source markets, so that visitors from those places know about them. In the coming one or two years, we will gradually launch more projects to take forward the relevant work. Thank you, President.

MR KENNETH FOK (in Cantonese): *President, both the Secretary and Ms QUAT mentioned that tours integrated with culture and sports would be a major trend in the future. In my opinion, participants of tours integrated with culture and sports are the so-called “high value-added overnight visitors”.*

As far as I know, Paris Pass, London Pass and Tokyo Pass have been introduced in Paris, London and Tokyo respectively, and what does a “pass” mean? It means that tourists can visit many cultural attractions and museums, take buses and other modes of transport, join river cruises, and even enjoy discounts offered by the local business sector by simply purchasing the relevant passes. The arrangement precisely demonstrates the efforts made by these governments in promoting collaboration with the business sector.

Yet, in Hong Kong, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (“LCSD”) has introduced passes for the museums under its management, but I think this is not enough. Can the Government take the lead in promoting the launch of a “Hong Kong Culture Pass” through collaboration between LCSD and various organizations and the business sector, such as the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority and operators of sightseeing buses and the Peak Tram, to attracting high-quality visitors? Thank you, President.

SECRETARY FOR CULTURE, SPORTS AND TOURISM (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. We will consider liaising with different sectors in the community to provide options to facilitate inbound visitors' travel to different destinations.

In the past, HKTB has also liaised with different sectors to provide convenient transport facilities, packages for different scenic spots and hotel packages. Mr FOK mentioned just now that the travel goals of inbound visitors have changed and they would not concentrate solely in certain districts. Some tourists may go to various scenic spots to experience green tourism, others may visit cultural monuments or try out Hong Kong's cuisines, reflecting diverse

interests and preferences of visitors. We may consider liaising with the relevant trades to introduce concessions or passes to facilitate their travel to different places. We can continue to explore this matter with HKTB.

MR LEUNG MAN-KWONG (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. Part (2) of the main question particularly asks about Muslim visitors. According to HKTB's information, spending by Muslim visitors around the world, which include professionals, middle-class people and young travellers, may increase to US\$300 billion in the future. Therefore, it is very important to equip the tourism industry in Hong Kong to welcome this group of visitors with spending potential.*

As I understand it, HKTB has also provided information to the industry, including information on services, tourist attractions, facilities and food available in Hong Kong to support and guide the industry in providing Muslim-friendly services to Muslim visitors, so as to give them a good travel experience and enable them to strike a proper balance between travelling and performing religious rituals. However, it is most important to equip the industry and attract "new blood" to it.

The Muslim community is a very important and large ethnic minority group in Hong Kong. Has HKTB or the Government provided any relevant supporting measures or collaborated with some organizations to attract people from the Muslim community in Hong Kong who are familiar with Muslim customs or characteristics to join the tourism industry, so that we can grasp the opportunities brought about by Muslim visitors in the future? Thank you, President.

SECRETARY FOR CULTURE, SPORTS AND TOURISM (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. We can hold more discussions with the industry in this regard. We need to know and understand things like the living habits and languages of the source countries or regions of our visitors. This is not only true for Muslim tourists, but also inbound tourists from many different countries.

We are also aware that the Muslim regions will be a rather large source market, as mentioned by the Member just now. Therefore, as I have said in the main reply, HKTB has, for some time in the past, made efforts to provide information on Muslim-friendly services available in Hong Kong, such as food, hotel services and tourism activities.

One point I have not mentioned in the main reply is that we have made a lot of efforts to equip the local industry. Muslim visitors have their requirements, and HKTB has done a lot of work in this regard to enable the catering industry in Hong Kong to understand the expectations and requirements of Muslim diners. Through its work, we have been able to identify hotels and restaurants which can provide Muslim-friendly services at present. We will continue with our efforts in this regard.

From Hong Kong's perspective, while the Muslim source market is still relatively new, we are aware of the significant opportunities for future development. We are doing preparatory work within Hong Kong and making publicity efforts externally. We will consider the Member's suggestion to attract more Hong Kong residents with ethnic minority backgrounds to join the tourism industry. We will continue to maintain communication with the industry in this regard.

MR ADRIAN PEDRO HO (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. As there are many travel videos on “Budget travel in Hong Kong” or “Zero-dollar travel” on the Mainland’s media platform Xiaohongshu, some Mainland tourists visiting Hong Kong have followed those tips and opted for day trips to Hong Kong instead of staying overnight. This trend of tourism has undoubtedly dealt a heavy blow to the hotel and retail industries in Hong Kong. Moreover, as some Mainland tourists have commented that hotel room rates have significantly increased their costs of visiting Hong Kong, I hope the Government will introduce measures to prescribe the right remedy to this problem.*

May I ask whether the authorities have considered introducing targeted measures to encourage tourists to extend their stay in Hong Kong, such as adopting the New People’s Party earlier proposal of introducing a pilot scheme on handing out discount coupons to inbound visitors for their spending in Hong Kong? Thank you, President.

SECRETARY FOR CULTURE, SPORTS AND TOURISM (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. Let me clarify some facts first. As I pointed out in the main reply, the percentage of overnight visitors in the total number of visitors is now higher than that before the epidemic, with about 50% of inbound visitors now being overnight visitors, compared to 46% before the outbreak of the epidemic.

In November and December, the average hotel room rate in Hong Kong was about \$1,500, which was similar to the pre-epidemic level.

According to the videos of Xiaohongshu, people hold different views on whether the rates are high or low, and whether or not they will stay overnight is a personal choice. We must clearly discern the facts so that we can have a clear direction in formulating the corresponding measures in the future.

Nowadays, exchange and integration between Hong Kong and the Mainland have become increasingly close. Many Hong Kong residents visiting the Mainland do not stay overnight either. They may just go to the Mainland to have meals or visit some places before returning to Hong Kong. This is also the case for Mainland visitors, be they from Shenzhen or Guangzhou, who may choose not to stay overnight after coming to Hong Kong because the existing transport facilities are really very convenient. Going to Hong Kong to enjoy a meal in one of its local cafes before returning to the Mainland is also an option for them.

While tourism can certainly promote the economic development of Hong Kong, it also serves to enhance mutual understanding, communication and appreciation between residents of the Mainland and Hong Kong, fostering a deeper understanding of cultural differences or other aspects. From the perspective of economic benefits, we indeed welcome overnight visitors more; thus, we have introduced measures and organized large-scale events to attract visitors to stay for a few more days.

Regarding the suggestions put forth by Members just now, including offering special concessions to overnight visitors, we are open to them as part of the comprehensive measures being formulated to attract overnight visitors. However, we also need to discuss the relevant concessionary arrangements with the business sector because the Government cannot provide subsidies on a long-term basis. It will be most desirable if the business sector recognize the value that our measures can bring to their operations, then it will be easier for them to join hands with various sectors (such as the hotel and catering industries) to offer more concessions to attract overnight visitors. Thank you, President.

MR STANLEY NG (in Cantonese): *President, a number of Members are very concerned ...*

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr Stanley NG, please clip the microphone onto your collar.

MR STANLEY NG (in Cantonese): *President, a number of Members are very concerned about how to attract more visitors to Hong Kong. The supplementary question I wish to raise here is: Will the Government hold further discussions with relevant authorities of the country on how to attract more Mainland visitors to Hong Kong? For example, is it possible to extend “multiple-entry” endorsements to cover the entire Greater Bay Area and simultaneously increase the duty-free allowance for Mainland visitors from RMB30,000 to RMB50,000? This proposal is made with reference to the Mainland’s arrangement of granting an annual duty-free allowance of RMB100,000 to visitors of Hainan.*

In addition, we can actually levy ...

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr Stanley NG, you have already raised two questions. Please sit down.

MR STANLEY NG (in Cantonese): *... that is a comprehensive question, for example ...*

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr Stanley NG, it will take more than two days if we are to discuss tourism comprehensively. Please sit down.

Secretary, please reply.

SECRETARY FOR CULTURE, SPORTS AND TOURISM (in Cantonese): Thank you, President, and I would also like to thank the Member for his supplementary question. I have explained in the main reply that we have been discussing with the relevant Mainland authorities how to optimize IVS. IVS comprises different modes, such as “one trip per week” endorsements and “multiple-entry” endorsements, and at present, the scheme only covers 49 designated Mainland cities.

Regarding the proposals put forward by the Member, including adjusting the duty-free allowance, we are now exploring them. We will discuss with the relevant Mainland authorities at an appropriate time to facilitate Mainland visitors' travel to Hong Kong so as to increase our overall visitor arrivals. Thank you, President.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Fifth question.

Implementation of contactless clearance

5. **MR YIM KONG** (in Cantonese): *It is learnt that contactless clearance adopts biometric technologies such as facial recognition for automated clearance verification. There are views that apart from enhancing clearance efficiency, expediting the implementation of contactless clearance which goes without gate checking formalities at various immigration control points in Hong Kong also helps to actively dovetail with the National 14th Five-Year Plan to promote Hong Kong's development into an international innovation and technology centre. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *as the Government has indicated in the new Policy Address that it will study with the Shenzhen Municipal Government the use of facial recognition technology to achieve contactless clearance, so as to provide travel convenience for scientific research personnel at the Hetao Shenzhen-Hong Kong Science and Technology Innovation Co-operation Zone, of the latest implementation progress and timetable of the Parks concerned, as well as the specific arrangements relating to contactless clearance (including whether the relevant arrangements will be implemented this year to expedite the cooperation between Shenzhen and Hong Kong in innovation and technology);*
- (2) *whether it has discussed with the Shenzhen authorities the implementation of contactless clearance at the redeveloped Huanggang Port; if so, of the specific arrangements; if not, the reasons for that; and*

- (3) *given that eligible Hong Kong residents who have enrolled can go through self-service immigration clearance formalities in the “Contactless e-Channels” set up at various immigration control points with the use of the relevant QR codes and facial recognition technology, whether the Government has reviewed the security and reliability of the relevant service; if it has reviewed and the outcome is in the affirmative, whether the Government will proactively consider implementing contactless clearance which goes without gate checking formalities at various immigration control points (including the airport) as a next step?*

SECRETARY FOR SECURITY (in Cantonese): President, the Immigration Department (“ImmD”) has been utilizing technologies to enhance the handling capacity of the ports. Back in December 2004, ImmD has already introduced the automated clearance system (“e-Channel”) service, which uses identification documents and fingerprints for identity authentication.

In order to provide more convenient automated clearance services, ImmD also launched the “Contactless e-Channel” at various ports in December 2021. Citizens can use the “iAM Smart” mobile application to verify their identity and complete their registration through ImmD’s “Contactless e-Channel” mobile application. Registered Hong Kong residents do not need to present their identification documents when using the “Contactless e-Channel”. They only need to scan the encrypted QR code displayed on the mobile application for the system to read their personal data before entering the e-Channels. Facial recognition technology is used to compare the read personal data to confirm their identities. The immigration clearance will then be completed and they can pass through the gate to leave. The entire process only takes about seven seconds, which is 13% faster than the eight seconds required by traditional e-Channels, and has further enhanced the efficiency of port clearance, providing passengers with more convenient immigration service.

As for contactless clearance, it generally refers to the clearance process which does not require presentation of any identification documents (including relevant QR codes) but by directly using facial recognition to verify the users’ identities against the database. Since this technology requires real-time comparison against all data in the database, to ensure immigration clearance

efficiency, at this stage we believe that contactless clearance is technically more suitable for ports serving specific groups of pre-verified individuals below the population of 100 000.

Currently, ImmD already has an example of implementing contactless clearance. Starting from October 2022, the Hong Kong International Airport has put in place the Flight Token service. Passengers only need to show their faces for identity verification during the check-in procedure in order to store their personal data in the database for comparison purpose. Thereafter, for subsequent procedures in the airport including departure and boarding, it is only necessary to use facial recognition for identity verification, instead of repeated presentation of travel documents and boarding passes. During departure, eligible Hong Kong residents only need to scan their faces at ImmD's Flight Token contactless e-Channel cameras to complete departure clearance without the need to present any identification documents nor QR codes, thereby achieving contactless clearance.

My reply to the Member's question is as follows:

- (1) The Hetao Shenzhen-Hong Kong Science and Technology Innovation Co-operation Zone ("Co-operation Zone") locates at the convergence point of the Northern Metropolis and the Guangzhou-Shenzhen innovation and technology corridor, which consists of the 87-hectare Hong Kong Park (i.e. Hong Kong-Shenzhen Innovation and Technology Park) and the 300-hectare Shenzhen Park. The first three buildings of the first phase of the Hong Kong Park will be completed gradually from the end of 2024 as planned.

The Co-operation Zone will operate under the mode of "one zone, two parks", with research personnel going to work early and returning home late between the two places every day. As such, it is necessary to provide convenient clearance mode and facilities to allow designated personnel to enjoy travel convenience by, for example, enabling those who have pre-registered under the system to enjoy streamlined travel between the two parks, and adopting technology to facilitate faster movement. In addition, to facilitate innovation and technology ("I&T") personnel travelling frequently between the two sides every day, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government and the Shenzhen Municipal Government are exploring

the construction of cross-river footbridge between the two parks but details such as exact location, clearance mode and construction timetable are subject to discussion between the two Governments.

To facilitate the travel of I&T personnel between the two places, the Security Bureau will collaborate with the Mainland authorities concerned to actively explore an innovative clearance mode which will allow designated personnel of both places to go through immigration clearance by using a cross-river footbridge. Our target is to allow I&T personnel of both sides who have pre-verified their eligibility to use facial recognition technology to verify their identities, thereby achieving contactless clearance.

- (2) The Governments of Hong Kong and Shenzhen are currently pressing ahead with the redevelopment of the Huanggang Port in full steam, including actively studying the implementation of the user-friendly clearance mode of “collaborative inspection and joint clearance” in the new Huanggang Port.

Under this clearance mode, automatic channels/counters of both sides will be set up side by side within their respective jurisdiction at the boundary inside the port, such that outbound and inbound visitors only need to queue up to have their documents inspected and their identities verified once to pass through the immigration facilities of both sides in order to complete the respective immigration procedures, which is highly convenient.

At present, the two Governments have reached preliminary consensus on implementing the “collaborative inspection and joint clearance” mode at the new Huanggang Port and are discussing the operational details in depth. Taking Hong Kong residents holding Mainland Travel Permits for Hong Kong and Macao Residents as an example, if they wish to use the collaborative inspection automatic channels, they will need to pre-register and already authorized the immigration departments of both Hong Kong and Shenzhen for the collection, holding, processing or use of their personal data (including travel document numbers, facial features and fingerprint information). During the clearance process for pre-registered Hong Kong residents, the immigration departments of Hong Kong and Shenzhen will only

compare the read document data with their respective databases and there is no data sharing involved. For those who do not wish to use the collaborative inspection service, they can still choose other clearance channels such as traditional manual inspection channels.

Since the new Huanggang Port is expected to be a high-volume port that can be used by all residents and visitors from Hong Kong and Shenzhen, with the number of people who can use the port far exceeding 100 000, we are currently not considering implementing contactless clearance at the port.

- (3) As contactless clearance is suitable for ports serving specific groups of individuals with pre-verified eligibility, we believe that it is not suitable for ports serving general passengers at this stage. As for the airport, we believe that the current gateway design of the Flight Token contactless e-Channels is conducive to immigration control by facilitating the interception and handling of individual cases (such as wanted persons), and hence is necessary for security purpose. If the gateways are not in place, it will not only pose certain difficulties in interception, but also hinder the smooth operations and maintenance of order of the clearance channels. We therefore will not consider the option at this stage.

ImmD will review the use of immigration facilities and system operation from time to time, and continue to apply innovative technologies to immigration control with a view to providing services with enhanced convenience and quality. Thank you, President.

MR YIM KONG (in Cantonese): *President, given that contactless clearance cannot be achieved at present, serious overcrowding occurred at immigration control points during certain periods of time, such as the stranding of travellers on New Year's Eve last year. Will the Government negotiate and agree with the relevant Mainland authorities to implement 24-hour clearance at major land boundary control points during the peak cross-boundary traffic periods of the Lunar New Year this year? Thank you.*

SECRETARY FOR SECURITY (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. The relevant situation occurred at Lok Ma Chau in the early hours of New Year's Day

this year because around 26 000 people were leaving Hong Kong for the Mainland via the Lok Ma Chau Control Point at that time, and the number was five times that of a normal weekend. As for vehicles, about 1 570 vehicles passed through that control point, and most of them (that is, 90%) passed through during the peak hours from 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm, which was in fact more than three times when compared with that on normal days. Congestion did occur as the traffic flow on that day exceeded the capacity of the control point in question. Similarly, the situation also happened when the vehicles reached Shenzhen.

In view of this, we have been actively discussing with the relevant Shenzhen authorities and are actively considering extending the service hours of some control points (for example those with railway connections) during the coming Lunar New Year, and may also extend the service hours of the Mass Transit Railway. We are also actively considering the implementation of 24-hour vehicle clearance at those control points where vehicle clearance is available, in the hope of avoiding congestion similar to that on New Year's Day. Thank you, President.

MR CHAN PUI-LEUNG (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. I would like to ask if contactless clearance is applied to most of the gates, in case these contactless clearance gates fail, will there be any contingency plan to ensure that there will be sufficient counters to handle cross-boundary travellers?*

SECRETARY FOR SECURITY (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. In fact, if there are problems with contactless clearance, we can first consider switching to "Contactless e-Channels" or traditional e-Channels, or even to traditional counters. We have also put in place contingency measures which will be adopted in the event of emergencies. Of course, some control points have more traditional manned counters while some have fewer, and currently on average at least 60% of the counters are manned ones. Therefore, we believe we are capable of handling exceptional circumstances. Thank you, President.

MS CARMEN KAN (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. President, I am pleased to note that the authorities have confirmed in part (1) of the main reply that the Co-operation Zone will operate under the mode of "one zone, two parks", which requires convenient clearance mode and facilities. The authorities also plan to allow I&T personnel of both sides who have pre-verified their eligibility to*

use facial recognition technology to verify their identities, thereby achieving convenient contactless clearance.

President, the keyword is “convenient”. Given that the three buildings to be completed first in the Hong Kong Park and the remaining five buildings, the completion dates of which are not known for the time being, are all located in the west, will the Bureau propose, in its discussion with the relevant Mainland authorities, that the bridge concerned be located in the west to facilitate the travel of scientific researchers, who go to work early and return home late, between Shenzhen and Hong Kong by means of contactless clearance?

SECRETARY FOR SECURITY (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. In fact, we are still discussing with the Shenzhen authorities whether the bridge should be located in the east or the west. We will take various factors into account, such as which area will have a higher flow of people and the situation of the area concerned. We will take heed of the suggestion made by Ms KAN and reflect it in the discussion, in the hope of making the most convenient arrangement for both sides. Thank you, President.

DR HOEY SIMON LEE (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. I am glad to see that we already have some relevant experience such as the Flight Token service. I would like to know whether this clearance technology with the use of QR codes can be directly transitioned to facial recognition technology. What is the comparison between the two technologies? Are there any technical barriers for such transition? If so, in what areas do these barriers exist, and how can they be overcome? Thank you.*

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Which public officer will give a reply? Secretary for Security, please reply.

SECRETARY FOR SECURITY (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. In fact, regarding the existing “Contactless e-Channels” technology, generally speaking, when a traveller presents a QR code, our machine will retrieve the facial information of the traveller after reading the QR code. When the traveller goes through clearance, the machine will make use of his or her face for comparison.

As for contactless clearance, as I just mentioned, when a traveller passes through the machine, the machine will compare the traveller's facial features against the database directly.

Therefore, if our database becomes overloaded with a large amount of data, for example, if all travellers in Hong Kong are allowed to use contactless clearance, it will result in low efficiency due to excessive data stored in the database, which is undesirable. So, we will only allow specific groups of pre-registered individuals to use the contactless clearance technology, which will be equally convenient.

In fact, regarding “Contactless e-Channels” and contactless clearance mentioned by the Member just now, the technologies adopted are theoretically similar but the major difference lies in whether or not pre-registration is required. Therefore, I think this is the main issue given that the technologies are more or less the same. Thank you, President.

DR JOHNNY NG (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. Contactless clearance mainly makes use of facial recognition technology to identify people, but facial recognition technology itself has limitations, for example, it is unable to identify twins or people with extremely similar facial features.*

May I ask whether the authorities will study the use of multi-biometrics or iris recognition technology to enhance the level of the relevant technology, so as to serve more people instead of just the registered ones? Thank you, President.

SECRETARY FOR SECURITY (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. Regarding the accuracy of facial recognition technology, the current minimum benchmark is 99.71%. This is the lowest benchmark, and we of course have not only met but also surpassed it. Therefore, under normal circumstances, including instances where travellers are wearing make-up, there will not be any problems.

In addition, some asked whether a person who has undergone plastic surgery will be able to pass through the gate. If I look like the President after plastic surgery, I surely will not be able to pass through the gate. But there is no need for us to worry about this. Why? It is because if the machine fails to verify the

identity of a traveller, the gate will not open, and our colleagues will handle the case separately to ensure that those who should not be allowed passage will not be released.

With regard to twins as mentioned by the Member just now, as I said earlier, pre-registration is required for contactless clearance. If we find in the pre-registration system that two persons look so similar that they cannot be distinguished from each other, the gate will not open when they leave the control point. Our colleagues will conduct individual verification by fingerprints or other means.

In some very extreme cases, such as twins or two people who look exactly the same, if only one of them has registered, the system will not be able to make comparison to confirm their identities. In such an extreme case, it is like a person who goes through clearance has a face exactly the same as that of another one, and no one is able to tell the difference after that person has produced his or her identity card. In fact, risk will not be increased with the adoption of contactless clearance, but this is a rather extreme situation. Thank you, President.

DR CHOW MAN-KONG (in Cantonese): *President, it is certainly desirable to use facial recognition technology, but we can see from the current application of “Contactless e-Channels” that while there is a full coverage at the West Kowloon Station of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link, only about one fifth of the Hong Kong inspection area at the Futian Control Point is covered.*

In fact, many members of the public have to queue up before reaching the “Contactless e-Channels” gates and get stuck there, thus slowing down the entire clearance process. In this connection, will the authorities consider arranging security guards to direct travellers about one to two hundred metres ahead of the “Contactless e-Channels” gates, or expeditiously upgrading the old control points in which “Contactless e-Channels” have not yet been installed, for example, by installing all-in-one devices that can support all modes of customs clearance, so as to expedite the entire clearance process? Thank you, President.

SECRETARY FOR SECURITY (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. We will carry out the relevant work to progressively upgrade the traditional e-Channels

to “Contactless e-Channels”. In addition, we will review the need to notify the public in advance. If deemed necessary, I think this is also something we should do. Thank you, President.

MR YIU PAK-LEUNG (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. President, I know that the Government has been actively engaged in discussions with the Shenzhen authorities, exploring ways to further optimize various customs clearance measures and the operations of the control points.*

The Secretary is aware that I have all along been very concerned about the opening up of Sha Tau Kok and now the second phase of the opening up has already been carried out. We can all see that the development of Sha Tau Kok has boosted the attractiveness of the place. For tourists, access to Chung Ying Street is after all the best selling point. Will the Bureau consider adopting contactless clearance there? Of course, I understand that the place is not a control point, but it involves cross-boundary issues. Can we make a breakthrough of this deadlock by making use of these technological modes, so that we the tourism sector can visit there by adopting the mode of “arriving and leaving in a group”? It is fine even if visitors have to register in advance as long as they can enter Chung Ying Street for visits and experiences. Regarding the future overall development of the Mirs Bay, Sha Tau Kok, Yan Chau Tong and the surrounding area, it is necessary for us to expeditiously make a breakthrough in this regard if we want to develop it into a world-class cross-boundary experiential tourism zone. Thank you.

SECRETARY FOR SECURITY (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. Whether or not to open up Chung Ying Street involves security and policy considerations, while the adoption of contactless clearance technology is a separate issue.

We have not considered opening up Chung Ying Street at the present stage because Chung Ying Street truly belongs to the boundary area. One who enters Chung Ying Street will cross the boundary to the other side. That is why we have to maintain the integrity of our boundary and cannot open up Chung Ying Street to all visitors at this stage.

As for contactless clearance, our current practice is in fact that certain authorized persons, such as those residing in the Hong Kong side of Sha Tau Kok

but working in the Mainland side of Sha Tau Kok, are issued with identification documents, so that they can enter the Mainland via Chung Ying Street in Hong Kong.

At present, we check the identification documents by traditional manual means. We do hope that by the third quarter of this year, we will be able to implement contactless clearance, so that authorized persons can make use of such technology to enter and leave Chung Ying Street more conveniently. Thank you, President.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Last question seeking an oral reply.

Measures to cope with the peak period of respiratory tract infections

6. **MR KENNETH LEUNG** (in Cantonese): *President, it has been reported that the number of respiratory tract infection cases has been on the rise in recent months. Apart from the commonly seen influenza virus and novel coronavirus infection cases, the numbers of rhinovirus, Mycoplasma pneumoniae, adenovirus and respiratory syncytial virus infection cases have also increased. Some patients have even been infected with three to four viruses at the same time, and such a situation has particularly posed a threat to the health of children and the elderly. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *of the activity levels of various types of respiratory tract viruses, the number of outbreaks of respiratory tract infections reported by schools and residential care homes and the number of persons infected, and the number of admissions to public hospitals due to respiratory tract infections, in each of the past six months;*
- (2) *as it is learnt that as at the 1st of this month, the seasonal influenza vaccination uptake rates in the two groups of children aged six months to under six and persons aged 65 or above still did not reach 50%, what measures the authorities have in place to step up promotion among these groups, and whether they will set vaccination targets to reduce the impact of outbreaks of seasonal influenza; and*

- (3) *as there are views that respiratory tract infections enter a peak period from February to March every year and, with the Lunar New Year holidays falling in February this year, the risk of respiratory tract infection will increase, whether the Health Bureau has issued guidelines to other policy bureaux and government departments to assist them in preventing a large scale outbreak of respiratory tract infections on the front of public disease prevention and coping with the relevant situation? Thank you, President.*

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH (in Cantonese): President, Hong Kong has entered the first winter after the lifting of mandatory mask-wearing requirements. Although this winter is not very cold, various respiratory infectious diseases start to show a rising trend. The Centre for Health Protection (“CHP”) of the Department of Health (“DH”) also announced on 11 January this year that Hong Kong had entered the influenza season, which was expected to last for 8 to 12 weeks, in addition to the possible transmission of influenza and COVID-19 at the same time. DH, the Hospital Authority (“HA”) and the Primary Healthcare Office have prepared and implemented specific measures for the prevention and control of respiratory infectious diseases. This was also reported to the Panel on Health Services of the Legislative Council in October last year. CHP and HA held three press conferences in the past two months to appeal to the public and heighten their vigilance.

While the Health Bureau (“HKB”) and the healthcare sector are steering the prevention and control of diseases, the whole society must also join hands in response. As prevention is better than cure, we should prevent fires rather than putting them out after an outbreak. Vaccination is an important firewall. In particular, I appeal to those who have not yet received influenza vaccination to do so as soon as possible, and high-risk groups should receive a booster dose of the COVID-19 vaccine at appropriate times. All COVID-19 vaccines currently available, including the inactivated (i.e. Sinovac vaccine), mRNA ancestral strain or bivalent, and XBB vaccines, which will be extended to cover all high-risk priority groups tomorrow (18 January), are effective in preventing severe illnesses and death.

Members of the public should also maintain good personal and environmental hygiene. When going out to crowded places, individuals who are at high risk or developing symptoms in particular should wear a surgical mask. Those developing symptoms should even consider staying at home and seeking medical treatment as appropriate. As residential care home (“RCH”) residents belong to the high-risk group, the Government has all along been advising staff members and visitors of RCHs to continue to wear surgical masks. Such guidelines are still effective and have been complied with by RCHs. Patients, visitors and staff members are also required to wear a surgical mask in the patient care areas of public healthcare institutions.

My consolidated reply to the questions raised by Mr LEUNG is as follows:

(1) Statistics

CHP has all along been closely monitoring the situation of local respiratory infectious diseases. The activity of various respiratory infections in Hong Kong varied in the past six months. The activity level of COVID-19 started to rise from a low base in mid-December. As regards seasonal influenza, we went through the active summer influenza season from August to October last year. In spite of returning to a low level, influenza started to edge higher in early December. The activity level of COVID-19 and seasonal influenza, outbreaks of respiratory tract infections in schools and RCHs, and the number of weekly hospital admissions for respiratory tract infections over the past six months are set out in Annex 1 to Annex 3 respectively.

(2) Vaccination

Since the launch of the 2023-2024 seasonal influenza vaccination (“SIV”) programmes, over 1.73 million doses of SIV have been administered so far, representing an increase of over 20% compared to the same period last year. A significant increase in SIV uptake rate among high-risk groups, especially the elderly and children, is observed compared to previous years. 80% of the residents in RCHs for the elderly have already received SIV. The vaccination rate of the elderly in the community has reached nearly 50% while that of children is over 50%. The number of doses received increases by approximately 40% compared to the last season.

Apart from that, the Government has already implemented targeted measures for the high-risk groups:

- For children, CHP has sought assistance from the Education Bureau, parent-teacher associations and district-based school associations in encouraging more schools to participate in school outreach vaccination. It has also reached out to schools that have not yet enrolled to provide targeted assistance.
- As for the elderly living in the community, the Visiting Health Teams of DH have been promoting the prevention of influenza and COVID-19 to elderly individuals and their carers. There are 14 designated Elderly Health Centres providing SIV for members and all elderly individuals aged 65 or above.
- As regards residents of RCHs for the elderly and RCHs for persons with disabilities, DH has adopted an opt-out approach for its outreach vaccination for those residents. The Social Welfare Department has also urged RCHs to proactively arrange vaccination by visiting medical officers to ensure timely vaccination of residents. In addition, CHP launched a new round of the outreach vaccination service special programme for RCHs in December last year to offer door-to-door vaccination.

Besides, the District Health Centres (“DHCs”) have held over 200 events since October last year to promote vaccination, providing members of the public with information on the list of private doctors enrolled in the Vaccination Subsidy Scheme, assisting the public with vaccination booking, and providing SIV at the centres in collaboration with private doctors.

As for target vaccination rate, the relevant Scientific Committee has not set a specific target on the SIV rate. Nevertheless, it is understood that a higher vaccination rate among high-risk groups can offer better protection against severe cases of influenza. We observed a significant increase of over 20% in the uptake rate under this year’s SIV programmes compared with that of the same period last year. The Government will keep up with its active promotion efforts.

(3) Prevention and Control

CHP has been working with various government departments and stakeholders to enhance preventive and control measures against respiratory infectious diseases. Relevant measures include:

- (i) formulating health guidelines on the prevention of and responses to seasonal influenza, COVID-19, etc. for the reference of various sectors including schools, RCHs, employers and employees;
- (ii) issuing guidelines on the prevention of influenza and COVID-19 in RCHs for the elderly and RCHs for persons with disabilities in November last year;
- (iii) issuing letters to schools, RCHs, healthcare institutions, etc. at the end of last year to remind them to take preventive measures and report outbreaks for prompt epidemiological investigation;
- (iv) holding three press conferences to appeal to the public and heighten their vigilance; and
- (v) disseminating the latest information on the prevention of and responses to respiratory infectious diseases to the public through other departments, such as conveying the information to the District Councils and stakeholders, including the District Services and Community Care Teams.

In addition, HA has formulated a phasic response plan, and it will review the service demand and deploy manpower and resources in response, including providing comprehensive respiratory panel testing for paediatric patients, conducting COVID-19 admission screening for patients with higher risks, as well as ensuring an adequate stock of antiviral drugs.

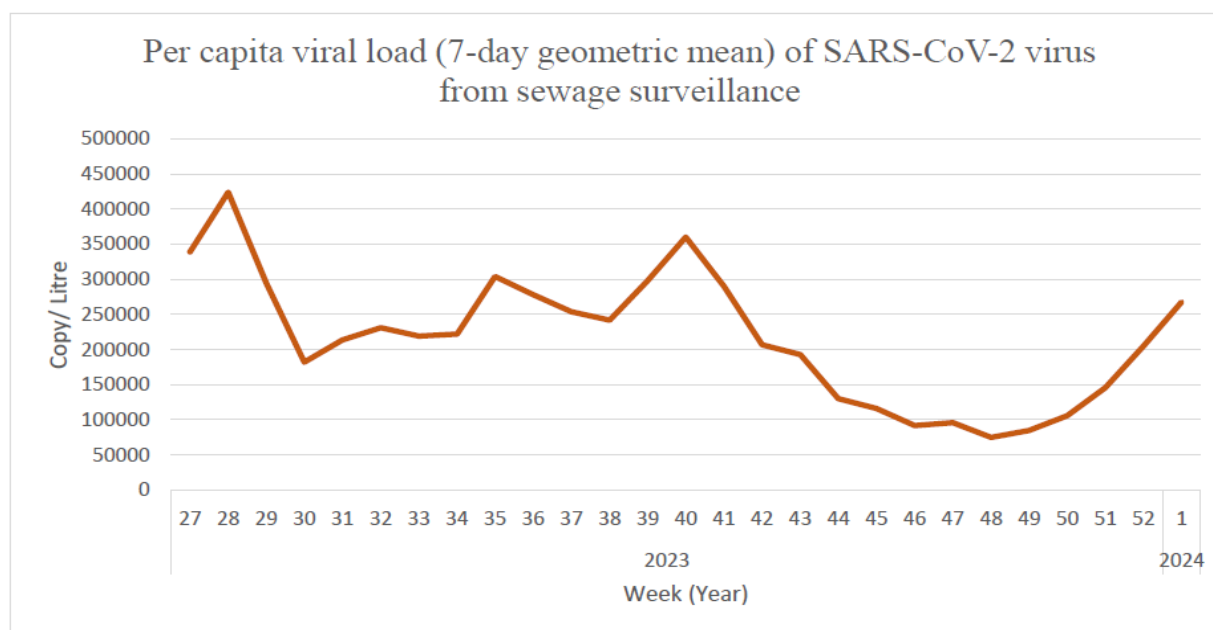
In response to the peak season of respiratory infectious diseases, HHB and the healthcare sector have been strenuously steering the prevention and control of diseases. The public should strengthen personal protection and take on primary responsibility for their own health. Thank you, President.

Activity Level of COVID-19 and Seasonal Influenza

COVID-19

The activity level of COVID-19 showed a declining trend from July to November last year. The weekly positive rate of respiratory specimens collected by the Government dropped from 11.67% in July to less than 2% in November. The rate started to rise in mid-December and stood at 6.8% as at 6 January this year. A similar trend was also observed from sewage surveillance (see the following graph for details).

Per capita viral load of SARS-CoV-2 virus from sewage surveillance
(from July 2023 to 6 January 2024)



Seasonal Influenza

The activity level of seasonal influenza increased since July last year, and the active summer influenza season lasted from August to October. It remained at a low level in November and edged higher in early December. As at the week ending 6 January this year, the influenza admission rate in public hospitals rose to 0.68 per 10 000 population, and the percentage of positive respiratory specimens collected surged to 11.77%, both above the baseline thresholds, indicating that the winter influenza season has started.

Annex 2

Reported Outbreaks of COVID-19, Influenza-like Illness and
Upper Respiratory Tract Infections in Schools and Residential Care Homes
in the Past Six Months¹

Month	Type of outbreak	COVID-19	Influenza-like Illness	Other upper respiratory tract infections
July	Weekly record of outbreaks	1-8	5-8	4-14
	No. of persons affected per week	4-89	40-70	28-96
August	Weekly record of outbreaks	1-4	6-10	6-14
	No. of persons affected per week	6-68	30-71	62-135
September	Weekly record of outbreaks	4-12	5-91	7-74
	No. of persons affected per week	26-146	31-621	44-778
October	Weekly record of outbreaks	4-9	23-42	13-32
	No. of persons affected per week	36-80	123-234	110-238
November	Weekly record of outbreaks	1-3	9-23	19-36
	No. of persons affected per week	3-25	43-149	148-303
December	Weekly record of outbreaks	1-5	1-14	4-29
	No. of persons affected per week	5-34	11-85	22-206
Total no. of outbreaks (Total no. of persons affected)		109 (1 098)	535 (3 429)	556 (4 452)

Annex 3

Number of Weekly Admissions with Respiratory Tract Infections
in the Past Six Months^(Note 1)
(Provisional Figures)

Year	Month	Week	No. of admissions with principal diagnosis as influenza-like illness syndrome group ^(Note 2)	No. of admissions with COVID-19 ^(Note 3)
2023	July	27th week	2 195	831
		28th week	2 305	728
		29th week	2 223	613
		30th week	2 345	473
		31st week	2 099	380
	August	32nd week	2 183	413
		33rd week	2 250	450

¹ From 2 July to 30 December 2023.

Year	Month	Week	No. of admissions with principal diagnosis as influenza-like illness syndrome group ^(Note 2)	No. of admissions with COVID-19 ^(Note 3)
		34th week	2 287	590
		35th week	2 332	622
	September	36th week	2 454	624
		37th week	2 513	603
		38th week	2 622	652
		39th week	2 926	722
		40th week	2 736	741
	October	41st week	2 246	569
		42nd week	2 222	382
		43rd week	2 129	283
		44th week	2 113	223
		45th week	2 130	159
	November	46th week	1 949	133
		47th week	2 249	114
		48th week	2 396	112
		49th week	2 293	102
	December	50th week	2 401	117
		51st week	2 013	161
52nd week		2 559	323	

Note 1: From 2 July to 31 December 2023.

Note 2: This syndrome group includes diagnosis codes related to influenza-like illnesses such as influenza, upper respiratory tract infection, fever, cough, throat pain and pneumonia.

Note 3: For cases with a positive SARS-CoV-2 result, if they are admitted to public hospitals within 28 days of the first positive specimen collection day, the cases will be regarded as hospital admissions with COVID-19. The underlying cause of hospital admission may be unrelated to COVID-19.

MR KENNETH LEUNG (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. During the peak season of respiratory infection diseases, it is particularly important to protect groups with low immunity, especially the elderly and children. May I ask the Government: Regarding outbreaks in the community (especially in schools and RCHs), does it have any plan to formulate specific mechanisms in advance, such as arrangements for class suspension in schools or isolation of infected RCH residents during the peak period of outbreaks? Will testing reagents be provided to those schools or RCHs so as to facilitate their response? In addition, will members of the public be required to wear masks during large-scale activities, group gatherings or on public transport?*

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH (in Cantonese): We have now entered a new mode of epidemic prevention and control. Influenza, like other respiratory diseases, is seasonal in nature with peaks in summer and winter every year. As for COVID-19, we have adopted similar preventive and control measures.

Regarding class suspension in schools, we will coordinate with various Policy Bureaux and issue guidelines as appropriate in light of the development of the epidemic and the infections. We do not have any plan to conduct inspections or screenings in RCHs or schools at this stage. Thank you, President.

MR CHAN KIN-POR (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. According to my personal experience, I become healthier after vaccination and seldom catch the flu. Whenever I show symptoms, I can easily recover by taking one or two doses of Chinese medicine. However, as seen from the main reply, the vaccination rate of the elderly in the community is still below 50%.*

May I ask whether the Government will adopt any new methods to boost the vaccination rate in this regard? Will it call for people to persuade or bring along their elderly parents to receive vaccination?

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH (in Cantonese): The low vaccination rate among the elderly in the community has been our concern since the COVID-19 epidemic. We have some relatively effective ways to encourage elderly people living in RCHs to get vaccinated, but they can refuse to do so. As for promoting vaccination among the elderly in the community, more education work needs to be done, and we hope to target their carers in particular. Currently, we are taking forward publicity efforts through various channels (including DHCs) while providing convenience for elderly people to receive vaccination.

As for influenza vaccination, it is currently available at many DHCs and private medical institutions under the relevant subsidy scheme, which is already quite easily accessible.

MS CHAN HOI-YAN (in Cantonese): *President, let us take a look at the situation in the Mainland over the past few months. Mixed infections of bacteria,*

Mycoplasma and viruses were observed in various places; some schools even needed to suspend their classes. Treatment has become more difficult.

From the figures provided by the Secretary in his main reply, we can see that the coverage rate of the influenza vaccine has increased; however, according to the press release issued by the Government on 4 January, the uptake rate of the COVID-19 vaccine remained relatively low. As the Secretary has just said, for the preventive measures to be effective, not only does the coverage rate of influenza vaccination have to be high, but the coverage rate of COVID-19 vaccination must also be high. Among children aged six months to less than three years, only 30% of them have received at least one dose of the vaccine, and for the elderly aged over 80, only 25% received the fourth dose.

In this connection, I would like to ask the Secretary: Given the low uptake rate of the COVID-19 vaccine among children, can we adopt the same school outreach arrangement for COVID-19 vaccination as we do for influenza vaccination? It will significantly raise the coverage rate. Apart from that, since experts have confirmed that the two vaccines can be co-administered, can school outreach vaccination for children not be limited to the influenza vaccine, but combined with the COVID-19 vaccine? And can parents also receive vaccination at the schools at the same time? Thank you.

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. I thank Ms CHAN for her supplementary question. The vaccination rates can be compared in various ways.

First, when we look at the vaccination status of the COVID-19 vaccine and the influenza vaccine in Hong Kong, the overall annual uptake rate of the former is much higher than that of the latter. The current effective vaccination rate of the COVID-19 vaccine (including previous infections) has already reached 95% of the overall Hong Kong population, which is higher than that of the influenza vaccine.

When we say that the vaccination rate is low, it only refers to certain groups of people. I fully agree with Ms CHAN, and we are equally concerned about certain high-risk groups, especially the elderly. As Mr CHAN Kin-por has already mentioned, the vaccination rate of the elderly in the community is relatively low. Not only is this phenomenon observed during the epidemic but also at present in terms of influenza vaccination. That being said, the uptake rate of the

COVID-19 vaccine has already outpaced that of the influenza vaccine in comparison. And when we look at influenza vaccination alone, there has been some progress compared to the previous year.

As I have just said, we have not set any target on the influenza vaccination rate. In fact, our target is to always do better. Since vaccination serves as a firewall, the higher the uptake rate among the population or in the community, the more effective we can be in preventing severe infections or large-scale outbreaks.

As regards the provision of vaccination services in schools for children, as mentioned by the Member, the service is already available. We offer school outreach vaccination by deploying healthcare staff to provide the services on campus. The vaccination rate of children this year has significantly increased compared to the previous year. However, the vaccination rate of specific groups, especially children under six and those in their teens, has not yet reached 50%. We will continue our efforts in this regard. In particular, we will encourage schools that have not registered for the outreach vaccination services to take part. Thank you, President.

MS LAM SO-WAI (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President and Secretary. It has been reported in the press that recently, many places in Europe have been hit by three types of respiratory infectious diseases, namely the influenza virus, novel coronavirus and respiratory syncytial virus (“RSV”). In the last two weeks of 2023, about 2 million people in Italy were infected with these viruses, bringing the healthcare system to the brink of collapse. Furthermore, the number of infections in Germany, Spain, and other countries has been surging. The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control predicts that there will be more infections this winter than last year. So, what should we do in Hong Kong?*

President, as the Lunar New Year is fast approaching, citizens travelling abroad may bring viruses from other parts of the world back to Hong Kong at any time. President, as mentioned by the Secretary in his main reply, HA has formulated a phasic response plan and will continue to review the service demand and duly deploy manpower and resources in response. In fact, I have repeatedly pointed out that the Accident and Emergency (“A&E”) Departments of public hospitals under HA are overwhelmed day after day. Staff members have asked me, “What should we do, Ms LAM?” Frontline staff want to stay on duty but are so stressed that they almost quit. Nurses, frontline staff, PCAs (patient care

assistants) and doctors are all in great distress. May I ask the Secretary how the A&E services will be arranged? What about the charges for A&E services? Thank you, President.

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. We are certainly aware of the global trend of influenza and other respiratory infectious diseases (including COVID-19), as well as the outbreaks in various places in Europe. Because of this, we keep emphasizing and appealing to the public to take proper preventive and control measures. Let me reiterate: Prevention is better than cure. We should prevent fires rather than putting them out after an outbreak. There is still much room for improvement in terms of vaccination.

Members have mentioned that the outbreaks of various diseases have brought the healthcare system to the brink of collapse. Wisdom comes from experience. Although the COVID-19 epidemic is painful to recall, we will never forget the lessons learnt from it. We will do our best on all fronts in response to the situation, and HA has repeatedly committed to implementing various measures. I would like to make an appeal here. As Ms LAM So-wai has mentioned, many citizens may travel abroad or attend group gatherings in the coming period. I would like to remind the public to get vaccinated before enjoying their holidays. Moreover, people should always take personal protective measures, whether travelling abroad or attending gatherings.

Lastly, I am also happy to discuss the issue of A&E services raised by Ms LAM. First, patients with mild symptoms, that is, minor respiratory tract infections, should not use the A&E services. Mild cases of seasonal or common influenza, or other respiratory tract infections, can definitely be managed on one's own or by consulting a family doctor. Our general outpatient clinics are also available to assist patients with these episodic diseases. The A&E Departments are designated for treating patients with accidental injuries or in critical or urgent conditions. Only by avoiding overcrowding in the A&E Departments can we provide such services.

The Government has already invested a significant amount of resources in the provision of healthcare services. We also hope to deploy more manpower. However, we must understand that healthcare resources, especially manpower, are always limited. Manpower is the key factor among all resources, but it is not readily available, nor can talents be trained up by the Government overnight. In the face of the anticipated winter peak season of influenza and other respiratory

tract infections, I urge the public to value our healthcare resources and refrain from abusing or misusing the A&E services. Thank you, President.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): The question session ends here.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Dental hygienists

7. **MR HOLDEN CHOW** (in Chinese): *Regarding dental hygienists, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *of the number of persons enrolled as dental hygienists in Hong Kong in each of the past five years;*
- (2) *of the number of graduates from the Higher Diploma in Dental Hygiene programme jointly offered by the School of Professional and Continuing Education of the University of Hong Kong and the Prince Philip Dental Hospital in each of the past five years, and among which the number of those who have enrolled as dental hygienists;*
- (3) *whether the authorities have plans to amend the Dentists Registration Ordinance (Cap. 156) and the relevant subsidiary legislation to relax the requirement for dental hygienists to undertake specified work in accordance with the directions of a registered dentist who is available in the premises when the work is being carried out, so as to enable them to perform and handle independently some of the dental care work (e.g. cleaning and scaling of teeth, and exposure of oral X-ray films), thereby releasing the manpower of dentists to cope with the public's demand for dental services; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and*
- (4) *whether the authorities have plans to increase the number of dental hygienists; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?*

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Health** on 17 January 2024 is in **Appendix 1**.

Promoting the use of electric vehicles

8. **IR CHAN SIU-HUNG** (in Chinese): *On promoting the use of electric vehicles (“EVs”), will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *of the latest numbers of private cars and EVs in Hong Kong, and the latest proportion of the number of EVs in the number of private cars in Hong Kong; the respective (i) total numbers of vehicles, (ii) numbers of EVs (and their proportions in the total numbers of vehicles), and (iii) numbers of hybrid vehicles (and their proportions in the total numbers of vehicles) owned by various policy bureaux/government departments in each of the past three years (set out in the table below);*

<i>Policy bureaux/ government departments</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>(i)</i>	<i>(ii)</i>	<i>(iii)</i>
	<i>2021</i>			
	<i>2022</i>			
	<i>2023</i>			

- (2) *given that in reply to a question raised by a Member of this Council on the Estimates of Expenditure 2023-2024, the Government indicated that some government departments were not able to switch to EVs in accordance with the green procurement practice when they procured new government private cars and when government private cars were due to be replaced, and it was mainly because the models of EVs available on the market were unable to meet the actual operational needs of the departments concerned (such as the need to attend to service calls at any time or travel long distances and engage in outside operations for a long time, thereby making it difficult to have enough time to recharge EVs), of the Government’s proposals to address the relevant problems, so as to increase the usage of EVs among government departments;*
- (3) *as there are views reflecting that the lack of EV charging facilities in the car parks of some civil servant quarters and government properties has hindered the use of EVs by civil servants, whether the Government has reviewed the relevant situation and taken follow-up*

measures (such as installing additional EV charging facilities); if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

- (4) *to encourage more members of the public to switch to EVs, whether the Hong Kong Housing Authority will consider setting up a separate application queue in its public car parks for the monthly parking spaces with EV charging facilities installed to give EV owners priority in applying for such parking spaces?*

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Environment and Ecology** on 17 January 2024 is in **Appendix 1**.

Mandatory Window Inspection Scheme

9. **MR CHAN KIN-POR** (in Chinese): *Under the Mandatory Window Inspection Scheme (“MWIS”), owners of private buildings aged 10 years or above (except domestic buildings not exceeding three storeys) and served with statutory notices by the Buildings Department (“BD”) are required to appoint a Qualified Person to carry out the prescribed inspection of all windows in their buildings and supervise the prescribed repair works found necessary after the inspection. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *of the number of reports received by the authorities in each of the past five years on incidents of windows falling from private buildings aged 10 years or above;*
- (2) *of the total number of MWIS notices issued by BD and the number of buildings involved in each of the past five years, with a breakdown by type of buildings (i.e. domestic building, commercial building, industrial building, hotel and building of other usage), as well as their respective percentages in the relevant numbers of target buildings covered; whether the authorities will introduce enhancement measures to meet the relevant target;*
- (3) *of the number and rate of non-compliant MWIS notices, as well as the average length of the overdue period in each of the past five years; in respect of those owners who failed to comply with MWIS notices, (i) the follow-up as well as law enforcement and regulatory actions*

taken and (ii) the total number of prosecutions instituted by BD, as well as the penalties imposed on the convicted persons; and

- (4) *whether it will step up publicity on the proper ways of using windows, and provide information to members of the public on the proper repair and maintenance of aluminium windows; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?*

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Development** on 17 January 2024 is in **Appendix 1**.

Environmental, social and governance performance of listed companies

10. **MR EDMUND WONG** (in Chinese): *The Hong Kong Institute of Certified Public Accountants (“HKICPA”) published a study report on “ESG Assurance in Hong Kong 2023: An evolving landscape” in November 2023. Regarding the environmental, social and governance (“ESG”) performance of Hong Kong-listed companies, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *as the aforesaid study report found that among the 1 882 December 2022 year-end listed companies, 141 adopted ESG external assurance, and although the figure represented an observable increase compared with the 85 listed companies found in a similar study conducted by HKICPA in 2021, the overall percentage of listed companies adopting ESG external assurance was still 7.5% only, whether the Government has plans to spur the Hong Kong Exchanges and Clearing Limited to require listed companies to adopt ESG external assurance; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;*
- (2) *given that according to the aforesaid study report, only over 15% (i.e. 290 companies) of the listed companies surveyed have put in place a board-level ESG committee, whether the Government will instruct the various regulatory bodies of listed companies to require listed companies to formulate a timetable for putting in place a board-level ESG committee; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and*
- (3) *as HKICPA is of the view that the absence of a widely-adopted and harmonized set of international standards for ESG reporting has*

presented challenges to assurers, and the Government indicated earlier on that the Green and Sustainable Finance Cross-Agency Steering Group was considering adopting a gradual approach in aligning the relevant local requirements with the baseline of the International Financial Reporting Standards Sustainability Disclosure Standards published by the International Sustainability Standards Board in June 2023, of the timetable and progress of the relevant work?

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury** on 17 January 2024 is in **Appendix 1**.

Encouraging the public in practising waste reduction and recycling

11. **MR DOMINIC LEE** (in Chinese): *The Government will implement the municipal solid waste (“MSW”) charging on 1 April this year, with charges to be levied by purchasing and using either designated bags (“DBs”) or designated labels (applicable to waste which cannot fit into DBs). However, it is learnt that many members of the public, residents’ organizations, property management companies and private enterprises are not clear about the relevant arrangements. Regarding encouraging the public in practising waste reduction and recycling, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *whether it will consider, during the first six months of implementation of MSW charging, distributing 30 free DBs to each residential unit every month, so as to facilitate the public to adapt to the charging arrangements, thereby ensuring the smooth implementation of the relevant charging;*
- (2) *whether it will provide additional resources (e.g. provision of DBs) to the relevant organizations of buildings as well as the District Service and Community Care Teams, so that such organizations can have sufficient resources to help promote MSW charging and encourage the public in practising waste separation and recycling;*

- (3) *apart from the 12th Recycling Station under GREEN@COMMUNITY, which is expected to commence operation in the fourth quarter of this year, whether the authorities will set up more Recycling Stations so as to make waste separation a part of people's life;*
- (4) *during the initial stage of implementation of MSW charging, whether the Government will increase the bonus points earned by members of the public who deliver recyclables to facilities under GREEN@COMMUNITY, in a bid to encourage their more active participation in waste separation and recycling; and*
- (5) *as it is learnt that a number of cases have occurred earlier involving fly-tipping of construction waste or refuse on private land, in rural areas or on idle sites, and there are views that such a situation may be aggravated by the implementation of MSW charging, whether the Government has put in place a mechanism to prevent the occurrence of such a scenario after the implementation of MSW charging; of the government department responsible for law enforcement and instituting prosecutions in respect of the relevant non-compliant acts?*

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Environment and Ecology** on 17 January 2024 is in **Appendix 1**.

Providing support for owners of “three-nil buildings”

12. **MR STANLEY NG** (in Chinese): *It has been reported that as at December 2022, there were 2 943 “three-nil buildings” in Hong Kong. As these buildings do not have owners' corporations (“OCs”) or any form of residents' organizations, or have not engaged property management companies, there are often problems in respect of hygiene, fire safety and external wall structure, resulting in a deplorable living environment for the residents and posing potential hazards to the community. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *of the number of building management cases involving three-nil buildings in each of the past three years resolved through government intervention (e.g. with the Government carrying out the default works for the building owners concerned);*

- (2) *of the number of three-nil buildings that have formed or reactivated OCs with the assistance provided under the Building Management Professional Advisory Service Scheme (“BMPASS”); whether it has assessed the effectiveness of BMPASS in providing support for owners of three-nil buildings;*
- (3) *of the current number of participants in the Resident Liaison Ambassador Scheme; whether it has reviewed the effectiveness of the Scheme (including whether the objective of assisting in the engagement of residents in handling building management matters (such as cleanliness, security and fire safety) can be achieved); and*
- (4) *whether it has assessed the effectiveness of the Community Care Fund-Subsidy for Owners’ Corporations of Old Buildings and the Urban Renewal Authority’s District-based Building Rehabilitation Pilot Scheme in providing support for owners of three-nil buildings in the past six months; whether the Government will consider launching more schemes on building maintenance to provide support for them?*

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Home and Youth Affairs** on 17 January 2024 is in **Appendix 1**.

Cross-boundary transport arrangements for large-scale events

13. **MR CHAN HOK-FUNG** (in Chinese): *It has been reported that on New Year’s Eve last year, the day on which the “Hong Kong New Year Countdown Celebrations” fireworks musical on Victoria Harbour (“the Show”) was held, about 200 000 Mainland travellers entered Hong Kong throughout the day. However, the two boundary control points (“BCPs”), which operated overnight, and the cross-boundary transport services were unable to cope with the flow of outbound passengers after the Show, resulting in some travellers sleeping on the floor of MTR stations and many feeling disappointed. On the other hand, the Financial Secretary indicated last month that more mega events and activities would be staged in 2024 to attract tourists. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *whether the various relevant policy bureaux have undertaken any planning in respect of tourist reception options prior to the staging of the Show; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;*
- (2) *as the Government has indicated after the aforesaid incident that it will discuss with the relevant Mainland authorities the extension of the opening hours of some rail-based BCPs on days when large-scale events are held, whether the Government will introduce the relevant measure before the Lunar New Year next month; if so, of the details;*
- (3) *as the Government has indicated that on the day of the Show, about 20 000 travellers chose to return to the Mainland on the same day, whether the Government will consider enquiring about the itinerary arrangements of travellers upon their entry into Hong Kong, so as to enable the various relevant policy bureaux to obtain the latest big data through the e-government concept, thereby facilitating better planning for the transport arrangements; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;*
- (4) *whether it will study the enhancements to transport arrangements on the days of large-scale events, such as accepting reservations online or through social media to enable travellers to take cross-boundary coaches in urban areas after the events, or arranging special departures on the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link to the Mainland;*
- (5) *as it has been reported that on New Year's Eve last year, many taxis displayed an "Out of Service" sign, and some taxi drivers did not charge fares according to taximeters, whether the Government will deploy additional manpower (e.g. civil servants of the non-disciplined services) to crack down on such situations during large-scale events, and whether it will introduce an online hailing taxi service for travellers (e.g. a designated hotline for the Huanggang Port) in view of large-scale events to facilitate travellers' immigration clearance and at the same time improve the business environment of the taxi trade; and*

- (6) *given the chaos in transport connectivity during the arrival of a mega cruise vessel in Hong Kong in August last year and the incident on the night of the Show, whether the Government has conducted another comprehensive assessment to prevent the recurrence of similar incidents; if so, of the details?*

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism** on 17 January 2024 is in **Appendix 1**.

City Gallery

14. **MR CHAN CHUN-YING** (in Chinese): *The City Gallery is Hong Kong's first exhibition hall with the theme of urban planning and large-scale infrastructure development. To celebrate the 25th anniversary of Hong Kong's return to the motherland, the Development Bureau and the Planning Department jointly hosted a special exhibition with the theme of Envisioning Beyond Legacy at the City Gallery from July to November 2022, which included displaying an exhibit to collect the views of the public on the uses of land on the future Kau Yi Chau Artificial Islands. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *of the number of thematic exhibitions held at the City Gallery in each of the past five years (with a breakdown by theme (i.e. (i) Hong Kong's major planning proposals, (ii) Hong Kong's major infrastructure projects, and (iii) the city's future development outlook), and the contents of those exhibitions;*
- (2) *of the total attendance at the City Gallery in each of the past five years;*
- (3) *of the respective numbers of secondary schools and primary schools participating in the City Gallery's School Thematic Tour Scheme in each of the past five years, with a breakdown by the learning unit (i.e. "Today's Hong Kong" as well as "Energy Technology and the Environment") in which they participated, and the number of students participating in the activities each time;*

- (4) *of the amount and contents of public views collected on the uses of land on the future Kau Yi Chau Artificial Islands in the special exhibition of Envisioning Beyond Legacy; and*
- (5) *whether it has plans to adjust the exhibition contents and directions of the City Gallery and introduce innovative elements; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?*

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Development** on 17 January 2024 is in **Appendix 1**.

Combating illegal vehicle modifications

15. **MR TONY TSE** (in Chinese): *Some members of the public have complained about the noise nuisance they have suffered over the years from illegally modified vehicles and suspect that such vehicles are involved in night-time street racing, posing a threat to public safety. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *whether it has studied the introduction of measures to effectively combat the noise nuisance caused by illegally modified vehicles; if so, of the details;*
- (2) *as the Government indicated in its reply letter to the Panel on Transport of this Council on 3 May last year that the Police and the Transport Department (“TD”) had conducted a number of joint operations against illegal vehicle modifications, whether the Police and TD have jointly reviewed the effectiveness of such joint operations;*
- (3) *whether it will amend the legislation to increase the penalties for illegal vehicle modifications in order to enhance deterrence;*
- (4) *whether it will list the road sections where vehicle noise complaints are frequently received as “black spots of noise nuisance”, so as to strengthen law enforcement against illegal vehicle modifications; and*

- (5) *whether it has adopted new technologies (such as the noise detector developed by the Environmental Protection Department and the Hong Kong Productivity Council, etc.) to carry out roadside monitoring, so as to step up efforts to combat illegal vehicle modifications; if not, of the reasons for that?*

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Transport and Logistics** on 17 January 2024 is in **Appendix 1**.

Handling of views expressed on Mainland social platforms

16. **MR PAUL TSE** (in Chinese): *It has been learnt that in recent years, many Mainland netizens have expressed their complaints against Hong Kong through the social platform Xiaohongshu, with some Mainland bloggers describing this as “bashing Hong Kong has now become a kind of political correctness”, and the relevant contents have aroused enormous reverberations from the HKSAR Government. For example, following the disrespectful remarks and behaviour of an airline’s cabin crew towards Mainland passengers, the Chief Executive immediately gave a high-profile response, pointing out that the incident had “hurt the feelings of Hong Kong and Mainland compatriots”; in the light of allegations of impolite treatment of Mainland tourists during their stay in Hong Kong, the authorities immediately encouraged the trade to promote courtesy activities; after the “Hong Kong New Year Countdown Celebrations” fireworks musical on Victoria Harbour on New Year’s Eve last year, when a large number of Mainland tourists were stranded on the streets, Mainland netizens criticized Hong Kong for its lack of contingency measures and poor hospitality to visitors, the Government also immediately held an interdepartmental meeting to formulate measures for a prompt response. Some members of the public have relayed to me that while Mainland residents’ remarks are often taken very seriously by the HKSAR Government, on the contrary, the persistent views of many members of the public in Hong Kong have not received the same level of attention and response from the official authorities over a long period of time (e.g. calls for the suspension of Mandatory Provident Fund (“MPF”) contributions or payments for MPF contributions to be made by the Government on people’s behalf during periods of economic downturn, tax rebates, withdrawal of the “harsh measures”, stamp duty reduction, concession of Government rent of owner-occupied properties, expansion of public dental services to provide the grass roots with, among others, services that are expensive in the private market such as endodontic treatment,*

dental prosthetics and dental implant), and this will easily lead to the perception of favouritism and even “Xiaohongshu administering Hong Kong”. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether the authorities have reviewed the views directed against all major and minor issues in Hong Kong expressed through Xiaohongshu, and of the criteria adopted for determining whether and how to handle such views;
- (2) of the government departments or officials currently responsible for monitoring, collecting and handling complaints or views about Hong Kong expressed on Mainland social platforms; and
- (3) whether the Government will take into account views expressed on social platforms such as Xiaohongshu when formulating policies that may involve Mainlanders; of the Government’s approaches and the criteria for (i) handling such views, and (ii) balancing the interests of both sides when discrepancies arise between such views and the mainstream views in Hong Kong, so as to avoid the aforesaid unnecessary perception among members of the public?

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs** on 17 January 2024 is in **Appendix 1**.

Financial returns on government assets

17. **DR KENNEDY WONG** (in Chinese): *Regarding the financial returns on government assets, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *of the amount of net earnings and the rate of return on average net fixed asset of the following government assets or items which are non-trading funds in each of the past five years (set out in a table):*
 - (i) *approximately 75% shareholding of MTR Corporation Limited;*
 - (ii) *West Rail Property Development Limited;*
 - (iii) *Airport Authority Hong Kong;*

- (iv) *all government toll-tunnels and bridges, including:*
 - (a) *Cross-Harbour Tunnel;*
 - (b) *Eastern Harbour Crossing;*
 - (c) *Western Harbour Crossing;*
 - (d) *Tate's Cairn Tunnel;*
 - (e) *Aberdeen Tunnel;*
 - (f) *Lion Rock Tunnel;*
 - (g) *Shing Mun Tunnels;*
 - (h) *Tseung Kwan O Tunnel;*
 - (i) *Route 8K;*
 - (j) *Lantau Link (including Tsing Ma Bridge); and*
 - (k) *Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge Hong Kong Section;*
- (v) *the Hong Kong-Macau Ferry Terminal in Sheung Wan and the China Ferry Terminal in Tsim Sha Tsui;*
- (vi) *Waterworks;*
- (vii) *Sewage Services;*
- (viii) *Government buildings (including car park rentals/disposal proceeds);*
- (ix) *Hongkong International Theme Parks Limited;*
- (x) *Hong Kong Cyberport Development Holdings Limited;*
- (xi) *Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation;*

- (xii) *Hong Kong IEC Limited; and*
- (xiii) *Urban Renewal Authority;*
- (2) *of the target rate of return on fixed assets of the following trading funds and the amount of related income in each of the past five years (set out in a table):*
 - (i) *Companies Registry Trading Fund;*
 - (ii) *Electrical and Mechanical Services Trading Fund;*
 - (iii) *Land Registry Trading Fund;*
 - (iv) *Office of the Communications Authority Trading Fund; and*
 - (v) *Post Office Trading Fund; and*
- (3) *how the Government handles the financial returns generated by government assets mentioned in (1) and (2)?*

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury** on 17 January 2024 is in **Appendix 1**.

Developing the “silver economy”

18. **DR TAN YUEHENG** (in Chinese): *In the 2023 Policy Address, the Chief Executive has announced the establishment of an Advisory Panel on Silver Economy to conduct an in-depth research and offer development recommendations on promoting the “silver economy” which involves products and services catered for the elderly, with a view to tapping into the development potential of the silver economy. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *whether it has explored the current situation of the development of the silver industry and the relevant business activities;*
- (2) *whether it has assessed the potential and market demand for developing the silver economy in Hong Kong (such as industries in*

the areas of elderly health, elderly services, elderly livability and elderly culture); and

- (3) *while seizing the opportunities for developing the silver economy, how the Government steps up its efforts in monitoring the relevant business activities (including whether it has plans to formulate or improve the standards and regulations for various types of products and services relating to the silver industry), so as to ensure that the consumer rights and interests of the elderly are protected?*

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development** on 17 January 2024 is in **Appendix 1**.

Non-refoulement claim-related judicial review cases

19. **MR LAI TUNG-KWOK** (in Chinese): *It is learnt that non-refoulement claim-related judicial review (“JR”) cases have accounted for over 90% of the JR cases received by the court. There are views that this has put judicial resources under tremendous pressure. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *of the numbers of non-refoulement claim-related cases handled by the various levels of courts (i.e. the Court of First Instance of the High Court (“CFI”), the Court of Appeal of the High Court (“CA”) and the Court of Final Appeal (“CFA”)) in each of the past three years;*
- (2) *of the number of non-refoulement claim-related leave applications for JR approved by CFI in each of the past three years;*
- (3) *of the numbers of non-refoulement claim-related leave applications for appeal approved by CA and CFA in each of the past three years;*
- (4) *of the current numbers of non-refoulement claim-related outstanding cases at the various levels of courts;*
- (5) *among the legal aid applications received and refused and the legal aid certificates granted by the Legal Aid Department (“LAD”) in each of the past three years, of the respective numbers and percentages of*

those involving non-refoulement claims; among the non-refoulement claim-related cases in which legal aid was granted, of the respective numbers of successful cases at the various levels of courts; and

- (6) *as there are views that LAD does not maintain the breakdown of the expenditure on legal costs involved in handling non-refoulement claim-related JR cases, making it impossible for society to grasp the amount of judicial resources taken up by the relevant cases, whether the authorities will consider making improvements in this regard; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?*

The written reply provided by the **Chief Secretary for Administration** on 17 January 2024 is in **Appendix 1**.

Measures to encourage food donation

20. **DR TIK CHI-YUEN** (in Chinese): *It has been reported that according to a recent survey conducted by a community group, it is estimated that about one million grass roots in Hong Kong are facing the risk of food insecurity (i.e. lacking the ability or money to buy food, etc.), yet many members of the food trade are cautious about food donation. They would rather dispose of food which has no commercial value but is still fit for consumption than donate the food concerned while bearing the risk of legal liabilities. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *of the amount of food waste disposed of at landfills each day, and whether it has compiled statistics on or made estimations of the amount of such food waste still fit for consumption; if not, whether it has plans to compile such statistics or make such estimation;*
- (2) *whether measures are in place to support or encourage food donation by the food trade; if so, of the details (including the amount of funding incurred by such measures); if not, whether it will consider introducing related measures;*
- (3) *given that some members of the food trade who have disposed of large quantities of food have relayed that the trade's desire to donate food*

is dampened by worries about bearing the risk of civil claims from recipients whose health might be affected after consuming the food donated by them, whether the Government has studied the introduction of or amendments to the relevant legislation, so as to exempt the trade from bearing the legal liabilities involving food donation;

- (4) as there are views pointing out that the related legal liability issue may be resolved through an agreement made between food donors and the charitable organizations concerned, but there are also views pointing out that under the Control of Exemption Clauses Ordinance (Cap. 71), the liability of donors involving personal injury or death will not be excluded by reference to a contract, whether the Government has studied the related legal points of contention; and*
- (5) as it has been reported that a charitable organization has recently drafted and submitted the Food Donation (Exemption from Civil Liability) Bill to the Government for reference, whether the Government has examined the relevant proposals; if so, of the follow-up actions; if not, the reasons for that?*

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Environment and Ecology** on 17 January 2024 is in **Appendix 1**.

Government Programme on Tackling Hygiene Black Spots

21. **MR CHAN PUI-LEUNG** (in Chinese): *To resolve district-based environmental hygiene and street management issues, the Government implemented the Government Programme on Tackling Hygiene Black Spots (“the Programme”) in mid-August 2022, with the targets of (i) tackling 600-odd hygiene black spots and strengthening the cleansing of about 4 000 public places and the clearance of dangerous or abandoned signboards; (ii) stepping up law enforcement; and (iii) enhancing public education and publicity. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *of the changes in the conditions of the hygiene black spots concerned since the implementation of the Programme, and set out the relevant information by District Council district;*
- (2) *whether it has gained an understanding of the causes of various hygiene black spots, as well as their impacts on environmental hygiene and cityscape; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;*
- (3) *of the details of the Government's work in relation to the cleansing of public places and the clearance of dangerous or abandoned signboards (including the specific data and the locations involved) since the implementation of the Programme; whether it has assessed the effectiveness of the relevant work in the past year; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;*
- (4) *whether it has conducted an assessment on the overall effectiveness of the Programme; if so, of the details (including the changes in hygiene conditions and the number of complaints); if not, the reasons for that; and*
- (5) *as it is learnt that some hygiene black spots have revived after the Programme has been implemented for some time, of the new measures put in place by the authorities to follow up the situation concerned, so as to ensure that the effectiveness of the Programme is sustainable?*

The written reply provided by the **Deputy Chief Secretary for Administration** on 17 January 2024 is in **Appendix 1**.

Management of typhoon shelters and sheltered anchorages

22. **MR KENNETH LAU** (in Chinese): *It is learnt that in recent years, the number of marine pleasure vessels has increased sharply, and most of the owners of such vessels berth their vessels at typhoon shelters near the urban areas, resulting in an acute shortage of berthing spaces at those typhoon shelters. In addition, some vessel owners have relayed that some vessels which are berthed at fixed locations at typhoon shelters (such as fish drying barges (i.e. vessels used by fishermen to dry seafood), decommissioned engineering vessels and barges, or*

even damaged yachts (commonly known as “dead vessels”)) are used to occupy berthing spaces, while the spaces on both sides of these vessels are leased to pleasure vessels for berthing, with some vessel owners being solicited for rewards when berthing their vessels at typhoon shelters. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the respective numbers of Classes I to IV licensed vessels registered in Hong Kong in the past year; how such figures compare with those in 2021 and 2022;*
- (2) of the number of vessels berthing at typhoon shelters and sheltered anchorages in Hong Kong in the past year, together with a breakdown by vessel type; how such figures compare with those in 2021 and 2022;*
- (3) of the details of the Marine Department’s efforts to combat illegal activities by vessels berthing at typhoon shelters in the past five years, including (i) the number of inspections conducted, (ii) the number of non-compliant cases, (iii) the types of non-compliant acts, (iv) the number of prosecutions instituted, and (v) the number of convictions;*
- (4) whether it will continue to step up inspection and law enforcement actions, including studying the introduction of smart technologies for enforcement, so as to ensure the proper use of berthing places at typhoon shelters; and*
- (5) whether it will consider setting up a dedicated department to coordinate the policy and management of typhoon shelters and sheltered anchorages, including re-planning and rationalizing all berthing places at typhoon shelters in Hong Kong, reviewing the “first-come-first-served” mode of operation for berthing spaces at typhoon shelters, as well as studying the feasibility of recovering all berthing spaces at typhoon shelters and then centralizing their management by the Government?*

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Transport and Logistics** on 17 January 2024 is in **Appendix 1**.

GOVERNMENT MOTION

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Government motion. Proposed resolution under the Hong Kong Export Credit Insurance Corporation Ordinance moved by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development.

Members who wish to speak please press the “Request to speak” button.

I now call upon the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development to speak and move the motion.

PROPOSED RESOLUTION UNDER THE HONG KONG EXPORT CREDIT INSURANCE CORPORATION ORDINANCE

SECRETARY FOR COMMERCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (in Cantonese): President, I move that the motion as set out under my name on the Agenda be passed.

The Hong Kong Export Credit Insurance Corporation (“ECIC”), established in 1966 under the Hong Kong Export Credit Insurance Corporation Ordinance (Cap. 1115) (“the Ordinance”), protects Hong Kong exporters against non-payment risks arising from commercial or political events through the provision of export credit insurance services, thereby supporting the development of export trade in Hong Kong.

As stipulated in section 18 of the Ordinance, the Government shall guarantee the payment of all moneys due by ECIC, and as stipulated in section 23, the liability of ECIC under contracts of insurance shall not exceed a specified amount as determined by the Legislative Council by resolution. Currently, ECIC’s statutory maximum liability (“SML”) stands at HK\$55 billion.

To support Hong Kong exporters to tide over challenges amidst the complex and uncertain external economic environment, ECIC has launched various support measures in the past few years, including annual policy fee waivers, premium discount, and the “100% Credit Limit Top-Up Scheme”. The latter has provided coverage to goods with an aggregate value of around \$37.3 billion, benefiting nearly 2 000 exporters. As at the end of October 2023, the aggregate maximum liability (“AML”) of all valid policies of ECIC amounted to around \$47 billion, or

85.5% of its SML. ECIC estimated that its AML may exceed the current SML by March 2025.

To ensure that ECIC can continue to effectively support Hong Kong exporters, the Chief Executive announced in the 2023 Policy Address that ECIC's SML would be increased from the current \$55 billion to \$80 billion. According to ECIC's estimate, the increased SML would be sufficient to cover ECIC's business growth until 2030-2031.

In light of the gradual recovery of the global economy, ECIC forecasts that its insured business will return to a steady positive growth track. ECIC will also continue to devise new measures to enhance support for Hong Kong exporters. Raising ECIC's SML will strengthen market confidence and provide it with sufficient capacity to expand its business in various markets while taking on an appropriate degree of risk, including developing markets such as the Mainland and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

President, I would like to stress that ECIC's claims figure is far below its AML. In 2022-2023, ECIC's loss ratio (i.e. gross claims divided by premium income) was 9.1% and its gross claims only amounted to around \$24 million, which was roughly 0.9% of its total reserves. ECIC's financial position is sound, and after increasing its SML, there is no need to use Government funds to assist ECIC in the foreseeable future. ECIC will continue to handle insurance applications with prudence to ensure that its claim risks remain within a manageable range, and do its utmost to support Hong Kong exporters.

President, I beg to move.

The motion moved by the **Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development** is in **Appendix 2**.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the motion moved by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development be passed.

Dr Johnny NG, please speak.

DR JOHNNY NG (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. The resolution proposed by the Secretary under the Hong Kong Export Credit Insurance Corporation Ordinance (“the Ordinance”) seeks to increase the cap on the contingent liability of the Hong Kong Export Credit Insurance Corporation (“ECIC”) under contracts of insurance from the current \$55 billion to \$80 billion.

ECIC was established under Cap. 1115 of the Laws of Hong Kong to, through the provision of export credit insurance services, protect exporters against the risks of not receiving payments for exported goods due to commercial or political events.

Hong Kong is an externally oriented economy. With the further deepening of economic and trade cooperation between Hong Kong and overseas countries, the total value of Hong Kong’s exports of goods in 2022 amounted to \$4,531.6 billion. Many of the contributors are small and medium enterprises, which have a strong demand for export credit insurance services.

It was in May 2017, more than six years ago, when the Government last sought this Council’s approval under the Ordinance to raise the cap on the contingent liability of ECIC under contracts of insurance from \$40 billion at that time to the current \$55 billion. The present proposal to further increase the cap to \$80 billion is believed to be relatively conservative.

Export trade in Hong Kong has been affected by international geopolitics in recent years. Some countries have set up artificial barriers for political reasons, hindering international bilateral and multilateral trade. Nevertheless, the world is huge after all. The SAR Government encourages the local business community to explore more markets with greater development potential, especially countries in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (“ASEAN”) or along the Belt and Road.

ASEAN has become Hong Kong’s second largest trading partner in terms of goods. Since the signing of the Hong Kong-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement in 2017, the total trade in goods has risen by over 38% to over HK\$1,200 billion in 2022. Hong Kong’s direct investment in Belt and Road countries also increased from about US\$70 billion in 2017 to about US\$120 billion in 2021. Remittance of Renminbi for cross-border trade settlement surged from RMB3.9 trillion to RMB9.3 trillion, which is more than doubled.

Can ECIC provide more concessions in terms of premiums paid by Hong Kong exporters for goods exported to individual markets so as to encourage them to explore more emerging markets with development potential? On the one hand, it can reduce the underwriting risk, and on the other hand, it can avoid non-payment risks for goods exported to individual countries due to artificial political factors. As seen from ECIC's official website, according to the Administrative Office of the United States Courts, the number of business bankruptcies in the United States filed in the third quarter of 2023 totalled 4 855, increased by 37.7% over the 3 527 filings in the same period in 2022. Is it possible for us to raise the premiums for goods exported to certain high-risk countries and regions, or even exclude them from the coverage, to better address the market demand?

With these remarks, President, I support the proposed resolution.

DR KENNEDY WONG (in Cantonese): President, the SAR Government proposes a resolution to the Legislative Council under the Hong Kong Export Credit Insurance Corporation Ordinance to, as announced by the Chief Executive in the 2023 Policy Address, increase the statutory maximum liability (“SML”) of the Hong Kong Export Credit Insurance Corporation (“ECIC”) from \$55 billion to \$80 billion, with a view to strengthening ECIC's underwriting capacity. On behalf of the import and export sector and the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong, I express support for the proposed resolution.

Many of my friends in the sector have complained to me that due to market competition, their transactions with customers are mostly not secured by credit protection, which puts them under great pressure. Therefore, I always encourage them to utilize export credit insurance services to enhance the protection of import and export trades and reduce risks.

According to the relevant authorities, as at the end of October last year, the aggregate maximum liability (“AML”) of all valid policies of ECIC amounted to about \$47 billion, representing 85.5% of its SML of \$55 billion, and its AML was expected to exceed the current SML by 2025. At the same time, in 2022-2023, ECIC's loss ratio (i.e. gross claims divided by premium income) was 9.1% and its gross claims only amounted to around \$24 million, which was roughly 0.9% of its total reserves of \$2.6 billion. Therefore, given the sound financial position of ECIC, I agree to increasing its SML to support Hong Kong exporters, strengthen

market confidence, and, in particular, assist small and medium enterprises in seizing business opportunities to explore markets in the Mainland and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Additionally, I support the “100% Credit Limit Top-Up Scheme” which aims to support exporters in exploring business opportunities amidst the volatile global trading environment. According to the information provided by the authorities, as at the end of June 2023, the Scheme has provided coverage to goods with an aggregate value of around \$37.3 billion, benefiting nearly 2 000 exporters.

It is hoped that after the passage of the resolution today, the relevant authorities and ECIC will step up publicity and promotion to the industry regarding the increase in its SML to \$80 billion, as well as other relevant support measures. It is also hoped that they will encourage industry practitioners to utilize export credit insurance services so that exporters will face less risks in external trade.

President, I so submit.

MR CHAN KIN-POR (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. The Hong Kong Export Credit Insurance Corporation (“ECIC”), established in 1966 under the Hong Kong Export Credit Insurance Corporation Ordinance, provides export credit insurance services to reduce the non-payment risks faced by exporters due to commercial or political events, thereby promoting and supporting export trade.

In recent years, the pandemic and geopolitical tensions have brought adverse impacts on external trade. To strengthen its support for Hong Kong exporters (especially small and medium enterprises), ECIC launched the “100% Credit Limit Top-Up Scheme”, benefiting nearly 2 000 policyholders and covering \$37.3 billion worth of goods. ECIC’s support measures for Hong Kong exporters have enabled them to sustain their business and explore new markets.

The Government has increased the cap on the contingent liability of ECIC on several occasions over the years to meet its business needs. It was announced in the 2023 Policy Address that the statutory maximum liability (“SML”) of ECIC would be increased from the current \$55 billion to \$80 billion, following the last adjustment in 2017. Whenever the aggregate maximum liability of ECIC is likely to exceed the prevailing SML, we promptly discuss and increase its SML, and this time is no exception. Not only can raising ECIC’s SML to \$80 billion demonstrate our continued support for Hong Kong exporters, but it also ensures

that the cap is sufficient to accommodate ECIC's future business growth and thus maintain market confidence.

With these remarks, President, I support the proposed resolution.

MR SUNNY TAN (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. I rise to speak in support of the resolution proposed by the Government under the Hong Kong Export Credit Insurance Corporation Ordinance.

Since its establishment in 1966, the Hong Kong Export Credit Insurance Corporation ("ECIC") has staunchly supported Hong Kong's industrial and commercial sectors in conducting business and developing markets, serving as their important backing. To the business community, even if one offers quality products and agrees on the price with a business partner, without export credit insurance, transactions can still hardly take place. Therefore, ECIC deserves recognition for its contributions over the years in promoting economic development and consolidating Hong Kong's distinctive position as an international trade centre.

Although the global economy is recovering from the pandemic, the European and United States markets remain sluggish and the geopolitical situation is volatile, bringing countless challenges and uncertainties to our conduct of business. In this sense, export credit insurance plays an even more pivotal role.

Moreover, our country provides us with enormous development opportunities, including the domestic market with a population of 1.4 billion and markets along the Belt and Road. Export credit insurance provides extremely important protection and support for Hong Kong enterprises in exploring emerging markets, giving them reassurance and confidence to conduct business without worries.

The industry and I have been urging the Government to enhance export credit insurance measures so as to assist enterprises in seizing the opportunities under the country's "dual circulation" strategy and Belt and Road Initiative. I am grateful to the Government for listening to our views and continuously enhancing the measures. The Export Credit Guarantee Programme was introduced in the 2022-2023 Budget to help small- and medium-sized exporters secure export

financing from banks more easily. The “risk-sharing arrangement on domestic sales in the Mainland” was also rolled out earlier.

The Policy Address delivered earlier has also responded positively to our proposal to raise the statutory maximum liability (“SML”) of ECIC to \$80 billion, and upgrade the free credit check services for policyholders regarding buyers from the 10 member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (“ASEAN”).

I would like to express my support for today’s proposal to increase ECIC’s SML. As at the end of last year, ECIC’s contingent liability of all valid policies amounted to \$47 billion. The increase in the insured amount precisely reflects its excellent work. In the face of the uncertain and complex global economic situation, increasing ECIC’s SML will surely strengthen its underwriting capacity and instil confidence in the market and Hong Kong enterprises. It is indeed a necessary move.

To better utilize the \$80 billion SML, we need to implement better supporting measures to further assist Hong Kong enterprises in seizing opportunities in the Mainland domestic market and emerging markets. For instance, I hope that the Government will further increase the indemnity ratio by raising the credit limit from the current 90% to 95%. This will provide exporters with greater protection against risks and will be in line with other credit insurance products.

For developing the Mainland domestic market, according to ECIC’s annual report, the Mainland is Hong Kong’s second largest insured market, accounting for more than 20% of the total value. As the level of disclosure of credit and financial information varies among private small and medium enterprises in the Mainland, it is generally more difficult for Hong Kong enterprises to obtain approval for related insurance applications, which has become a major pain point in exploring the Mainland domestic market.

For this reason, I have long suggested that ECIC should strengthen cooperation with its Mainland counterparts, including financial and banking institutions as well as credit agencies, to obtain a better grasp of the credit information in the Mainland market. I am glad that ECIC has accepted our proposal to collaborate with five banks in Hong Kong to promote the “risk-sharing arrangement on domestic sales in the Mainland”. I hope that the arrangement will

continue to be enhanced and expanded and that similar practices will be extended to the ASEAN and Middle East markets.

(THE PRESIDENT'S DEPUTY, MS STARRY LEE, took the Chair)

Looking ahead, I am eager to work with the Government and ECIC to strengthen export credit insurance, thereby providing essential support for Hong Kong enterprises in exploring market opportunities both in the Mainland and overseas.

With these remarks, I support the proposed resolution.

MR JEFFREY LAM (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President. The latest Policy Address proposes to increase the statutory maximum liability (“SML”) of the Hong Kong Export Credit Insurance Corporation (“ECIC”) from \$55 billion to \$80 billion, with the aim of strengthening its underwriting capacity. I am fully supportive of the measure proposed by the Chief Executive and the SAR Government to enhance support for Hong Kong exporters. I also support the provision of 12 additional free credit assessment facilities to Hong Kong exporters regarding buyers from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (“ASEAN”), as recently announced by ECIC. In fact, the provision of free credit assessment facilities was first proposed by me when I chaired the ECIC Advisory Board. I believe that these arrangements can assist Hong Kong enterprises in exploring the ASEAN market and creating business opportunities. Meanwhile, I hope that the Government will step up its publicity efforts to let more enterprises know about the services and access the relevant information.

Over the past year, the global economy has not recovered as rapidly as anticipated. Many major countries tightened their monetary policies to curb inflation; prices and production costs were rising, affecting consumption demand and putting pressure on retailers. Coupled with geopolitical tensions and numerous issues such as capital outflows and currency depreciation faced by emerging markets, it has been challenging for the industrial and commercial sectors to expand their business into those markets.

Deputy President, given that Hong Kong is currently at a critical juncture of reviving its economy after the epidemic, we must step up our efforts in supporting our industrial and commercial sectors (especially small and medium enterprises) to go global. I hope that in addition to raising ECIC's SML to \$80 billion, the Government will continue to roll out policy measures to strengthen ECIC's support for Hong Kong enterprises. It includes expanding the scope of insurance coverage and increasing the credit limit from the current 90% to 95% so as to further address various pain points faced by industries in developing the Mainland domestic market and emerging markets.

Regarding the Mainland domestic market, ASEAN market and other emerging markets, I hope that the Government will closely monitor and take heed of the applications for ECIC's "risk-sharing arrangement on domestic sales in the Mainland", and conduct timely reviews and enhancements. It should also explore with ECIC the possibility of adopting a more proactive strategy to secure more partners and introduce more comprehensive export credit measures targeting the relevant markets.

Furthermore, in line with the overall economic and trade strategies of HKSAR, I believe the Government should give greater play to ECIC's role, such as disseminating information on emerging markets to the local industrial and commercial sectors, and strengthening its reinsurance business.

Meanwhile, the SAR Government should engage the relevant Mainland authorities to strengthen support for the micro, small and medium enterprises in Hong Kong. This can be done by further enhancing the information exchange and partnering mechanisms between the Mainland and Hong Kong at the official level, and sharing credit information databases of Mainland enterprises with ECIC.

Deputy President, the Business and Professionals Alliance for Hong Kong fully supports the proposed resolution. Thank you.

DEPUTY PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Does any other Member wish to speak?

(No Member indicated a wish to speak)

DEPUTY PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): If not, I now call upon the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development to reply. Then, the debate will come to a close.

SECRETARY FOR COMMERCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (in Cantonese): Deputy President, first of all, I would like to thank Members for supporting the motion. We will gazette the latest statutory maximum liability (“SML”) of the Hong Kong Export Credit Insurance Corporation (“ECIC”) on 19 January (Friday). On the premise of fully supporting Hong Kong exporters, ECIC will continue to handle policy applications with prudence to ensure that it maintains a sound and healthy financial position while providing comprehensive and effective protection for exporters, especially small and medium enterprises (“SMEs”), thereby helping them seize the business opportunities arising from the resumption of normalcy and the global economic recovery.

I would also like to thank Members for putting forward their views on the motion. We will step up our efforts in publicizing the latest initiatives to the industry, and will carefully consider Members’ suggestions, such as the initiatives to be adopted by ECIC to support the industry, as I have mentioned when moving the motion. We will also continue to urge ECIC to stay tuned to the latest market developments and promptly introduce appropriate support measures for exporters or update existing measures in response to the actual situation.

Some Members have mentioned how ECIC would assist SMEs and exporters in developing emerging markets, including those in the Mainland and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (“ASEAN”). Firstly, with regard to developing the Mainland market, as at the end of October last year, the Mainland was ECIC’s largest insured market, with a total credit limit of nearly HK\$29 billion, representing a four-fold increase from around HK\$7 billion a decade ago.

To further strengthen ECIC’s support for Hong Kong exporters in developing the Mainland market, ECIC launched a pilot scheme in June last year to implement the “risk-sharing arrangement on domestic sales in the Mainland” (“the Arrangement”) in collaboration with five local banks, including Bank of China (Hong Kong) Limited, Bank of East Asia, Limited, DBS Bank (Hong Kong) Limited, Hang Seng Bank Limited, and The Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation Limited, with the aim to enhance ECIC’s understanding of Mainland

buyers, thereby strengthening its underwriting capacity and protection for exporters in developing the Mainland domestic market. Under the Arrangement, when an exporter applies to any of the five banks for credit insurance or export loans regarding a Mainland buyer, the bank will share with ECIC the assessment results of the Mainland buyer concerned. Then, both parties will share the non-payment risk regarding that buyer. The maximum credit limit per buyer group is HK\$100 million.

As for developing the ASEAN market, as Members have mentioned, in light of the country's "dual circulation" strategy and the fact that the Chief Executive led a delegation of industry representatives to visit ASEAN countries last year, we anticipate that ECIC will gradually receive more applications for credit limits regarding ASEAN buyers. To strengthen its underwriting capacity, ECIC has been actively expanding its credit reference network to help Hong Kong enterprises explore the ASEAN market in greater depth. As at the end of October last year, ECIC's credit limit for ASEAN buyers totalled nearly HK\$6 billion, which is more than double the amount recorded 10 years ago.

As Mr Jeffrey LAM has just mentioned, ECIC will launch a new measure to encourage exporters to actively explore the ASEAN market. In addition to the existing 6 free credit assessment facilities on buyers, ECIC will provide Hong Kong exporters with 12 additional free credit assessment facilities regarding ASEAN buyers, which will enable them to gain a better understanding of those potential buyers and thus explore the ASEAN market with greater motivation and confidence.

I so submit. Thank you, Deputy President.

DEPUTY PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you and that is: That the motion moved by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development be passed. Will those in favour please raise their hands?

(Members raised their hands)

DEPUTY PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Those against please raise their hands.

(No hands raised)

DEPUTY PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I think the question is agreed by a majority of the Members present.

I declare the motion passed.

MEMBERS' MOTIONS

DEPUTY PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Members' motion on the period for amending subsidiary legislation.

Proposed resolution under the Interpretation and General Clauses Ordinance to extend the period for amending two items of subsidiary legislation relating to dying in place, which were laid on the Table of this Council on 6 December 2023.

I now call upon Mr Paul TSE to move the motion.

PROPOSED RESOLUTION TO EXTEND THE PERIOD FOR AMENDING SUBSIDIARY LEGISLATION (L.N. 161 AND L.N. 162 OF 2023)

MR PAUL TSE (in Cantonese): Deputy President, I move that the motion, as printed on the Agenda, be passed.

The motion moved by **Mr Paul TSE** is in **Appendix 3**.

DEPUTY PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the motion moved by Mr Paul TSE be passed.

DEPUTY PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you as stated. Will those in favour please raise their hands?

(Members raised their hands)

DEPUTY PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Those against please raise their hands.

(No hands raised)

DEPUTY PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I think the question is agreed by a majority of each of the two groups of Members present, that is, those returned by the Election Committee and those returned by functional constituencies and geographical constituencies.

I declare the motion passed.

DEPUTY PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Members' motion with no legislative effect.

Mr TANG Fei will move a motion on “Actively building Hong Kong into an international education hub by formulating a comprehensive strategic development blueprint for Hong Kong’s education”.

Five Members will move amendments to the motion.

This Council will proceed to a joint debate on the motion and the amendments.

Later, I will first call upon Mr TANG Fei to speak and move the motion. Then I will call upon Prof William WONG, Mr Stanley NG, Ms Lillian KWOK, Mr Frankie YICK and Prof Priscilla LEUNG to speak in sequence, but they may not move the amendments at this stage.

The joint debate now begins. Members who wish to speak please press the “Request to speak” button.

I now call upon Mr TANG Fei to speak and move the motion.

MOTION ON “ACTIVELY BUILDING HONG KONG INTO AN INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION HUB BY FORMULATING A COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT BLUEPRINT FOR HONG KONG’S EDUCATION”

MR TANG FEI (in Cantonese): Deputy President, I move that the motion, as printed on the Agenda, be passed.

On 29 May 2023, General Secretary XI Jinping stressed at the fifth study session of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee the need to make accelerated efforts to build China into a leading country in education, and to put equal emphasis on introducing overseas educational resources and going global, so as to make China an influential and important education hub in the world. He also stressed the need to vigorously promote the building of the brand of “Study in China” and to tell China’s stories well, so as to enable China’s education to be more influential and have a greater say in the world.

Deputy President, Hong Kong is widely recognized as China’s international financial and commercial metropolis, and it is only right that Hong Kong should leverage its advantages for meeting the country’s needs. This role of Hong Kong should not only be played in the financial and economic aspects, but also in the education aspect. Hong Kong should even create the brand of “Study in Hong Kong, China”, so as to enhance the international soft power and the say of our country and the SAR through education.

Hong Kong is a financial and commercial city. While many of our financial and economic indicators are ranked in various authoritative international rating lists, five of our universities have also secured positions in the world’s top 100. Having said that, the brand of “Study in Hong Kong, China” has apparently failed to create an impression of Hong Kong in the international community. For instance, Hong Kong has never been featured in the annual report on international education published by OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) as one of the top eight or top ten countries and regions worldwide for non-local education.

The Institute of International Education (“IIE”) from the United States, which has set up its Hong Kong office, is one of the prestigious organizations in the field of international non-local education. According to *Project Atlas*, the annual report released by IIE, the total number of globally mobile international students at the tertiary level in 2021 was about 6.4 million, with Europe and the United States being the top host destinations for non-local education. Out of this market of 6.4 million international students, China accounted for 3% of the overall figure, and this percentage only covered students at the tertiary level.

Hong Kong, on the other hand, is again not on the list. While Hong Kong attracts international investment, it is rarely known as a destination for international students. Education in Hong Kong is of world-class standard, yet its international

brand image does not commensurately reflect such level of recognition. According to the data released by the University Grants Committee (UGC), we can see that in the five academic years from 2018 to 2022, the average yearly proportions of non-local students from the Mainland, other Asian countries and regions, and non-Asian countries and regions were 71%, 25% and 4% respectively, indicating that about 30% of the students came from overseas, which is actually quite good. However, the brand image of “Study in Hong Kong” has not been established.

Attracting overseas students to study in a country or region not only directly influences their perception of the host location through education, but also cultivates them through the education standards of that particular country or region. This is the so-called soft power and the right to say. Overseas education is a kind of self-financing education, representing an education service that does not, and should not, rely on public funding. Hence, not only will education build up soft power, it will also bring genuine economic benefits. The term “industrialization of education” may not be pleasing to the ear. However, in order to build up such brand of education to fortify our country’s soft power and bring more economic benefits to Hong Kong, the industrialization of education for non-local students is worthy of support.

The industrialization of education for non-local students is not something new to many top host countries. According to a report published by the National Association of Foreign Student Advisers (NAFSA), there were about one million international students studying in American colleges and universities in the 2021-2022 academic year, which contributed US\$33.8 billion to the American economy and supported 3.35 million jobs, that is, every three overseas students studying in the United States created one American job opportunity. The US\$30 billion-odd economic return is equivalent to the trade surplus generated by the United States when trading with Hong Kong.

In September 2021, the Higher Education Policy Institute in the United Kingdom published a report entitled “The costs and benefits of international higher education students to the UK economy”, and the title itself has laid out the bare truth. The report showed that in 2018-2019, 270 000 inbound students came to the United Kingdom to study university programmes. The economic benefits of this cohort of university students to the United Kingdom have been calculated at around £28.8 billion against a cost of £2.9 billion, giving a net economic benefit of

£25.9 billion. This evidently demonstrates the importance of international students to the United Kingdom economy.

Let us not just look at the English-speaking countries, but also some non-English speaking countries. On 28 November 2022, Campus France conducted a survey with 10 000 international students. The survey showed that international students brought an economic contribution of €5 billion to France, with a net benefit of €1.35 billion after taking into account the associated costs and expenses.

In July 2022, the Swedish Institute also published a report. It found that most of the students studying in Sweden were short-term exchange students who were not enrolled in degree programmes. However, the economic benefits brought to Sweden by these short-term exchange students amounted to about SKr3.5 billion to SKr4 billion, which is an example worthy of reference.

Insofar as the present situation of non-local students studying in Hong Kong or attracting these students to Hong Kong is concerned, generally speaking, higher education is becoming more popular, while vocational and professional education and training is much less promoted and the promotion of basic education is yet to begin. For persons who enter Hong Kong under the Top Talent Pass Scheme, their children are granted admission to local schools based on a dependent visa, which is quite different from the opening up of self-financing school places I mentioned earlier.

The Chief Executive has explicitly proposed in the 2023 Policy Address the establishment of an international hub for post-secondary education by increasing the admission quota of non-local students to government-funded universities from 20% to 40%. This is a very clear declaration and a very good start. In the face of an increasingly competitive international education market, there are still many policy measures that need to be followed up and implemented. I thus propose to initiate efforts from various domains and formulate a comprehensive strategic development blueprint, with the goal of building Hong Kong into an international education hub.

First, we should further open up the non-local student places for higher education, vocational and professional education and training as well as basic education, so that the entire education sector can be thoroughly revitalized in terms of its industrialization for non-local students. By so doing, not only can we recruit

students from outside Hong Kong to earn tuition fees, we can also invigorate other economic sectors and alleviate the problem of our ageing population structure, as well as replenishing under-employed manpower in various trades and industries. The first thing we need to do is to establish a clear sense of purpose, that is, to build the brand of “Study in Hong Kong, China” and to industrialize Hong Kong’s education for the outside world.

Second, we should compile an annual report on the internationalization of education in Hong Kong. The report should analyse the number of inbound students attracted to Hong Kong each year at different levels of education and under academic education and vocational and professional education and training, as well as their cost-effectiveness and corresponding strategic review.

Third, the SAR Government (especially the Economic and Trade Offices) should take the lead in conducting targeted publicity, and at the same time, collecting education information on countries whose people have the potential to study in Hong Kong. For example, according to a report in *DotDotNews* on 17 December last year, countries such as Kazakhstan in Central Asia have shown a strong interest in seeking external collaboration to revamp their teacher training systems inherited from the former Soviet Union, and The Education University of Hong Kong, in response to this demand, has signed a series of cooperation agreements with these countries, offering assistance in reshaping their education systems by drawing on Hong Kong’s teacher training system. This serves as a very successful precedent of going global.

Besides, taking Southeast Asian countries (especially their Chinese communities) and Central Asian countries along the Belt and Road as examples, what is their effective demand for studying overseas? How many prestigious primary and secondary schools are there in these countries? In my duty visit to Southeast Asian countries in the middle of last year to promote education, I was keen to collect information on their prestigious primary and secondary schools. We can target our publicity on overseas study at these prestigious local schools, just like Singapore, the United Kingdom and the United States which have targeted their overseas study publicity at the prestigious schools in Hong Kong. At the same time, we should regularly organize education fairs in these countries. During the summer holiday each year, universities and even primary and secondary schools from Europe and the United States often hold education fairs in Hong Kong. We have adequate overseas education resources, but there is still a lot of room for improvement and enhancement in terms of going global.

Fourth, we should provide a variety of student accommodation and visa arrangements. Hong Kong is a small and densely populated city, and universities are already struggling to provide student hostels. There are more than 1 000 primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong, but only a handful of them have the capability to provide boarding for their students.

In addition to the Government's support in helping universities identify sites and funding for constructing hostels, we can also fully mobilize the community to set up boarding houses for students. I have visited three student boarding houses of varying sizes to research on this topic, and I find that while they do present a feasible option, better planning from the Government is required, particularly due to the absence of a specific licence category for "student boarding house" in Hong Kong.

In addition, insofar as visas are concerned, non-local post-secondary students are required to apply for a visa to stay and work in Hong Kong after graduation. If basic education is opened for non-local students, another kind of visa will need to be set up for parents to come and accompany their children to study in Hong Kong. By gradually increasing the issuance of these two types of visas, as evidenced in the successful cases of other countries and regions known for overseas education, Hong Kong will encourage a greater influx of students from overseas.

Fifth, we need to strike a balance between scholarships and self-financing education for non-local students. Pragmatically speaking, students from developing countries, especially those from well-off families, are more inclined to study in European and American countries. The biggest challenge in developing the brand of "Study in Hong Kong, China" is that non-local students from well-off families may not prefer Hong Kong, whilst those who meet the academic requirements may not be able to afford the cost of living and tuition fees in Hong Kong. The current practice of the SAR Government is to increase the investment in scholarships to attract non-local top students to study in Hong Kong. This is the right approach, or to put it in plain terms, it can be seen as "warming up the market" first to establish "Study in Hong Kong, China" as a prevailing trend, ultimately driving the increased popularity among non-local students for pursuing self-financing studies in Hong Kong. There are at least six banks in the Mainland offering study loans. We can also promote and revitalize businesses that offer study loans and loan repayments for post-graduation employment, which not only provides a solution for students but also create a new business avenue.

All in all, Deputy President, there are always more solutions than difficulties. I urge for Members' support of my motion. Thank you.

Mr TANG Fei moved the following motion: (Translation)

“That General Secretary XI Jinping explicitly mentioned in May 2023 ‘the need to improve the strategy of educational opening up, put equal emphasis on introducing overseas educational resources and going global, and put to good use world-class educational resources and innovative factors, so as to make China an influential and important education hub in the world. It is important to participate in global education governance, vigorously promote the brand of “Study in China”’; as education in the HKSAR is an integral part of the national education system, it is only natural for the SAR Government to play a more proactive role in the process of promoting the building of China’s education brand; the Chief Executive has also explicitly mentioned in the 2023 Policy Address the need to build Hong Kong into an international hub for post-secondary education; in this connection, this Council urges the SAR Government to adopt more proactive measures to formulate a comprehensive strategic development blueprint for Hong Kong’s education and provide more diversified education services and support measures, thereby playing the role of leveraging the SAR’s advantages for meeting the country’s needs in the field of education, maintaining and strengthening Hong Kong’s edge as an international city, and enabling the country’s and the SAR’s education to be more influential and have a greater say in the world.”

DEPUTY PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the motion moved by Mr TANG Fei be passed.

PROF WILLIAM WONG (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President. I thank Mr TANG Fei for proposing a motion on “Actively building Hong Kong into an international education hub by formulating a comprehensive strategic development blueprint for Hong Kong’s education”, and the few other Members for proposing their amendments.

The 2023 Policy Address has proposed to build Hong Kong into an international hub for post-secondary education, and we are indeed well-positioned

to fulfil this role. Hong Kong enjoys a favourable geographical location. We are strategically located at the heart of Asia and also the southern gateway to China. It is very convenient to come to Hong Kong from overseas, with major commercial cities in Asia just about a four-hour flight away and more than half of the world's population reachable within a five-hour flight. Moreover, Hong Kong has the unique advantage of being a place where Eastern and Western cultures converge and where biliteracy and trilingualism are commonly used, so Putonghua- and English-speaking students who choose to study in Hong Kong will not face any language barriers. Most importantly, many post-secondary institutions in Hong Kong are ranked among the best in the world. In a small city like Hong Kong, we have five universities in the world's top 100, and all of them are subject to stringent regulations to ensure good education quality. With these advantages, Hong Kong is definitely capable of promoting the establishment of the "Study in China" brand.

Deputy President, I very much agree with the original motion in saying that education in Hong Kong is an integral part of the national education system. Our post-secondary institutions are definitely qualified to be part of the quality brand name of "Study in China". Hong Kong can do more for the "Study in China" brand and one of such efforts is, as I have proposed in my amendment, to facilitate the joint offer of more double degree programmes between our local higher education institutions and those in the Mainland.

Students who take these double degree programmes jointly offered with the Mainland education institutions are required to complete relevant courses in both the Mainland and Hong Kong. By so doing, they will be able to get in touch with different cultural backgrounds of the two places and greatly expand their personal network. They will also be able to obtain two degrees concurrently, one from the Mainland institution and another from the Hong Kong institution. These factors make Hong Kong an appealing destination for foreign students. Additionally, graduates will have greater flexibility in choosing between pursuing further study and employment, and will enjoy development prospects in both Hong Kong and the Mainland.

In fact, collaboration with Mainland education institutions can also be carried out in Hong Kong. In the Policy Address last year, the Government has put forth the proposal of developing the Northern Metropolis University Town where local education institutions are encouraged to cooperate with internationally-renowned ones. I believe the internationally-renowned education institutions mentioned by the Government should not exclude those in the

Mainland. As a matter of fact, many Mainland universities have achieved global recognition. If these universities can establish a presence in the Northern Metropolis together with our post-secondary education institutions, they can leverage Hong Kong's international vibe to attract students from all over the world, making the Northern Metropolis University Town a gateway for overseas students to study in China, especially in renowned Chinese universities.

The Chief Executive has put forth in the Policy Address the proposal to “build an international hub for post-secondary education”. But in fact, developing Hong Kong into a regional education hub has always been a policy of the Government, which includes not only post-secondary education but also primary and secondary school education, vocational education, etc. Let me take the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (“HKDSE”) examination as an example. In addition to using the HKDSE examination results to apply for admission to local universities, the results are also recognized by more than 600 higher education institutions outside Hong Kong. Students are allowed to use their HKDSE examination results to apply for admission to these universities, which will in turn attract more non-local students from the Mainland and even from Southeast Asia to enrol in the HKDSE programme. This will be a very worthwhile option for Hong Kong to work towards an international education hub; and by attracting secondary and even primary school students to choose Hong Kong as their study destination, we will also be able to counteract demographic changes and alleviate the impact of low fertility rate on the education sector.

Deputy President, I so submit.

MR STANLEY NG (in Cantonese): Deputy President, building a leading country in education is a major national strategy. It is also an important part of our efforts to regain our education sovereignty and to enhance the soft power of our country.

In this connection, the SAR Government must have the commitment to give full play to Hong Kong's own strengths and at the same time serve the needs of the country. Mr TANG Fei's motion on “Actively building Hong Kong into an international education hub by formulating a comprehensive strategic development blueprint for Hong Kong's education” precisely meets the needs of this national strategy, and enables Hong Kong to give full play to its strengths in education. I thus very much agree with Mr TANG Fei's original motion, and I also support Prof William WONG's amendment to which he added the part regarding “the

objective of becoming a leading country in education by 2035” put forward in the report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. I originally also intended to add the same to my amendment. Additionally, to enable national education to go global, the SAR Government should also step up its efforts in encouraging the local higher education sector to cooperate with them, so as to enable the education services in Hong Kong to diversify and expand, thereby consolidating its position as an international education centre.

On another front, I also hope that this strategic blueprint for education development in Hong Kong can cover the development of, and give importance to, vocational and professional education and training (“VPET”), so that this blueprint does not focus only on traditional education and neglect VPET, and that the development of Hong Kong as an education hub can be more comprehensive. It is for this reason that I propose my amendment.

There are currently 22 degree-awarding higher education institutions in Hong Kong, and the recent upgrade of another post-secondary institution to become the third private university in Hong Kong has increased the diversity of educational opportunities for students. In the latest QS Asia University Rankings, 10 universities in Hong Kong have made the list, with the University of Hong Kong ranked 2nd, The Chinese University of Hong Kong ranked 10th, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology ranked 15th, the City University of Hong Kong ranked 17th, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University ranked 23rd and the Hong Kong Baptist University ranked 64th. Hong Kong’s education resources can be said to have a high reputation in the Asian region as well as in the globe.

Blessed with such an edge in education, we should make full use of this edge of Hong Kong to help promote the branding of education in China, proactively introduce more quality educational resources from overseas and help more quality education services in China to go global. We must reclaim our education sovereignty and enhance the international influence and the say of our country and the SAR in education, so that the excellent traditional Chinese culture and ideology can go global, which can contribute to and influence the world while serving as a valuable educational option to address the problems of mankind.

Deputy President, in the past, Hong Kong attached too much importance to grammar education and neglected VPET. However, under the new trend of international education in the new era, the value of a university degree in the traditional pursuit of grammar education has depreciated. The labour market is in

greater need of talented people equipped with hands-on skills in applied technology and vocational training. More governments around the world are concerned about how to provide more diversified development for young people through the development of VPET, so as to stimulate their potential and create greater value for society. Reforming VPET is essential if Hong Kong is to become an international education hub. If the Government fails to recognize this trend and fails to attract greater development in VPET, Hong Kong risks losing its international status and market share in VPET, or even undermining its role as an education hub.

Deputy President, we must grasp the essential meaning of the major national strategy of building a leading country in education. We must not be controlled by others in terms of what we learn, what knowledge we acquire, and what talents we cultivate. We must firmly grasp our education sovereignty, so as to establish Hong Kong as a partner and a builder of the global education governance, while positioning our country as a prominent education centre with significant influence in the world as well as telling China's stories well.

I hereby support Mr TANG Fei's original motion and Prof William WONG's amendment. I so submit.

MS LILLIAN KWOK (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President. I am indebted to Mr TANG Fei for proposing a Members' motion on "Actively building Hong Kong into an international education hub by formulating a comprehensive strategic development blueprint for Hong Kong's education". In 2020, education services in Hong Kong only accounted for 1.4% of our Gross Domestic Product, which was much lower than that of major education services exporting countries such as the United Kingdom (6.3%), the United States (5.6%) and Australia (5.2%). But in fact, our post-secondary education has long been recognized around the world, with five of our post-secondary institutions ranked among the world's top 100. It is thus clear that Hong Kong does have the capacity and the potential to establish itself as an international education hub.

President XI has emphasized that "everyone is able to excel themselves, and can do full justice to their talents", implying that apart from traditional academic subjects, vocational and professional education and training ("VPET") is also very important. From the proposal of establishing universities of applied science and technology, optimizing life planning services, and stepping up promotion to

enhance public understanding of vocational education, it is evident that the Government now attaches great importance to VPET. Hence, if Hong Kong is to establish itself as an international education hub, VPET is also an indispensable part. In fact, the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications have already passed the external reviews conducted by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education, which is a testament proving that the standard of qualifications framework in Hong Kong is internationally recognized. Hence, the amendment I propose seeks to point out that if Hong Kong is to develop into an international education hub, we must seek different regions' recognition of our qualifications. In this connection, I have the following suggestions.

First, we should promote as soon as possible the mutual recognition and transfer of professional qualifications in the Greater Bay Area ("GBA"). For Hong Kong to fulfil its role in being part of the brand of "Study in China", the first and foremost task is to enable the mutual recognition and transfer of professional qualifications attained in Hong Kong and the Mainland. The lack of a platform for recognizing qualifications has hindered the flow of different professionals from GBA, at home and abroad. Hence, it is indeed necessary to expeditiously and comprehensively implement the mutual recognition and transfer of professional qualifications in GBA, so that non-local talents who come to Hong Kong can receive training and education here and at the same time obtain national qualification accreditation. After attaining the qualifications in Hong Kong, they can return to their places of origin and take up employment. I believe this can increase the attractiveness of our education services to foreigners. I suggest that we should first look at the more well-developed programmes, and then set up a "GBA Standard", stipulating a series of qualifications framework accreditations.

Second, we should promote Hong Kong's professional qualifications frameworks to different regions of the world for their recognition. Hong Kong's education has always been recognized worldwide, especially the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education ("DSE"), which is recognized by many post-secondary institutions at home and abroad as one of the qualifications for admission. If Hong Kong is to develop into an international education hub, we can draw on the case of DSE and strive for other regions' recognition of the standards of our technical professions as well as our vocational education qualifications. This will provide diversified choices of study to attract people from overseas to come to Hong Kong for education. With the enhancement of the

admission scheme for non-local graduates, I believe that some of the graduates will be more willing to stay in Hong Kong for development.

Third, we need to comprehensively develop VPET. With the changes in the needs and development of society, the Government has endeavoured to promote the development of VPET in recent years. In this connection, I suggest that the Government may further review and optimize the situation. For instance, it may nurture the type of talents required for the development of industries to promote the integration of industry and academia; and provide students with teaching contents that are closely related to the industries. It may also launch professional education programmes relevant to the emerging industries of the country, and review and update these programmes in a timely manner to reduce and eliminate outdated curricula and pedagogical knowledge, so as to achieve maximum effectiveness.

All in all, by promoting mutual recognition of qualifications between the Mainland and Hong Kong, striving for the recognition of Hong Kong's qualifications by different regions, and optimizing Hong Kong's VPET, Hong Kong will be able to develop into an incubation base for international talents and become an international education hub, thereby truly achieving the goal mentioned by President XI, which is to "tell China's stories well, spread China's experience, and enable China's education to be more influential in the world". With these remarks, I urge Members to support the building of Hong Kong into an international education hub, endorsing Mr TANG Fei's original motion, my amendment and the amendments proposed by the other Members.

I so submit. Thank you, Deputy President.

MR FRANKIE YICK (in Cantonese): Deputy President, of the eight publicly-funded universities in Hong Kong, five are ranked among the world's top 100; and the research and development work conducted by our universities has been recognized by the international academic community. As a place where East meets West, Hong Kong provides students with more opportunities to learn about different cultures. Moreover, with only a four-hour flight to major cities in the Asia-Pacific region and a five-hour flight to more than half of the world's population, Hong Kong has a superior geographical location that helps attract overseas students to come and study in Hong Kong. All these show that Hong Kong does have the criteria to develop into an international education hub, which

will not only broaden the international horizon of local students but also help increase the manpower resources needed for the development of local industries.

The Liberal Party supports Mr TANG Fei's original motion and the amendments proposed by the other Members. My amendment only seeks to add that more specific efforts should be made to develop vocational and professional education and training ("VPET") while establishing Hong Kong as an international education hub.

To develop Hong Kong into an international hub for post-secondary education, the Government proposed in last year's Policy Address to further increase the amount of scholarships and relax the quota of non-local students to government-funded post-secondary institutions to 40%, which is the second relax of quota after a lapse of 15 years. In addition, the Government also proposed to temporarily exempt non-local students from the restrictions on taking up part-time jobs in Hong Kong, and develop the Northern Metropolis University Town in the Northern Metropolis. However, in order to become an international education hub, having a diversified curriculum is also very important. In addition to traditional mainstream academic subjects, VPET has gained an increasing emphasis in various countries in recent years because many of these countries are also faced with an acute shortage of technical professionals in all sectors, and these professionals are essential to the sustained functioning of society.

I have repeatedly told the Government that there is a serious shortage of technical personnel in various trades and industries in Hong Kong, and that the shortage of repair and maintenance technicians in the land-, sea- and air-related sectors is particularly serious. The continuous decline in technical professionals has led to the present succession gap. This is due to the fact that the education system of Hong Kong has all along emphasized academics and neglected craftsmanship. In May last year, in response to the severe shortage of manpower in certain sectors, the Government launched the Sector-specific Labour Importation Schemes and the Enhanced the Supplementary Labour Scheme. Originally, it is intended to address the shortage of aircraft repair and maintenance technicians in the aviation industry by importing foreign workers through the Labour Importation Scheme. Unfortunately, the industry has not managed to hire a single employee so far. It is thus evident that the problem of technical personnel shortage is not unique to Hong Kong; other places and cities are also facing this same problem. Hence, my amendment seeks to point out that, in developing Hong Kong into an international education hub, we must also allocate more resources for VPET,

coupled with avenues for continuing education, to provide young people with a diversified career path, thereby providing continuous training for technical personnel, who are in acute shortage, for Hong Kong.

As a matter of fact, technological advancement has prompted today's technical personnel (such as vehicle repair and maintenance mechanics) to change from simply working only with a spanner or a screwdriver as they used to do in the past. They are required to acquire a wider range of knowledge and skills, including expertise in electronics, electrical engineering and computers, in addition to mechanics. Hence, the Liberal Party absolutely supports the Chief Executive's proposal in last year's Policy Address to establish universities of applied sciences, so as to raise the status of VPET to attain qualifications at the university degree level.

The Liberal Party is of the view that the Government should allocate more resources to promote VPET. Starting from the junior secondary school level, the technology subjects should be integrated into the daily curriculum, or a "one person, one craft" approach should be adopted to gradually cultivate students' knowledge in craftsmanship; and the technology subjects should be specialized to tie in with the tertiary education and vocational internships, with a view to training up new labour force for the skilled trades and industries in the future.

Deputy President, to establish Hong Kong as an international education hub, we must offer diversified programmes that cater to students' various needs while providing the community with the talents required for the development of industries, so as to facilitate their sustainable growth.

With these remarks, I implore Members to support my amendment.

PROF PRISCILLA LEUNG (in Cantonese): Deputy President, I speak in support of Mr TANG Fei's original motion and all the amendments. Deputy President, to tell the story about the rule of law in China well, we must first do a good job in providing training for talents in the practice of foreign-related legal affairs. With the International Organization for Mediation to be located in Hong Kong, our opportunity to do so has come. Are we ready for it? Hong Kong needs to do a good job in training international legal talents, which will contribute to the overall national development in the coming century, and this opportunity is given to us by our country.

At the Fifth Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, General Secretary XI Jinping has repeatedly stressed that our country must have a greater say in the international arena, and that it must insist on coordinating and taking forward the rule of law at home and the rule of law with foreign countries, with the latter being a comprehensive strategy. Strengthening our cultivation of talents in foreign-related legal affairs is a matter affecting the fate of the country and the Communist Party. As a member of the legal sector, I am glad to hear the leader of our country repeatedly mention the importance of the rule of law. As a cosmopolitan city, is Hong Kong fully prepared in terms of our knowledge of international law?

Hong Kong has a vital role to play if our country is to become a major player in the international arena. I have been deeply committed to reshaping the storytelling of China's rule of law since the 1990s, promoting the story of China's rule of law in foreign countries. Additionally, I have contributed to editing Chinese court decisions in both Chinese and English to enable foreigners to know more about the legal system of China, and have been involved in international legal talent training for judges from various Mainland provinces. Hence, after China acceded to the World Trade Organization in 2001, it has been actively and systematically training its international legal professionals.

On the other hand, although Hong Kong is an international city, our development in international law is relatively unimpressive. The three law schools offer only general common law programmes. Today, are we ready for the opportunity that our country has given us? This will affect the overall development of our country. Our country attaches great importance to the common law brand of Hong Kong. We are supposed to be capable of serving the whole world, of which at least 2.8 billion people are conversant with Chinese or English. Over the past 30 years, or around our return to the motherland, we have taught mainly basic common law programmes, which is the same in all three law schools. We at the City University of Hong Kong have been promoting Chinese Law and Comparative Law since the 1990s. We have been promoting these programmes together for several decades, but we have done relatively little on international law. Whether or not we can take on the role of training international legal talents will depend on how we do it.

In 1965, the United Nations ("UN") initiated the training of international law professionals, and The Hague Academy of International Law has been inviting every year prominent international law scholars to train UN international judges

and experts. I had the honour of accompanying my husband to The Hague in 2009 because he was invited to speak at The Hague Academy of International Law. He felt honoured when many international judges, whom he encountered on the streets, addressed him as “Professor”. I think that this modest experience brings great satisfaction to a lawyer. Hence, the Hong Kong International Legal Talents Training Academy should be of this dimension. It is mentioned in the Policy Address that a dedicated office will be set up to facilitate the establishment of this academy, which will also aim to give a sense of satisfaction to those delivering speeches or attending courses there. At present, I do not think that the three law schools and the two lawyers’ associations in Hong Kong are fully prepared in this respect. I hope that they will not take the establishment of this academy as an exercise to “get a share of the pie”; but rather, the academy will invite prominent international scholars to Hong Kong, with a view to fostering an international environment conducive to training talents in international law and making all participants and teachers involved in this project feel honoured.

Deputy President, I so submit.

SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION (in Cantonese): Deputy President, I thank Mr TANG Fei for his motion, and Prof William WONG, Mr Stanley NG, Mr Frankie YICK, Prof Priscilla LEUNG and Ms Lillian KWOK for their amendments. Their views and suggestions on “Actively building Hong Kong into an international education hub by formulating a comprehensive strategic development blueprint for Hong Kong’s education” have given us an opportunity to explore in depth the objectives and strategies of building an international hub for education as proposed by the Chief Executive in the 2023 Policy Address. Here below, I will highlight the strategies and measures of the Government in building Hong Kong into an international education hub, so as to tie in with the education development strategy of our country; and I will also give a preliminary response to the Members’ amendments.

President XI Jinping says that a leading country in education is led by higher education, and that we should speed up the development of world-class universities and strong disciplines with Chinese features, so as to promote scientific research and innovation that aims at the global frontiers of science and technology and our country’s major strategic needs. He also says that we should improve the strategy of educational opening up, strive to introduce overseas educational resources and go global, and put to good use world-class educational resources and innovative

factors, so as to make our country an influential and important education hub in the world.

Hong Kong has been leveraging its advantages to meet the country's needs. We need to tie in with our country's education development goal and the Belt and Road ("B&R") Initiative, and seize the opportunities arising from the rapid development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area ("GBA") and provide the manpower support for Hong Kong to develop the "eight centres" as outlined in the 14th Five-Year Plan. Mr TANG Fei's motion precisely echoes the Chief Executive's 2023 Policy Address by planning from a macroscopic and long-term perspective, setting a direction and a goal for the high-quality development of Hong Kong's education. This direction or goal is to build Hong Kong into "an international education hub and a cradle for future talents". Developing Hong Kong into an international education hub and nurturing diverse talents will not only enhance Hong Kong's development momentum, but also enhance people-to-people ties and contribute to the advancement of our country.

Hong Kong has a multicultural characteristic. We have a sound education infrastructure, world-renowned universities, outstanding research talents and strong research capabilities. The quality of our teaching and learning has ranked among the top in various international comparative studies. Hong Kong has a total of 22 degree-awarding post-secondary institutions, 8 of which are universities funded by the University Grants Committee ("UGC") and 5 of them are among the world's top 100 universities, making Hong Kong one of the cities with the highest number of top universities in the world. It is well known that Hong Kong's quality education brand is widely recognized and appreciated both at home and abroad.

To dovetail with the education development strategy of our country, the SAR Government has capitalized on our existing strengths to build a blueprint by way of the following four key strategies and a number of important measures, with a view to comprehensively developing Hong Kong into an international education hub.

First, promote the synergistic development of higher education in Hong Kong and the Mainland, and step up cooperation and enhance the complementarity of strengths of the two places. Specific measures include introducing Hong Kong's quality education brand and first-class education resources to GBA cities in the Mainland through cooperative education programmes, so as to fulfil the role

of leveraging the SAR's advantages to meet the country's needs. The Hong Kong Baptist University has co-founded the United International College in Zhuhai with the Beijing Normal University; and The Chinese University of Hong Kong (Shenzhen) and The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (Guangzhou) have also established a presence in GBA, while the City University of Hong Kong (Dongguan) is also pressing ahead with the preparation for its Dongguan campus.

Meanwhile, with the support of the Ministry of Education and the assistance of the relevant education departments, Hong Kong's higher education institutions have established alliances with those in the Beijing Municipality, Shanghai Municipality, Guangdong Province, Jiangsu Province and Shandong Province. These alliances have effectively brought together quality teaching and research resources, improved the cooperation mechanism and promoted the collaborative development of higher education institutions, thus enhancing the depth and breadth of regional cooperation, and contributing to the building of high-quality education systems for our country.

Second, encourage post-secondary institutions to play a leading role in strengthening international exchanges and cooperation, and to bring in first-class education institutions and organizations from the Mainland and overseas to establish a foothold in Hong Kong. Moreover, we are pleased to see that universities have resumed organizing large-scale international academic events, inviting university representatives and renowned scholars from different parts of China and the world to participate. To promote internationalization, the UGC-funded universities jointly organize annual overseas admission tours or promotion activities to attract more international students to pursue undergraduate programmes in Hong Kong. To support universities to recover from the pandemic and strengthen their promotion efforts, of the UGC's funding for the 2022-2025 triennium, \$20.47 million are allocated to the Standing Committee on Internationalization of the Heads of Universities Committee to take part in and organize various overseas activities and to visit different places to recruit overseas students. On the other hand, to broaden students' horizons and explore development opportunities at home and overseas, UGC will inject an additional \$100 million to the Funding Scheme for Mainland and Global Engagement and Student Learning Experience from the 2023-2024 academic year onwards, so as to encourage universities to provide more learning opportunities through exchanges outside Hong Kong, and to enable students to have a better understanding of the

development of our country and the global situation. As of the end of November 2022, the UGC-funded universities have signed over 2 600 student exchange agreements with institutions around the world, which is a significant increase over the pre-pandemic period.

Third, education is an important investment for the future. The current-term Government attaches particular importance to supporting local post-secondary institutions to expand their capacity and enhance their quality, so as to attract more Mainland and overseas students to study in Hong Kong, thereby promoting internationalization and multicultural experience. Expanding the scale of development of higher education in Hong Kong can also broaden students' international horizons and provide them with more diversified development options and pathways. Related measures include increasing the non-local student quota of publicly-funded post-secondary institutions; increasing the B&R Scholarship recipients to attract more outstanding non-local students to pursue further study in Hong Kong; and proactively taking forward the development of post-secondary education in the Northern Metropolis by fully leveraging its proximity to the hinterland and pressing ahead with various projects under the theme of a “new international innovation and technology (‘I&T’) city”, so as to achieve a synergy with the neighbouring areas on I&T development, construct landmark developments for post-secondary institutions, and develop the area into the Northern Metropolis University Town to attract elite education institutions in the Mainland and overseas to set up branches in or launch collaboration projects with Hong Kong, thereby creating a synergy by sharing resources and enhancing collaboration with the industry sector.

Fourth, make early planning of the future directions and targets for higher education development. Such planning should stress the importance of aligning the development of our higher education with the national strategic directions; and encourage the UGC-funded universities to nurture talents to meet the needs of society, so as to enhance the development momentum of Hong Kong. In the triennial planning exercise for 2022-2025, the SAR Government has clearly set out the strategic directions, which include encouraging universities to adopt a strategic planning approach to cope with the social development trends, and specifying the proportion of undergraduate degree programmes related to STEAM (i.e. Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts and Mathematics)) and the “eight centres” as outlined in the National 14th Five-Year Plan, so as to cultivate professionals with different knowledge areas and contribute to the invigoration of our country through science and education.

To sum up, through the four strategies of promoting the synergistic development of higher education institutions in the Mainland and Hong Kong, strengthening international exchanges and cooperation, supporting local institutions to expand their capacity and enhance their quality, and making early planning of the future directions and targets, coupled with the eight measures of increasing the non-local student quota, offering additional scholarship quota, enhancing the supply of hostel places, encouraging cooperative education, providing subsidies for teacher and student exchange programmes at home and abroad, providing non-local students with better opportunities for career development in Hong Kong, developing the Northern Metropolis and optimizing the triennial planning, the SAR Government will build up a blueprint for education development, in a bid to establish Hong Kong as an international education hub for the nurturing of talents.

Regarding Prof WONG's proposal, as mentioned in his amendment, of encouraging Hong Kong's higher education institutions to jointly offer more double degree programmes with Mainland institutions, the SAR Government supports Hong Kong's higher education institutions to cooperate with high-standard universities outside Hong Kong, so as to upgrade the local academic and research standards. Under the principle of institutional autonomy, the UGC-funded universities have been collaborating with international and Mainland institutions in the forms of joint programmes, academic and research exchanges and student exchange programmes, and they have achieved remarkable results. Various Mainland institutions that operate cooperative education programmes with our local institutions are also actively offering dual-major programmes on campuses in both GBA and Hong Kong, examples of which include the "2+2" undergraduate degree programmes jointly offered by The Chinese University of Hong Kong and The Chinese University of Hong Kong (Shenzhen), and dual-campus programmes organized by The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology and The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (Guangzhou), under which credits earned are mutually recognized and automatically transferable. These programmes will enrich students' learning and internship experiences, and assist in the cultivation and aggregation of internationalized and innovative talents in GBA.

The promotion of vocational and professional education and training ("VPET"), as mentioned in the amendments by Mr NG, Mr YICK and Ms KWOK, echoes the goal put forth by the State President, and that is the need to develop

vocational education, and to promote the integration between vocational education and general education, between industry and education, and between science and education, so as to continuously cultivate high-calibre technicians and skilled workers and master craftsmen. With this goal in mind, together with efforts to tie in with our country's policy of promoting the development of high-quality modern vocational education, the current-term SAR Government is committed to nurturing more professionals with applied skills and in good grasp of various technologies for the development of Hong Kong and the country.

Through the promotion of VPET, we provide quality, diversified and flexible study pathways with multiple entry and exit points for young people with different aspirations, and equip them with the skills and knowledge required by society and the workplace, thereby laying down a solid foundation for their further studies, employment and lifelong learning. With the strategy of fostering industry-institution collaboration and diversified development and a multi-pronged approach, we introduce a series of measures at different levels (including the secondary and tertiary levels) and promote VPET as a pathway parallel to conventional academic education. The SAR Government also actively promotes VPET collaboration with the Mainland, including actively looking into the mutual recognition of sub-degree level qualifications with the Mainland authorities, so as to broaden the career pathways for VPET students and nurture quality talents with applied skills for the development of Hong Kong, GBA and the country.

Moreover, in order to raise the status of VPET at the degree level and to provide an alternative path to success for young people who aspire to pursue a career in the technical professions, the Chief Executive has proposed in the 2023 Policy Address the establishment of universities of applied sciences, and has introduced measures to encourage self-financing post-secondary institutions to plan for their development in the relevant direction, so as to provide the impetus for the development of Hong Kong.

Regarding promoting the training of legal talents, as mentioned by Prof LEUNG in her amendment, the Department of Justice will set up the Hong Kong International Legal Talents Training Office and the Expert Committee for Hong Kong International Legal Talents Training within 2024 to take forward the work relating to the establishment of the Hong Kong International Legal Talents Training Academy. Through promoting the training of legal talents, we will further participate in the B&R Initiative in the next decade, contribute to the rule

of law in the country, and give full play to Hong Kong's close connection to the world as well as its unique advantages and position in the rule of law.

Deputy President, I so submit. Thank you.

MR ANDREW LAM (in Cantonese): Deputy President, first of all, I would like to thank Mr TANG Fei for his original motion and the five Members for their amendments.

The 14th Five-Year Plan acknowledges the role of Hong Kong's development into leading centres in eight key areas, and in order to realize the positioning of the "eight centres", Hong Kong needs a lot of manpower. Although Hong Kong has recently made good progress in attracting talents, the relevant measures are only short-term ones; the long-term solution is to start with education.

All along, many people have appreciated the education system in Hong Kong and it is not difficult to see comments made by Mainland netizens on social media platforms. While some consider Hong Kong's learning atmosphere, teaching contents and methods highly internationalized, others commend its learning environment which makes students feel a great degree of tolerance and respect.

According to the World University Rankings 2024 published by the Times Higher Education of the United Kingdom, five universities in Hong Kong continue to be ranked among the world's top 100, whereas our major competitors, Singapore and South Korea, only have two and three universities so ranked respectively.

According to the information of the Census and Statistics Department, starting from the 2019-2020 academic year, there was an average of 4 000 to 5 000 international students from other parts of Asia and 700 to 800 non-Asian international students in Hong Kong each year, accounting for about 30% of the non-local students. It was even proposed in last year's Policy Address that from the 2024-2025 academic year onwards, the admission ratio of non-local students to the eight universities in Hong Kong would be increased from 20% in the past to 40%, which, I think, is a move in the right direction.

Exchange and cooperation in education, which is an important aspect in the development of the Belt and Road Initiative, plays a very important role in

enhancing the people-to-people bond and consolidating the public support for the Belt and Road Initiative. Hong Kong's advantages in higher education have undoubtedly laid a good foundation for Hong Kong to develop into an international education hub.

Hong Kong should capitalize on its advantages to establish and consolidate its role as an international education hub. This will not only serve to meet the local demand for talents in the medium and long term, but also contribute to the development of our country in pooling and nurturing talents, and extend the advantages of our education system to professional, entrepreneurial, political and cultural networks, so as to provide the community with more comprehensive ideas and strategies through nurturing new talents. This is because education is not just about teaching “skills and techniques”, it is also closely related to culture, morality and values.

At present, the world is faced with a myriad of problems. As President XI Jinping said in 2022 when quoting from *Zhong Yong*, the idea of “achieving harmony in diversity” is respected by Chinese people for thousands of years, and “All living things should flourish without harming each other; all ways of life should thrive without hindering each other”. Thus, we should scrutinize the trend of world development on the high ground in history and strive to build a community with a shared future for mankind. Hong Kong should enable the world to embrace the values of the Chinese culture, promote the philosophies of our country and nurture talents in this regard for our country and even the world.

Inspired by Mr TANG Fei's speech, I believe it is possible that education (including professional study assistant services), as a supporting service for industries, can promote the economic development of Hong Kong.

Education is a major undertaking of nurturing people over a very long period of time, and its responsibility is not simply to train talents. It also provides a network for long-term exchanges with the world as well as a facility for publicizing the development of the country, making cultural comparison and maintaining bonds and connectivity between people. Diversity of civilizations fosters exchanges, exchanges facilitate mutual learning, and mutual learning promotes development. Hong Kong should continue to enhance its communication with different countries, ethnicities and cultures in the world, embrace the Chinese culture, and actively develop itself into an international education hub, so as to

contribute to our country and even the world in building a community with a shared future for mankind.

Deputy President, I so submit.

DR TIK CHI-YUEN (in Cantonese): Deputy President, it is right for Hong Kong to move in the direction of developing international education as an industry. When former Chief Executive Donald TSANG was in office, he already advocated developing education as one of the Six Industries. All along, our local universities have enjoyed very high academic status internationally, with the University of Hong Kong, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University and the City University of Hong Kong ranked among the top 100 universities in the world. Our universities can indeed attract research talents from all over the world to serve in Hong Kong, as well as students from all over the world to study and conduct research here, thus truly achieving the goals of introducing overseas educational resources and going global. Therefore, the university system in Hong Kong is an important platform for maintaining our close connection to the world.

However, if we want to attract international scholars and research talents to serve in Hong Kong universities, we must maintain the academic freedom and institutional autonomy of Hong Kong universities; whereas in recent years, the tertiary education sector in Hong Kong has gone through trials and tribulations.

Firstly, university student unions have been marginalized. Many institutions, such as Lingnan University, the University of Hong Kong and the City University of Hong Kong, have begun to deny the status of student unions in the universities. The student unions have been deprived of their right to participate in the internal affairs of the universities; they are unable to take part in the councils of their universities, and have even been burdened with numerous constraints that hinder their organization of student activities. In the past, universities and student unions had a harmonious relationship and collaborated with each other to improve the environment and teaching quality of the institutions, while student unions also provided a platform for students to learn. Student unions have all along been a platform for nurturing elites and leaders in society. Many government officials, business leaders and political leaders were active members of student unions in the past. If student unions are marginalized and student participation is restricted, it will not be conducive to the diversified development of university students.

Secondly, the autonomy of universities has been interfered with. In recent years, the Legislative Council has passed a number of amendments to university ordinances, changing the composition of the university councils. In the case of The Chinese University of Hong Kong (“CUHK”), for example, the original ratio of internal to external members in the Council is 1:1, but after the amendment, external members now account for two-thirds, which has aroused the concern that external members may dominate in deciding the internal affairs of the university, thus leading to unnecessary interference in the university’s teaching objectives, personnel arrangements, room for academic development and so on. The Council of CUHK has been reorganized to include external members. After the reorganization, the Council of CUHK dismissed a Vice-President, and recently, the Vice-Chancellor/President of CUHK has also resigned. These incidents have aroused concern about political interference in the autonomy of universities, which will definitely affect the desire of scholars and researchers from all over the world to serve in Hong Kong.

Thirdly, there is a lack of transparency in the reforms introduced by the management. In recent years, many universities have merged some faculties and departments or carried out curriculum reforms, but the lack of adequate consultation by the management of universities has resulted in many stakeholders perceiving a lack of transparency and plurality of opinions in the reforms. Moreover, concerns have also been raised regarding the concentration of power in the hands of the management, which may undermine the participation and autonomy of the academic community.

In an academic environment, participation of teaching staff, academics and other members of the institution is crucial to the protection of academic freedom, as their perspectives and professional insights can enrich discussions and balance considerations in the decision-making process. If the management does not care about the participation of different stakeholders, it may lead to dissatisfaction with the decisions, which may in turn affect the academic environment and pose threats to academic freedom in practice.

Recently, an international higher education organization has announced the 2024 World University Rankings, and the rankings of various universities in Hong Kong have dropped significantly. Looking back at the past few years, it is not difficult for us to see that the room for university education and academic development has been shrinking. Take the laws on national security as an example, many academics have made the decision to either leave their jobs or

revise their teaching materials to avoid violating the law, and there was a wave of departures from 2021 to 2022. According to the figures of the University Grants Committee (“UGC”), a total of more than 360 academics from the eight UGC-funded universities in Hong Kong have left their jobs between 2021 and 2022, and the wastage rate of 7.4% is the highest since Hong Kong’s return to the motherland in 1997. If our universities cannot uphold academic freedom and institutional autonomy as they did in the past, our universities will not be able to attract people to them, nor will they be able to go anywhere.

Deputy President, I so submit.

IR CHAN SIU-HUNG (in Cantonese): Deputy President, I would like to express my gratitude and support to Mr TANG Fei’s motion on “Actively building Hong Kong into an international education hub by formulating a comprehensive strategic development blueprint for Hong Kong’s education” and the amendments proposed by the several Members.

The report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China has clearly set out the objective of becoming a leading country in education by 2035, and last year, President XI Jinping also pointed out “the need to improve the strategy of educational opening up, put equal emphasis on introducing overseas educational resources and going global” and “vigorously promote the brand of ‘Study in China’ and tell China’s stories well”. As the “super bridge” between our country and the world, Hong Kong naturally has to contribute to our country’s goal of becoming a leading country in education.

Deputy President, Hong Kong has always been a place where East meets West, with five universities ranked among the top 100 universities in the world; there is a certain degree of institutional autonomy in our tertiary institutions and mechanisms for assuring teaching quality have been put in place. In addition, as there are no entry restrictions on overseas education and training institutions in Hong Kong, the city possesses the potential to establish itself as an international education hub, attracting students from both the Mainland and overseas to pursue their studies here.

Quite a number of students in Hong Kong will pursue further studies in countries in Europe, the United States, Australia and so on, which have long since turned the export of university education services into an industry, and the

economic benefits brought about by overseas students are substantial. Since Hong Kong possesses the above-mentioned advantages in developing into an education hub, it should also steer education development in the direction of industrialization. The Government should remove barriers and restrictions in the relevant policies, including further relaxing the restrictions imposed by the University Grants Committee on the admission quota for non-local students to tertiary institutions and relaxing the restrictions on taking up part-time jobs by non-local university students. The strategic development of education services and the export of university education services will not only bring about economic benefits, but also serve as a means to tell Hong Kong' stories well and connect us to the world.

At present, the Government is striving to attract talents from the Mainland and overseas to Hong Kong by launching a number of talent admission schemes. Education for their children is definitely one of the important considerations for professionals when deciding whether or not to come to Hong Kong for development. According to the figures provided by the Immigration Department, as at the end of October last year, nearly 120 000 applications have been approved under various talent admission schemes in Hong Kong. There are over 81 000 approved visa applications for dependants under the schemes and among them, about 47 000 are for minor children, indicating that many talents will bring along their children while developing their careers in Hong Kong. Therefore, if Hong Kong has comprehensive planning and support for education development, it will attract more professionals from the Mainland and overseas to consider developing their careers in Hong Kong.

Deputy President, several Members have mentioned vocational and professional education and training (“VPET”) in their amendments to this motion, proposing that additional resources be allocated to promote VPET and efforts be made to strive for the recognition of Hong Kong’s VPET qualifications by different regions. In last year’s Policy Address, the Chief Executive also said that universities of applied sciences would be established, and the Government would strive to raise the status of VPET to attain qualifications at university degree level, providing an alternative path to success for young people who aspire to pursue a career in the technical professions.

I very much agree with these proposals. My own learning path was not smooth either, for I started my studies with a diploma in engineering and a higher diploma before finally completing a degree course. Therefore, I believe if the

Government can do a good job in vocational education and allow students to receive training in craft subjects in schools, so that young people who are interested can continue with their studies to equip themselves with the skills of a particular trade, their competitiveness will naturally be enhanced. Of course, the Government should also promote the diversification of the industrial structure, so as to provide young people with a broader range of employment options.

Deputy President, many young people hope to develop their professional skills through receiving VPET, so that they can join various trades and industries and become professional craftsmen, but they are often constrained by their parents' partial understanding of VPET. In order to successfully promote VPET, it is necessary for parents to change their way of thinking that "children's enrolment in traditional universities is the goal", thus, it is crucial for the Government and various sectors to step up education and publicity among parents.

My last point is that both vocational education and talent training must be oriented towards the specific needs of industries. Only when "academic disciplines keep pace with the development of industries and professions focus on meeting those specific needs" can students of vocational education acquire the professional skills actually required by society to develop their own career pathways, thus achieving integration of education and industry.

I so submit. Thank you, Deputy President.

MR SUNNY TAN (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President. The Policy Address proposes to develop Hong Kong into an international hub for post-secondary education. In order to realize this objective, we must first achieve internationalization. The sources of our students must embrace international diversity, our institutional partners must also be internationalized, and the curricula and the qualifications attained must align with high international standards.

When it comes to post-secondary education in Hong Kong, we have the eight traditional tertiary institutions, as well as self-financing institutions and vocational education institutions geared towards career development. There is a very strong foundation for the development of post-secondary education in Hong Kong, and many of the programmes offered are highly recognized internationally, for example, the Master of Business Administration programmes offered by a number

of institutions in Hong Kong have very high rankings in the world, representing one of the strengths of Hong Kong's professional services.

In order to consolidate and strengthen Hong Kong's advantages in this respect, I think our local institutions need to forge closer cooperation with overseas educational institutions. Take institutions of fashion and textiles in Hong Kong as an example. The Institute of Textiles and Clothing of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, with a history of 65 years, was upgraded to become the School of Fashion and Textiles in 2020, and immediately afterwards, it was rated by *CEOWORLD Magazine* as the third top fashion design school in Asia. In my opinion, in order to further internationalize the School of Fashion and Textiles, it is necessary for Hong Kong to appropriately strengthen cooperation with international educational and industrial institutions, just like the fashion capital of Paris and the craft capital of Milan. This will enable Hong Kong's tertiary education on fashion and textiles to become more internationalized so as to promote the development of the industry and foster trade, which will also benefit the development of Hong Kong's economy.

As for our role as a hub, Hong Kong and other cities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area ("GBA") will complement each other's strengths in coordinated development. Hong Kong has been exploring the markets of Southeast Asian countries for years and is very experienced and familiar with those markets. Capitalizing on the unique advantage of "one country, two systems", we have been actively dovetailing with national strategies such as high-quality development of the Belt and Road Initiative and the GBA development, so as to give full play to our role as a "super-connector".

The same applies to education. Each institution has its own specialities and positioning. The document entitled "Opinion on the establishment of higher education institutions during 14th Five Year period" published by the Ministry of Education in 2020 sets out the basic principles, which include "accurate positioning with highlights of characteristics" and "coordinated layout with appropriate preferences". I suggest that in promoting the upgrading of institutions, the authorities should play the role of coordination. Through the Guangdong-Hong Kong task forces, more in-depth discussions and studies should be conducted on the coordinated development of education, and at the same time, the strengths of the various institutions in Hong Kong should be brought into full play, so as to ensure that there is no overlapping in the design of the curriculum, and that the resources are effectively utilized in nurturing talents.

As education is an investment, it is necessary to discuss cost recovery. Apart from making an increase in the admission quota of non-local students a performance indicator, it is equally important to use contribution of graduates to Hong Kong and even the country as another performance indicator. I welcome the Vocational Professionals Admission Scheme (“VPAS”) proposed by the SAR Government. This measure truly responds to the manpower needs of Hong Kong amid economic restructuring and technological advancement, and allows non-local graduates to stay in Hong Kong for one year after acquiring vocational skills, so that they will have more time to look for jobs in related professions and contribute to Hong Kong society.

If we are to give full play to the functions of VPAS, we must first solve the problem of the accreditation of vocational and professional education and training (“VPET”) qualifications, otherwise, it will be difficult to attract non-local students to enrol in our courses.

Hong Kong VPET students who wish to go to the Mainland for development need to complete the designated courses in the Mainland before they can acquire professional qualifications there. I strongly agree with Ms Lillian KWOK’s suggestion that the Government should gradually strive for the recognition of Hong Kong’s VPET qualifications by different regions. I hope that the Government will proactively engage in dialogue with the relevant Mainland authorities to strive for “One Trade Test, Two Certificates”, so as to create more opportunities and a broader platform for Hong Kong students who aspire to pursue vocational careers, thus enabling Hong Kong young people to make contributions to themselves, their families, Hong Kong and the country in the new era.

With these remarks, I support the motion.

MS YUNG HOI-YAN (in Cantonese): Deputy President, I speak in support of Mr TANG Fei’s motion on “Actively building Hong Kong into an international education hub by formulating a comprehensive strategic development blueprint for Hong Kong’s education”, as well as all the amendments proposed by the Members.

Being an international city, Hong Kong benefits from its advantageous geographical location, advanced education system and pluralistic culture, as well as a well-established education foundation and renowned academic institutions. These provide a very good basis for Hong Kong to develop into an international

education hub. Therefore, it is necessary for the Government to formulate a comprehensive strategic development blueprint to raise the standard of education, attract international students and teachers, and promote the development of the education industry.

Just now, I heard many Members put forward proposals on vocational and professional education and training (“VPET”). After completing my university studies, I took a two-year short-term course at the German Swiss International School in Hong Kong. What are the unique features of this course? It is actually a VPET programme for overseas German students, so 90% to 95% of my 20 or so classmates are Germans. I think modernization and diversification (including diversified programmes) are prerequisites for Hong Kong to develop into an international hub.

After looking at the information, I find that there are very few programmes of this sort at present. The programmes allow German students to come to Hong Kong to take up VPET after graduating from secondary schools. Our programme was special in that three days in the five-day programme each week were allocated for on-the-job training. The school would arrange jobs for the students, such as a management trainee in a German company for a period of two years. Hence, the students might stay and work in Hong Kong after completing the training. Among the students, 95% were Germans. There was a total of three Chinese students, including two studying German at the Hong Kong Baptist University and myself, and the rest are Germans.

Thus, we can offer diversified programmes to attract overseas students to Hong Kong. It will be very attractive to overseas students if they know that the schools can offer them jobs with a promotion ladder in such prestigious international companies in Hong Kong. VPET programmes are excellent in that they integrate jobs with education. They can show the international community that Hong Kong has the ability to be international and it offers world-class programmes. Therefore, in respect of VPET, I hope the Government can give more thought to it, especially planning how to match jobs under the programmes, for they can provide a good showcasing opportunity.

Secondly, on diversification, I notice that the amendments proposed today by the other Members, including Mr Stanley NG and Ms Lillian KWOK, mention that it is necessary to tell China’s stories well, spread China’s experience and make China’s voice heard, and enable China’s education to be more influential and have

a greater say in the world. Thus, I thought about who should do the telling. In hoping that Hong Kong can become an international education hub and attract overseas students, we can actually offer some key opinion leader (“KOL”) courses in Hong Kong, so that we can really systematically nurture international talents in Hong Kong to become Hong Kong’s KOLs and promote Hong Kong’s strengths, Hong Kong’s culture and the Chinese culture, so that they can tell China’s stories well for us. I know that HKU SPACE is offering such courses, but they are short-term courses. The Hong Kong Metropolitan University offers Bachelor’s degree programmes in interactive entertainment, and the City University of Hong Kong has the School of Creative Media. These serve as effective entry points to incorporate new elements into education and attract international students to pursue studies and gain experiences in Hong Kong.

Thirdly, I would like to talk about arts education. I notice that The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts ranked 13th in the world and even first in Asia, and I think this is a very good example. We can promote cultural education and arts education to the international community, so that people will know how outstanding our institutions and how high their rankings are. Students come to Hong Kong for the purpose of acquiring better skills and becoming more cultured in music. We very much hope that we can further promote our culture in music and education, so that we can integrate with the Greater Bay Area in providing integrated services and developing internationalized education.

Deputy President, I so submit.

MR CHAN KIN-POR (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President. President XI Jinping has emphasized the importance of education to our country in various speeches, saying that “when education in a country thrives, the country will thrive, and strong education makes a strong nation”. The Chief Executive has also clearly mentioned in the 2023 Policy Address the need to develop Hong Kong into an international hub for post-secondary education. At present, Hong Kong needs to set clear objectives and an implementation roadmap for the policy on internationalization of education, so as to expedite its development into an international education hub. I would like to thank Mr TANG Fei for proposing today’s motion and the other Members for proposing their amendments, so as to afford us an opportunity to discuss this subject.

At present, the education system in Hong Kong focuses on academic studies to the neglect of application of skills, and this traditional concept has caused the development of vocational and professional education and training (“VPET”) in Hong Kong to lag behind that in the international community. The important direction for the future development of education in Hong Kong is to nurture talents and establish multiple pathways and to promote VPET as a pathway parallel to conventional academic education. VPET is the main channel for nurturing technical talents. We should set up a clear progression ladder for VPET, so that students choosing to receive VPET can be on a par with those pursuing traditional academic degrees and have a well-established career pathway. In addition, we should allocate more resources to VPET institutions, upgrade the quality of teaching, and invite internationally renowned enterprises to set up vocational training centres in Hong Kong and cooperate with vocational education institutions in training technical talents. Meanwhile, close collaboration with industries should be established to organize vocational training courses and provide students with internship opportunities, so as to ensure that they can acquire practical work skills. Moreover, job-matching services should even be provided for enterprises and student interns, thus enabling them to secure employment immediately after graduation, while also saving time for employers in staff recruitment.

Secondly, we should step up publicity in student recruitment in other countries so as to attract more international students to study in Hong Kong in a more targeted manner. Hong Kong’s tertiary education is highly internationalized and diversified, and it is the only city with five universities in the world’s top 100. However, there is still room for enhancing its international reputation and attractiveness. Apart from setting up booths at international education fairs for effective publicity and student recruitment, we should also go global and step up publicity in high schools and university campuses in Southeast Asia and the international world, so as to present to more students Hong Kong’s advantages, such as high teaching standards, a diversified cultural environment and close ties with Mainland China. Through increasing the amounts awarded for academic achievement scholarships, exchange scholarships and research project grants, we can attract more outstanding international students to study in Hong Kong, so as to enlarge the talent pool.

We should also introduce measures to encourage international students to stay and work in Hong Kong after graduation. International students who stay in Hong Kong will not only bring new ideas and creativity for the development of

Hong Kong, but also serve as a bridge for cultural exchange between Hong Kong and other countries. At present, non-local graduates do not have a good understanding of career planning and job-seeking channels in Hong Kong, which makes them feel confused about what to do after graduation. In this regard, we should adopt a more proactive approach to strengthen employment support for these graduates, including organizing career fairs, providing career guidance and training, and facilitating liaison with enterprises. We should also try our best to offer relatively long-term employment contracts to these graduates in Hong Kong, facilitate their job search and integration into the local community, and encourage international students to stay in Hong Kong for a long period of time for career development, with a view to retaining talents for Hong Kong.

To develop Hong Kong into an international education hub, it is particularly important to formulate a comprehensive strategic development blueprint. We should establish education pathways of conventional academic education and VPET in parallel, attract more outstanding international students and scholars to Hong Kong, create an international learning environment and strengthen employment support for graduates, and so on, so as to contribute to Hong Kong's education industry and enhance our international influence.

Thank you, Deputy President.

REVD CANON PETER DOUGLAS KOON (in Cantonese): Deputy President, Hong Kong possesses the unique advantages of “one country, two systems” and “enjoying strong support of the motherland and being closely connected to the world”. In respect of our higher education, not only are the curricula diversified, the students have also made outstanding achievements and won many awards, thus many people from other countries are attracted by our reputation and come to study in Hong Kong. Moreover, Hong Kong is home to five universities which are ranked among the top 100 universities in the world, and they hold leading positions in the world in terms of teaching standard, curricula and academic research. Therefore, Hong Kong fully possesses the conditions and potential to develop into an international education hub.

However, to realize this vision, I believe the Government should consider making more efforts in the following three areas.

Firstly, in order to successfully attract students from all over the world, it is necessary to enhance the awareness of Hong Kong's tertiary institutions among foreign students first. At present, Hong Kong's tertiary institutions have not made enough publicity efforts overseas, and most of the publicity activities are organized by the institutions on their own. The situation is like members of the same family minding their own business, thus, the result of the publicity efforts is unsatisfactory. The Government can take the lead to cooperate closely with the institutions or set up an independent organization dedicated to coordinating and organizing large-scale overseas education forums, as well as launching publicity and student recruitment activities in schools abroad. To achieve a more diversified composition of non-local students, the Government can also consider stepping up its efforts in recruiting students from members states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and countries along the Belt and Road, especially recruiting outstanding students from some renowned schools in these countries to study in Hong Kong, thus fostering exchange between Hong Kong and these regions.

Secondly, the Government should also provide adequate support and complementary measures to tertiary institutions at the policy level. In the face of escalating competition for talents, our admission quota of non-local students will only make us surrender the top talents to other regions. It is proposed in the Policy Address that the admission quota of non-local students to government-funded post-secondary institutions will be doubled to 40%, which is believed to be effective in easing obstacles to the admission of non-local students and consolidating the future development of institutions. However, with the increase in the number of students, the demand for hostels, teaching facilities, and so on, will also be on the rise. The Government must optimize the support measures for non-local students and put in place relevant ancillary facilities before institutions can enhance their ability to recruit international students and attract them to stay in Hong Kong for future development.

Deputy President, all along, the tight supply of hostel places for students has also been a problem, although as early as 2018, the Finance Committee already approved the funding for the establishment of the Hostel Development Fund to provide funding to universities in a total of 15 additional hostel projects. However, Deputy President, as at June last year, only two projects have been completed, and three projects are still at the preliminary preparatory stage, so it is difficult to increase the number of hostel places in the near future. In other words,

when there are not enough hostel places even for local students, providing hostel places for overseas students will not be an easy task either. Therefore, given that hostel places are in short supply, how should the authorities of the institutions allocate them? Increasing the intake of non-local students will have significant implications, thus, I hope the Government will actively support the institutions to properly solve the aforesaid problems. In order to expeditiously increase the supply of hostels, the Government may consider converting hotels or vacant school premises into hostels, and exploring the introduction of “talent apartments” similar to those in the Mainland.

Lastly, only 1% of non-local students will stay in Hong Kong for development after graduation at present. Attracting and retaining talents are equally important for Hong Kong to become an international education hub. Therefore, the Government should strengthen guidance on further studies and employment for non-local graduates, further relax the restrictions for them to take up part-time jobs and internships, including considering extending the Immigration Arrangement for Non-local Graduates to cover Higher Diploma graduates, facilitating collaboration between education institutions and enterprises to offer more internship opportunities and formulating life planning for non-local students, so that enterprises can directly employ them after graduation.

With these remarks, Deputy President, I support the original motion and all the amendments.

DR CHOW MAN-KONG (in Cantonese): Deputy President, first of all, I would like to thank the Chief Executive and the Secretary for Education for responding to the prevailing circumstances and incorporating the proposals made by representatives of the tertiary education sector, including me, in the 2023 Policy Address by putting forward the important topic of building Hong Kong into an international education hub and relaxing the admission quota of non-local students to the eight tertiary institutions to 40%, demonstrating that every effort will be made in building Hong Kong into an international hub for post-secondary education with unprecedented determination, which is praiseworthy.

The authorities must also note that the relaxation of the admission quota of non-local students and the development of the Northern Metropolis University Town are only initial steps towards building Hong Kong into an international hub for post-secondary education, and there is a pressing need for them to formulate a

set of “combination punches” encompassing short-, medium- and long-term measures. On the one hand, they must continue to retain, compete for and nurture talents to create strong impetus for growth, while on the other hand, they must continue to expand the scope of education services, so as to enhance the reputation of Hong Kong’s education and tell Hong Kong’s stories well.

In order to rationalize the measures to broaden the pool of non-local students, the SAR Government is duty-bound to play a leading role and coordinate the relevant bureaux, such as the Education Bureau, the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau and other relevant bureaux, as well as public organizations such as the Hong Kong Trade Development Council and Invest Hong Kong, to go global together, so as to assist the education sector in targeting towards the overseas market, publicizing and promoting the brand name of Hong Kong’s education, as well as developing high-end education services. The Education Bureau is considering forming a “Team Hong Kong” with various universities and leading the team to publicize Hong Kong’s excellent university education in various parts of the world, for example, Arabian countries and even the Belt and Road countries, so as to attract top-notch students to study in Hong Kong. This is something worth looking forward to.

In my opinion, the Bureau has taken a correct and well-planned step. In the medium and long term, it can also allocate funds to set up quasi-government organizations specializing in international education similar to the British Council and Introducing Australia Studies Centre; or it can, in the light of the latest measure of increasing the quota of the Belt and Road Scholarship, explore to establish “2+2” scholarship-funded degree places with Mainland tertiary institutions. This will not only promote cooperation between local universities and Mainland or other universities outside Hong Kong, but also serve as a selling point for attracting top-notch students or students with middle-class backgrounds from developing countries to pursue studies in Hong Kong, which is conducive to fostering people-to-people exchanges.

Tertiary institutions are also duty-bound to formulate a set of clear and practicable methods to enable their teaching staff and students to understand and respect the importance of different cultures, so as to create an inclusive environment that can fully dovetail with measures to promote internationalization of campuses. I believe it is now easier for students from the Mainland and the Belt and Road countries to adapt to the life and customs of Hong Kong. However,

as local students and non-local students have their own social circles, they seldom communicate with each other, except in the classroom. At this point, the student affairs office of each institution should give full play to its role, such as setting up peer mentoring programmes or high-table dinners, so as to foster mutual understanding and exchanges, and only in this way can the goal of diversified integration and internationalization on campus be achieved. When local students have the opportunity to meet with students from all over the world on campus, it will not only broaden their horizons and interpersonal networks, but also enhance their competitiveness.

I have learned from the representatives of various tertiary institutions, especially self-financing institutions which have not been covered this time, that they are also eager to further increase the number of places for non-local students. In my opinion, as long as the SAR Government can make interdepartmental efforts in doing a good job in external publicity and student recruitment, and as long as the institutions can rationalize their student support, accommodation provision, classroom arrangements, and so on, they do have the conditions to increase the number of places by phases, for example, by increasing the quota for non-local students from the existing 40% to 60%, 80% or even higher. I must emphasize that non-local students are additionally recruited and they study at their own expense, and it is out of the question that they take up the quotas for local students or snatch the opportunities of local students.

I must also emphasize that not any one of the eight publicly-funded universities and 14 self-financing institutions shall not be left out in the course of building Hong Kong into an international hub of post-secondary education. In the coming period of time, since the authorities intend to promote the establishment of universities of applied sciences, and the 14 self-financing institutions may also become an integral part of the establishment in the future, it is only right to provide them with more supportive policies, including removing protectionism, optimizing valuable and quality education resources, and completely abolishing the 10% additional student admission quota on self-financing institutions, so as to make up for the inadequacy of Hong Kong's manpower resources and continue to create more impetus for growth.

As long as the policy of building Hong Kong into an international education hub can be taken forward, the aspirations of General Secretary XI Jinping for "fostering a new generation of young people to shoulder the mission of realizing

national rejuvenation” and “enabling China’s education to be more influential in the world” can be effectively fulfilled.

Deputy President, I so submit.

DR WENDY HONG (in Cantonese): Deputy President, the 2023 Policy Address proposes to build Hong Kong into an international hub for post-secondary education, and the measures include doubling the non-local student quota for taught undergraduate programmes of various University Grants Committee (“UGC”)-funded institutions to 40% starting from the 2024-2025 academic year.

The development of an international education hub is of strategic significance. Honourable colleagues have talked about many of the benefits which I also agree. However, I am more concerned about the input required for the development of an international education hub, that is, the question of where the money will come from.

Just now, Mr TANG Fei said that we could industrialize education to earn tuition fees. But the reality is that we have not been able to recover the total cost of admitting non-local students, not to mention generating profits from it.

In 2023, our expenditure on education exceeded \$100 billion. Same as welfare and healthcare, education becomes one of the three major government expenditures exceeding \$100 billion. Over the past five years, our expenditure on education has increased by a total of 21.6%, with an average annual increase of 4% for education; our government revenue has only increased by a total of 7.1% over the past five years, with an average annual growth rate of only 1.4%; and our nominal Gross Domestic Product (“GDP”) has only increased by 7.2% over the past five years, with an average annual growth rate of only 1.4%. Obviously, the growth rate of our education expenditure is far greater than those of government revenue and GDP, and this is also one of the major factors contributing to the large deficits recorded in Hong Kong for many years in a row.

Last month, I submitted a written question asking how each UGC-funded institution determines the annual tuition fees charged on non-local students for taught undergraduate programmes, that is, what the criteria for determining the tuition fees of non-local students are. The reply received from the Education Bureau is that under the existing policy, the Government requires that the tuition

fees charged by UGC-funded universities on non-local students should be at a level which is sufficient to recover all extra marginal cost.

As far as I understand it, the so-called “extra marginal cost” is not total cost. In this connection, I have sought advice from UGC and the reply I got was that the expenditure of a university included teaching expenditure and technological research expenditure, and the tuition fees charged by universities on non-local students were only the cost of teaching expenditure, while the technological research expenditure is not taken into account.

In fact, teaching and technological research complement each other and are inseparable. Non-local students who come to Hong Kong for education only pay for extra marginal cost, which means that taxpayers have to subsidize other costs such as technological research. This is not fair. Nowadays, we are all aware of the public finance of Hong Kong. I think that UGC-funded universities should charge non-local students the average total cost, so as to slow down the growth of education expenditure and reduce taxpayers’ subsidy.

I so submit. Thank you, Deputy President

MS DOREEN KONG (in Cantonese): Deputy President, I speak in support of the motion moved by Mr TANG Fei.

As a highly internationalized city, the Hong Kong SAR is ranked 10th in the 2023 Global Cities Index, indicating that Hong Kong has certain advantages worldwide. However, in terms of international education, Europe and the United States are still the “home of international students”. There are data showing that in 2022, about 950 000 international students received higher education in the United States. In Hong Kong, according to the data from the University Grants Committee Annual Report 2020-2021, only 19 000-odd international students were admitted by the eight government-funded universities in Hong Kong, of which only about 30% are non-Mainland international students. In this regard, Hong Kong still needs to make more efforts to put equal emphasis on introducing overseas educational resources and going global for our country.

Hong Kong needs to first clarify its positioning strategy for building itself as an international education hub and adjust the strategy in a targeted manner. First, on institution and culture, the language structure of biliteracy and trilingualism in

Hong Kong with English as the medium of instruction in tertiary institutions as well as a high degree of cultural diversity make it easier for international students to integrate into Hong Kong society; second, regarding the economy, as an international financial centre, Hong Kong offers abundant development opportunities, especially for international students majoring in such professions as business management and law; third, as for the quality of education, five universities in Hong Kong are honoured to be ranked among the world's top 100. These are the advantages of education in Hong Kong.

At the same time, industrialization is the only way to develop Hong Kong into an international education hub. Hong Kong needs to compete for a place in the international education industry with the “home of international students” such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada, instead of indulging in “tough confrontation” in the red sea of crowded marketplace. In fierce market competition, the SAR Government should clarify Hong Kong's unique position in the international education industry, make use of and continue to strengthen the above-mentioned comparative advantages, adopt a differentiation positioning strategy and a pain point marketing strategy to identify the pain points of international students, and develop a blue ocean market for the international education industry, ultimately achieving a breakthrough. For example, under globalization, the more complex the social intersectionality, the greater the demand for interdisciplinary research in academia. Hong Kong can capitalize on its advantages as an international financial centre and a place where East meets West to strive to develop cross-disciplinary tertiary programmes integrating business, social sciences and science and technology. Green Fintech and the growing emphasis on environmental, social and governance (ESG) practices serve as prominent illustrations of cross-disciplinary fields.

More importantly, the development of an international education hub is also an integral part of Hong Kong's talent admission policy. To provide new fuel for Hong Kong to build a knowledge-based economy, it is necessary to have a set of “combination punches” in respect of policies spanning initial, middle and later stages. In the initial stage, more resources should be put into overseas publicity, such as actively participating in international education exhibitions around the world, while also providing more international students with financial incentives such as scholarships, round-trip airfare subsidies and accommodation subsidies. In the medium term, during the international students' studies, we can help them integrate into the city by providing more exchange opportunities between local and international students. At the same time, we can offer them local and Mainland

internship opportunities, so that they can learn about the ample opportunities if they stay in Hong Kong for development. In addition, at a later stage, after the international students have graduated, we need to formulate a more favourable immigration policy, provide economic incentives, create more employment opportunities for young people and enhance the sustainability of the welfare policy for new immigrants. Only by this two-pronged approach will we be able to persuade them to settle in Hong Kong and contribute to the local pool of talents.

Recruitment of international students is a multi-faceted issue, which is not only related to policies on education but also those on population, immigration and welfare, and is also affected by changes in factors such as international and local socio-economic, cultural and political environments. In drawing up a development blueprint for an international education hub, we must “be visionary and forward-looking and set eyes on the big picture”, achieve breakthroughs and cast our vision farther, tie in with other policies and clearly define our positioning. Only by this way can we outflank our rivals and stand out in keen international competition.

Deputy President, I so submit.

MR CHAN CHUN-YING (in Cantonese): Deputy President, the development of education is closely related to the prosperity of a country. Globally, every superpower is a leading country in education. It was clearly pointed out in last year’s Policy Address that to develop Hong Kong into an international hub for post-secondary education, measures such as increasing the admission quota of non-local students to government-funded post-secondary institutions and enhancing learning and enrichment opportunities for international students will be adopted.

At present, the total number of Hong Kong international students is 63 200, accounting for about 20% of the total number of students. Among the 660 000 international students in the Mainland, less than 7% are studying in Hong Kong. Building an international education centre can bring about an upgrade of university infrastructure, and the industrialization of education can also bring better economic benefits. Therefore, the Government may consider the synergistic development of international education centre and the “eight centres”, so as to, first, greatly attract outstanding Mainland and global talents to study in Hong Kong; second, take forward the development of the “Northern Metropolis University Town”; and

third, encourage more diversified capital to participate in the development of the education centre.

Before the announcement of last year's Policy Address, the eight major institutions in Hong Kong were allowed to admit up to 20% of non-local students. According to the figures of the University Grants Committee, non-local students of the University of Hong Kong and The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology in the 2022-2023 academic year account for 23.7% and 22.4% respectively, while the numbers for the other institutions range from 10.1% to 17.8%. It is believed that relaxing the admission quota of non-local students to 40% will help enhance the internationalization of education in Hong Kong. But it should at the same time be supported by more detailed admission and publicity strategies.

At present, the enrolment publicity of Hong Kong institutions for non-local students is relatively restricted and lacks initiative and focus. Non-local students mostly obtain information on Hong Kong institutions online. They mainly visit the official websites of the institutions to apply for admission or make enquiries, or look for sharing of personal experience on the Internet. These searches are usually done by non-local students on their own initiative. Hong Kong institutions seldom take the initiative to advertise online, and there is a lack of offline publicity campaigns such as "admission roadshows" organized by Mainland institutions. As students from different countries and regions have different considerations and concerns in choosing institutions, targeted publicity strategies and approaches are necessary to attract students from different places to study in Hong Kong.

It is believed that multiple benefits can be achieved by combining the strategic development of our country's Belt and Road Initiative and regionalized enrolment publicity. Enrolment publicity should be more active and customized. For example, institutions can invite staff and students from the corresponding countries or regions to participate in the publicity process, and enhance the understanding of students from different countries or regions on Hong Kong institutions through video cassette recording (VCR), online or offline interactions, etc. With the large number of countries along the Belt and Road, it is believed that the enrolment will enhance the internationalization of Hong Kong institutions.

The wastage of non-local graduates is also quite notable. Owing to the high cost of living in Hong Kong, limited internship and employment opportunities, as

well as a lack of understanding of the local society, the number of non-local graduates who choose to remain in Hong Kong for employment after graduation has been on a downward trend in recent years, which is not conducive to the promotion of the benefits of pursuing studies in Hong Kong. It is suggested that the Government provide more internship and employment opportunities to engage non-local students in the local working environment during their study in Hong Kong, so as to facilitate their integration into our society. As non-local students gain first-hand experience of Hong Kong's social and employment environment through this initiative, it is believed that they will spread positive word-of-mouth in their places of origin and attract more local students to pursue studies in Hong Kong.

With the staunch support from the motherland, Hong Kong should leverage the rich education resources in the Mainland to help develop into an international education hub. For example, Hong Kong universities can collaborate with Mainland institutions to launch the “N+N” academic structure, which involves two stages of study in Hong Kong and Mainland institutions, so as to enhance the attractiveness of Hong Kong universities to non-local students by enriching the curriculum.

Hong Kong's post-secondary education has long been highly internationalized and diversified. As the only city with five universities in the world's top 100, Hong Kong should better promote the brand of “Study in China”.

I would like to thank Mr TANG Fei for proposing this motion, and I support the original motion and the amendments proposed by the five Honourable colleagues. I so submit.

MR ROCK CHEN (in Cantonese): Deputy President, first of all, I declare that I am the Chairman of the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications and I speak in support of Mr TANG Fei's motion. With five universities in the world's top 100 and a diversified education system, Hong Kong definitely has the potential to become an international education hub. However, in order to achieve this objective, I think we still need to make efforts in the following five areas.

First, we should industrialize education in Hong Kong. We have to make use of the characteristics and advantages of Hong Kong's publicly-funded and

private universities to attract more international and Mainland students to pursue post-secondary programmes in Hong Kong, thereby facilitating the development and competitiveness of the education services industry, upgrading Hong Kong's education level and international reputation, and increasing revenue and attracting outstanding talents. We may draw reference from the data of other countries in this regard. In 2020-2021, the total revenue of higher education institutions in the United Kingdom exceeded £40 billion, with the vast majority of it coming from tuition fees paid by overseas students. During the same period, the education industry contributed more than A\$29 billion to the Australian economy.

Second, we should foster collaboration in education between Hong Kong and the international community and do a good job of “introducing overseas educational resources”. We have to encourage local universities to forge close bonds with overseas institutions, attract top international teaching and scientific research talents, “incorporate” advanced international teaching and research concepts, and even offer preferential policies to attract more overseas universities to set up branch campuses in the “Northern Metropolis University Town” (“the University Town”), so as to inject new impetus into Hong Kong's education.

Third, the SAR Government should proactively motivate and support local tertiary institutions to conduct overseas roadshows and participate in international exhibitions on higher education, especially those organized by member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and countries along the Belt and Road, so as to publicize Hong Kong's quality education resources and recruit more international students under the non-Joint University Programmes Admission System.

Fourth, we should properly develop the University Town and provide tax and financial incentives to encourage institutions to set up second campuses in the University Town and cooperate with industries and scientific research institutes, so as to give full play to the effect of industries, academia and research and promote industry development, thereby providing the institutions and enterprises in the area with more scientific research talents, higher level of research support and higher rate of transformation of outcomes.

Fifth, we should actively establish universities of applied sciences to raise the status of vocational and professional education and training to university degree level. Many countries in the world (such as Germany and Switzerland) have implemented a dual-track tertiary education system that offers both academic and

vocational degrees. This initiative will promote talent training in the field of applied sciences and provide more diverse pathways for young people who aspire to pursue a career in the technical professions based on their different aspirations and interests, thereby implementing the strategy of fostering industry-institution collaboration and diversified development. Most importantly, the relevant programmes should be career-oriented, with an emphasis on the interface with industry and providing students with internship opportunities, so that graduates are equipped with the skills and experience that the industry craves and are able to respond to the market's manpower needs.

With these remarks, Deputy President, I support the original motion and the amendments.

MR DENNIS LEUNG (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President. The 14th Five-Year Plan has supported the development of Hong Kong in eight key areas, including the international financial centre, international innovation and technology centre, East-meets-West centre for international cultural exchange, international trade centre, international shipping centre, international aviation hub, centre for international legal and dispute resolution services in the Asia-Pacific region as well as regional intellectual property trading centre. The SAR Government attaches great importance to dovetailing with national strategies in a bid to enhance the impetus for the growth of Hong Kong, pursue economic growth and improve people's livelihood, recognizing that abundant and diverse human resources serve as the most crucial driving force of our development. Therefore, building an international hub for post-secondary education is one of the important education policies in the Chief Executive's 2023 Policy Address, so as to dovetail with our country's strategies.

Hong Kong is now the only city in the world with as many as five universities in the world's top 100. Hong Kong's post-secondary education is international and highly diversified and can be developed into an education industry, and it can even be on par with some renowned universities in Europe and the United States, attracting Mainland and overseas students to pursue studies in Hong Kong to obtain qualifications that are highly recognized worldwide. Graduates can tell Hong Kong's stories well, whether they return to their places of origin, stay in Hong Kong or even go to the Mainland for work.

However, Hong Kong has a declining population and a low birth rate. This alarm has already affected the labour force in various industries, jeopardizing not only Hong Kong's own advantages in development but also its overall security. The Policy Address has in fact listed seven strategies, including first, increasing the admission quota of non-local students to government-funded post-secondary institutions; second, expanding scholarship schemes; third, increasing hostel places; fourth, supporting self-financing post-secondary institutions in enhancing their campuses; fifth, enhancing learning and enrichment opportunities for international students; sixth, promoting multi-cultural learning experiences; and the seventh one is related to the development of post-secondary education in the Northern Metropolis. The proposals I am going to make aim at enriching this strategic development blueprint. The Government should step up its efforts in taking forward the following work, so that Hong Kong can truly become an international education hub and attract more people to study here.

First, universities should offer more programmes related to the eight centres and offer joint programmes with universities around the world in this regard, so that overseas or Mainland students can obtain two graduation certificates when they come to study in Hong Kong. This can enhance the attractiveness of these programmes and develop unique university programmes by combining the strengths of universities outside Hong Kong. An even greater advantage of these joint programmes is that students have the opportunity to engage in overseas internships and exchanges, which can enhance the “gold content” or value of such programmes.

Second, universities should enrich and upgrade the contents of their programmes and increase internship opportunities for students, so that they can take part in internships in Mainland or Hong Kong companies and get to know employers at an early stage. This can foster a deeper understanding of industries among students and enable employers to put forward more ideas, so that the programmes can closely meet market demands and a new and contemporary youth force can be trained up to contribute to the development of Hong Kong and the Mainland.

Third, innovation and technology is an important development strategy. Hong Kong should establish a joint university research institute and set up a development research fund by allocating more resources, so that local universities can devote more resources to scientific research and contribute to the country's development of independent innovative technologies.

Fourth, it is a must for the Government to build more student hostels. First of all, local students should be given the opportunity to enjoy hostel life as it can enrich their experiences in university. Besides, it should also identify more land for building new student hostels, so that non-local students can also enjoy hostel facilities at a lower cost, thereby attracting Mainland and overseas students to pursue studies in Hong Kong.

Fifth, continuing education and lifelong learning have become the prevailing trend of development in society. But transport fares in Hong Kong are too high. I hope the Government will offer transport concessions to full-time undergraduate or postgraduate students to help reduce the costs of their studies.

Sixth, universities should organize more competitions and activities through which students can enhance their abilities and explore innovative technologies.

With these remarks, Deputy President, I support the original motion and all the amendments.

MR ADRIAN PEDRO HO (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President. Since the implementation of the Hong Kong National Security Law, the SAR Government has stepped up its efforts in promoting patriotic education in schools, aiming to provide students with knowledge about our country's development, the Constitution, the Basic Law and the rule of law, and has facilitated the development of patriotic education in Hong Kong with a series of measures. In the future, I think Hong Kong needs to proactively cultivate patriotism in the next generation, while at the same time adopting a multi-pronged approach to, say, endeavour to consolidate and enhance the inherent strengths and characteristics of education in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong is an international city integrated with Chinese and Western cultures. Its education should certainly be capable of nurturing outstanding individuals, so that the next generation can have a global outlook and be able to gain a foothold in the rest of the world. Language proficiency is exactly a crucial criterion. In November last year, the Swedish educational institution "Education First" published the EF English Proficiency Index 2023, which shows that Hong Kong's overall English proficiency level is classified as "high proficiency" and is ranked 29th in the world but 4th in Asia, trailing behind Singapore, the Philippines and Malaysia. To ensure the quality of education in Hong Kong and enhance its

reputation internationally, I think English education is very important. This is why the New People's Party proposed earlier that the SAR Government should introduce measures to retain existing teachers and attract overseas ones to come to Hong Kong, with a view to ensuring a sufficient manpower of native-speaking English teachers in the city.

To avoid the recurrence of such embarrassing situations as “rest in piece” and “I am very thanks them”, and if we are to formulate a strategic development blueprint for education in Hong Kong, I suggest that Hong Kong should make ongoing efforts in biliterate and trilingual education to equip Hong Kong students with a good command of Chinese and English, while enhancing and preserving academically Hong Kong's ability and characteristics of being bilingual in both Chinese and English, thus capitalizing effectively on its advantageous position of “enjoying strong support of the motherland and being closely connected to the world”. I believe that once education in Hong Kong becomes a factory of international talents with a good command of both Chinese and Western languages and cultures, and Hong Kong's advantage of being a place where East meets West is strengthened, it will definitely be conducive to building Hong Kong into an international education hub and promoting the internationalization of the Chinese language, thereby contributing to the development of our country into an important education centre in the world.

Deputy President, I so submit.

DR SO CHEUNG-WING (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President. Education is an important source of energy for the long-term development of a region and an important basis for assessing a region's soft power. Education in Hong Kong enjoys exceptional advantages. The Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education is recognized by nearly 300 overseas institutions. Hong Kong students are ranked among the top ten in the Programme for International Student Assessment. Hong Kong is the only city with five universities in the world's top 100.

In 2022-2023, Hong Kong's recurrent expenditure on education is one of the areas with the largest expenditure, accounting for 18.1% of the Government's total recurrent expenditure. This indicates the importance the Government attaches to education. However, the value added of education services in Hong Kong has only accounted for 1.4% of the Gross Domestic Product (“GDP”) in recent years,

and is lower than 3.6% in Japan, 5.3% in Korea and 5.6% in the United States, indicating that there is still much room for Hong Kong to develop its education industry.

(THE PRESIDENT resumed the Chair)

Internationally, education has emerged as the fastest-growing industry. Direct earnings from education services are significant and boost spending on items such as housing and transportation. Studies have found that on average, for every 1% increase in a city's mobile population, GDP increases by 0.54%. Successful international education has indeed become a new economic growth driver.

Education in Hong Kong is facing the plight of a low birth rate, a continuous decline in the number of local students and a shortage of talents. If the “development of education services” can be used as a breakthrough, not only can it bring substantial benefits to various industries in Hong Kong, but it will also be conducive to attracting talents from all over the world to settle in Hong Kong.

Therefore, I support Mr TANG Fei's original motion and the amendments proposed by the other Members, and suggest that the Government take action in the following areas to expedite the pace of Hong Kong's development into an international education hub.

First, increase the variety of diploma programmes that non-local students can study in Hong Kong. The eight major institutions in Hong Kong have always been attractive to students from the Mainland and countries along the Belt and Road. But besides the eight institutions, there are many outstanding self-financed institutions in Hong Kong. It is recommended that self-financed institutions be also included in the scope of non-local student admission. In addition, the Government and the industry should actively consider providing programmes of applied nature as well as vocational diploma programmes for non-local students.

Second, relax the restrictions on primary and secondary students from neighbouring regions to study in Hong Kong. In view of the current local surplus places of primary and secondary schools, it is recommended that restrictions be relaxed to allow primary and secondary students from the Mainland, Macao, the Taiwan region and some Asian countries to study in Hong Kong on a self-financing

basis, and time-limited accompanying visas be granted to the immediate family members of underage students coming to Hong Kong for schooling.

Third, develop multiple channels to increase the supply of hostels. The high cost of living in Hong Kong is one of the reasons why some non-local students have turned to other regions. It is suggested that the Government consider drawing reference from the Youth Hostel Scheme. In addition to self-managed hostels in universities, the Government should encourage and support private capital in setting up private student hostels or require that for newly granted land a certain proportion of it should be designated as student hostels. The Government can also explore the implementation of a host family programme by studying overseas experience.

Fourth, incorporate the advantages of Hong Kong's education system into its overseas publicity and promotion campaigns. At present, most of the overseas publicity for tertiary institutions is conducted by the institutions themselves. The Government should take up the main responsibility of promoting Hong Kong's overall education ecosystem overseas, so as to familiarize overseas students and parents with Hong Kong's education brand. At the same time, it should formulate policies to encourage local organizations and enterprises to provide more local internship opportunities for non-local students.

President, I so submit.

MS NIXIE LAM (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. This motion is particularly important to the future of Hong Kong. Education aims to pave the way for the future of our students and lay a solid foundation for the future of Hong Kong. In fact, the Chief Executive has also mentioned in the Policy Address that we have to capitalize on the strengths of the local higher education system. But what can we do to “introduce overseas educational resources”?

In recent years, as there has been a drop in birth rate—as pointed out by Dr SO just now—coupled with the impact of external factors, the number of school-age children has decreased. Many business people have put forward the same proposal to me, urging us to consider how to formulate the “policy of accompanying low-age international students”. They regard this as a policy that merits consideration, specifically in the context of Hong Kong. They also said that we can issue accompanying visas to eligible parents and allow them to take up

employment while accompanying students in Hong Kong if they fulfil certain conditions, such as having a specific education level and engaging in a professional field, thus killing two birds with one stone for the Hong Kong market.

If Hong Kong is to become an education hub, we must figure out how we are going to export our education talents to the Greater Bay Area, Southeast Asia and cities with which we have connections for their use. The core question is what kind of talents we need in the future.

At present, Hong Kong is in acute shortage of talents related to the overall development of digital economy, such as environmental, social and governance (ESG)-related professions, knowledge related to art investment appraisal and regulation of virtual asset management. It seems that these subjects are not available in Hong Kong. We lack an overall investment-driven planning by the Government's top level. The question we have to ask ourselves is, do we know what talents Hong Kong needs in the future? What are the criteria for becoming successful "Greater Bay Area People"? What are the criteria for becoming elites active in the Southeast Asian market?

To solve these problems scientifically, we have to understand scientifically what talents are needed in the future job market and what they can do. Let me cite an example. In the Mainland, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security has recently started to solicit applications for the sixth batch of new occupations nationwide. To date, 429 occupations have been submitted. According to the procedures, it is expected that new occupations will be formally announced in the first quarter of this year after the submissions have gone through the process of expert assessment and examination, solicitation of public views as well as publicity and vetting. Among the submissions, more fall into new occupations in the fields of intelligent manufacturing, information technology and modern services, which are closely in line with the needs of the development of digital economy. There are more than 100 submissions in these fields, accounting for one-fourth of the total number of submissions for new occupations. It is estimated that by 2025, the demand for talents in these emerging occupations will reach 30 million, of which 5 million is for artificial intelligence talents, 5 million is for installers and testers for Internet of Things, 2 million is for e-sports players, and 10 million is for the shortfall of digital management professionals.

At present, the Mainland has included digital solution designers as one of the new occupations in the Dictionary of Occupational Classification. With the

booming development of digital economy, their job is to provide digital solutions for enterprises by making use of cutting-edge technologies such as audio, videos, large language models and big data, so as to achieve the digital transformation of enterprises. But for Hong Kong, have we conducted such an in-depth and interactive survey? It was mentioned just now that in the Mainland people were asked to submit their occupational information at the beginning of the survey before the kind of talents needed are determined. What kind of talents do we really need? Can the design of higher education tie in with and train up the talents needed? Is it not going a bit too far for the Government to come forward and say that it wants to become an international education hub when all this information is not yet available? However, if the Government can really set out to clarify the above issues, I believe we will be able to say loudly to the Mainland, Southeast Asia and countries along the Belt and Road, “you will also benefit if your students come to Hong Kong for study!” At present, the core problem of Hong Kong is that “the goods are not good enough”. Once “the goods are good”, coupled with publicity and the holding of regular education exhibitions, it is then right to go global in a practical manner. So, when is the right time? In my opinion, any time is a right time as long as we are well prepared.

Thank you, President. I so submit.

MR LAM SAN-KEUNG (in Cantonese): President, education is of paramount importance to any place, including Hong Kong. Whether or not an education system is properly developed has a direct bearing on whether or not young people can become talents in the future. Talent is the primary resource. Hong Kong will have a future only when there are talents.

The education sector in Hong Kong is facing a very realistic problem, namely the shortage of students. The declining birth rate in Hong Kong is an indication that the number of students will drop drastically in the future. Some kindergartens have already closed down due to under-enrolment, and this trend will spread to primary schools, secondary schools and even universities. At present, there are 22 degree-awarding higher education institutions in Hong Kong. If we do not make good preparations now, it is universities that may have to close down in the future.

Therefore, I strongly support Mr TANG Fei’s motion on “Actively building Hong Kong into an international education hub by formulating a comprehensive

strategic development blueprint for Hong Kong’s education”, which seeks to attract international elites to study in Hong Kong, and more importantly, to stay in Hong Kong for development, with a view to developing education in Hong Kong into an industry.

Education policy not only aims to train students, but should also take account of the career development of students after graduation. An example I often cite is the legal profession. Our three universities train so many law graduates every year but only about half of them can pass the examination to become lawyers. This is because they have to sit for the qualifying examination for solicitors, a programme known as the Post Graduate Certificate in Laws (“PCLL”), and the number of places for PCLL every year is only about half of the number of graduates. Since law faculties have been established in universities, both students and the public hope that these students can apply what they have learnt after graduation and become lawyers. If the students are not good enough to become lawyers due to poor academic performance, then it is the problem of the students. But now, we know very well that half of the students are destined not to become lawyers when they enrol in the programme, and that is a problem with the system.

In December 2022, I already proposed in the Legislative Council that PCLL standards should be standardized as soon as possible. The Secretary for Justice expressed his concern at that time. A year has passed but we have not heard any news yet. I am disappointed and hope the Government will follow up the matter as soon as possible.

Hong Kong is the only common law jurisdiction in the whole country, and common law is applied in areas such as shipping, trade and finance all over the world. If we are to leverage Hong Kong’s unique advantages under “one country, two systems”, the first thing we need to do is to train up more common law lawyers and judges.

With the development of society and the advancement of technology, the number of areas of law has been growing. At present, what law undergraduates learn are only the basics, which are all-round but not masterly. Present and future legal talents need to master not only the basic principles of law, but also other professional knowledge as well. Apart from studying law, law students should also take one more professional course, such as business economics, architecture and science. Only in this way can more lawyers with different professional knowledge be trained to provide more professional legal services to various

industries in society. I hope that the universities in Hong Kong can introduce similar programmes.

Prof Priscilla LEUNG's amendment is also right in saying that the Hong Kong Government should expeditiously take forward the establishment of the Hong Kong International Legal Talents Training Academy, so as to train up more common law legal talents for our country and even for the international community. In fact, Hong Kong can enhance external promotion to encourage individuals from other common law jurisdictions to receive common law training in Hong Kong.

The Chief Executive has proposed in the Policy Address a policy appealing to overseas students, hoping to attract them to study in Hong Kong by providing a better environment. This is a very good direction because overseas students not only pay tuition fees, but will also drive housing rentals and local spending in the vicinity of universities. However, it must be borne in mind that the Government must provide proper support measures to encourage graduates to stay in Hong Kong for development.

With these remarks, President, I support Mr TANG Fei's motion.

MR LAM CHUN-SING (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. First of all, I would like to thank Mr TANG Fei for proposing this motion. With the rapid advancement in technology, vocational and professional education and training ("VPET"), which nurtures talents with diversified and applied skills for different industries, has become increasingly important. Therefore, I agree with the amendment proposed by Mr Stanley NG. VPET development is an international trend and its promotion plays an important role in building Hong Kong as an international education hub.

Let us draw reference from overseas experience. In the United Kingdom, degree apprenticeships were launched in 2015. A person can attain an undergraduate degree qualification on completion of the apprenticeship, with many professional disciplines (including architecture and medicine) covered under the programme. In fact, the choices of courses under the apprenticeship can be very diversified and specialized. According to the data of the Department for Education of the United Kingdom, in 2016-2017, more than 1 600 people joined the degree apprenticeships and two years later, the number exceeded 13 000, reflecting the popularity of the programme. In Hong Kong, though the Earn and

Learn Scheme was launched, the highest qualification that apprentices can attain is only a higher diploma, which is relatively less appealing. I suggest that the Government draw insights from the relevant practices and explore the possibility of launching a degree apprenticeship programme, so as to provide a more diversified and attractive development pathway targeting talents needed by new industries in the future, thereby laying a foundation for Hong Kong to become an international VPET hub.

In last year's Policy Address, it was also proposed to take forward the establishment of universities of applied sciences ("UASs") to raise the status of VPET to attain qualifications at university degree level, which will help enhance the recognition of VPET in society. The idea of UASs is after all a new initiative. We propose that the Government should consider setting up a development fund for UASs ("the Fund") to foster collaboration among sectors such as education, industrial and commercial, and labour, with a view to discussing areas such as curriculum design and employment support and promoting the long-term and sustainable development of VPET; setting up various funding schemes under the Fund, including providing financial support and support measures to institutions intending to transform themselves into UASs; subsidizing and promoting the collaboration between UASs and other vocational universities in the Mainland and overseas, and promoting mutual recognition of professional qualifications among different places; establishing scholarship schemes and providing tuition fee subsidies for relevant applied degree programmes which correspond to designated industries where there is a shortage of talents, so as to attract more students, including non-local ones, to enrol in VPET.

In addition, the Government also put forward the Vocational Professionals Admission Scheme ("the Scheme") last year, under which in the following two academic years non-local students of designated full-time higher diploma programmes will be allowed to stay in Hong Kong after graduation to seek jobs relevant to their disciplines. I agree that this will help attract non-local students to come to Hong Kong to take VPET and stay here for work, thereby promoting the flow of VPET talents. However, on the other hand, I also hope that the Government will closely monitor the implementation of the Scheme in the future, including whether the work of the applicants is related to the professions of their programmes, and whether the employment opportunities and remuneration packages of local VPET graduates will be reduced, which will affect the attractiveness of the programme. After all, the objective of the Scheme is to attract non-local VPET students to come to Hong Kong in order to help Hong Kong

become an international education hub and enhance the social status of VPET, rather than discouraging local students from enrolling in the programme.

With these remarks, President, I support the motion.

MR SHANG HAILONG (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. I speak in support of Mr TANG Fei's motion and the amendments proposed by the other five colleagues.

In my opinion, if Hong Kong is to become an international education hub, we must first pay attention to three points. Firstly, to fully review and give full play to our strong traditional advantages; secondly, to expedite and balance the linkage between academics and industries; and thirdly, to pool talents extensively and nurture them in practical ways. To this end, I think the Government needs to “think harder, come up with more solutions and put in more resources” in these three areas.

Firstly, to fully review and give full play to our strong traditional advantages. I think there are at least two advantages in Hong Kong's education, be it K15 education or post-secondary education. Our basic education and academic research are solid and of high quality, blending Chinese and Western cultures and having a far-reaching international outlook. Education in Hong Kong has long enjoyed a good reputation both in the international world and in the Mainland, and it is a soft power that makes Hong Kong widely recognized.

The academic research achievements of Hong Kong universities are outstanding, with five universities of ours in the world's top 100; they are truly a “Q” Mark brand of Hong Kong. A senior told me that before Hong Kong's return to the motherland, there were discussions on whether English should continue to be the main medium of instruction in Hong Kong universities after 1997. Now that nearly 30 years have passed, English is still the main medium of instruction. This is precisely an example that shows that Hong Kong's education is still internationalized, and full play is given to its advantages under “one country, two systems”. It can be said that developing Hong Kong into an international education hub is just what we want because we can give full play to our strengths in this regard. It is thus extremely important for us to keep our education system internationalized and further develop this feature. As regards attracting new talents to Hong Kong, 75% of the parents told me that they have been attracted to

Hong Kong because they recognized the East-meets-West characteristics of Hong Kong's education.

Secondly, to expedite and balance the interface between academic studies and industries. University education has to face the new normal of linking academic studies with industries. Some people call this “transformation”, but I think that is an oversimplification. After all, industries and academic research are linked and complementary to each other; the idea is different from our previous “ivory tower” concept. In the past, key performance indicators (“KPIs”) in academia primarily focused on submission of academic papers as achievements, whereas today, we need to extend KPIs to linkage with the industry chain, where outcomes are regarded as achievements only if they can be turned into products and services.

To expedite the linkage of academic research with industries and strike a balance between them, universities should adjust their administrative operations and the way forward in education, and the Government needs to take corresponding actions in formulating education policies and allocating resources. There is a new normal in universities, and a new “education and industry” ecosystem has already emerged in universities. Innovative high technologies, such as ChatGPT and large language models, come from industries and not universities, so the term “learning centre” no longer refers only to an education institution. Instead of taking them as posing a challenge or exerting pressure on traditional education, I would say they have inspired us to consider redefining education. Discussions on an international education hub should be conducted with new perspectives and new mindsets.

Thirdly, it is all about pooling talents in practical ways. To become an international education hub, talents are the mainstay. Apart from outstanding students with potential, there must also be high-level elite educators and creative and intelligent scholars. Internationalization and diversification of university education was, and still is, best demonstrated by the nurturing of talents by Hong Kong itself, or the recruitment or pooling of talents from within and outside Hong Kong. In the future, this will be an extremely important aspect of the international education hub, and we should, through “telling the stories of Hong Kong's education well”, provide more effective measures to enable this aspect to flourish. For example, in the past, most of the postgraduate students were overseas students. As far as K15 education is concerned, policies such as the introduction of the Top Talent Pass Scheme have already brought thousands of K15 students to Hong Kong

in 2023, and there is a chance that tens of thousands of students in the relevant age group will come to Hong Kong to study in the future. Retaining students means retaining the families of newly-arrived talents, which is a way to consolidate Hong Kong's position as an international education hub.

Increasing the number of non-local graduates in tertiary institutions to attract, nurture and retain non-local talents is also an important step. Hong Kong's tertiary institutions should also work closely with the Ministry of Education to promote mutual recognition of the Higher Diploma qualification and the Associate Degree qualification between the Mainland and Hong Kong.

President, it is a strategic vision to develop Hong Kong into a genuine international education hub. According to the 14th Five-Year Plan, Hong Kong should integrate into the overall development of the country in developing the "eight centres". In my opinion, developing Hong Kong into an international education hub is not tantamount to turning Hong Kong into a ninth centre because education itself is the basic element and standard provision of the aforementioned "eight centres".

With these remarks, I support Mr TANG Fei's motion and the amendments proposed by the other five Honourable colleagues.

DR TAN YUEHENG (in Putonghua): Thank you, President. I speak in support of the motion moved by Mr TANG Fei and the amendments proposed by the several other Members.

All along, Hong Kong has been a rare internationalized education highland in the region. Not only is its tertiary education standard among the highest in Asia, but it also possesses the unique advantage of enjoying the strong support of the motherland and being closely connected to the world, so it can be said that Hong Kong is equipped with very good conditions for development into an international hub for post-secondary education.

Looking at other famous education hubs in the world, they not only focus on their tertiary institutions but also make multi-dimensional planning, from living facilities for students to the overall planning of employment and settlement after their graduation, to absorb talents from the advantageous position of education development, thus giving full play to the functions of an "education hub" and

achieving the aim of obtaining both talents and economic benefits. I think this is also the direction to go in developing Hong Kong into an education hub. The Government, academia and the community should join hands in taking more proactive actions to upgrade the standard of education, build a comprehensive industry chain for education, and plan for its longer-term development.

In this regard, I would like to make a few suggestions.

Firstly, we should do a good job in top-level design and overall planning for the development of an international hub for post-secondary education. This is an ambitious and long-term strategy, and the Government should conduct a strategic study on Hong Kong's medium-to-long-term manpower demand, as well as the structure and contents of post-secondary education, so as to formulate a set of detailed development blueprints to take forward the development of an education hub in phases and by fields of study.

Meanwhile, the development of post-secondary education requires the support and collaboration of basic education such as primary and secondary education. It is suggested that the SAR Government should be more forward-looking in assessing and formulating medium-to-long-term education policies and resource allocation, and that it may consider conducting a comprehensive review of the teaching system, so as to guide local primary and secondary schools in actively complementing the building of Hong Kong into an international education hub, and to strengthen the linkage and cooperation with universities to enable the foundation subjects in primary and secondary schools to better articulate with the professional studies in universities. This will also lay the foundation for Hong Kong to be fully upgraded into an international education hub in the future.

Secondly, upgrading the academic and scientific research standards of tertiary institutions. The most essential factors in attracting overseas students to study in Hong Kong are the academic and scientific research standards of our universities, as well as the recognition of the programmes and qualifications. It is proposed that the Government should further increase its investment in the post-secondary education sector and, on the premise of ensuring teaching quality, gradually raise the admission quota of non-local students to universities funded by the University Grants Committee and self-financing institutions, to guide the parallel development of public and private universities. Meanwhile, encouragement and assistance should be given to universities to offer more

internationalized programmes, so as to provide international students with a variety of choices, such as double-degree programmes, international exchange programmes and cross-border cooperation programmes.

In addition, the Government should also consider allocating more resources to upgrade the teaching and accommodation facilities of tertiary institutions, actively study the construction of additional teaching buildings and hostels by various tertiary institutions, as well as the possibility of establishing public-private partnerships in developing off-campus student hostels, so as to continuously improve the education infrastructure and increase the capacity of education.

Thirdly, we should step up our efforts in recruiting international students and keep our student population “internationalized”. Student recruitment is a key factor in developing Hong Kong into an education hub. In promoting Hong Kong’s education services abroad to build an overall brand name, the Government should take the lead in consolidating and uniting the strengths of the academic sector, and actively assist various tertiary institutions in launching international student recruitment activities. Targeted student recruitment policies and publicity measures should be formulated for students from the Belt and Road and Southeast Asian countries and regions, so as to attract more international students to study in Hong Kong through organizing special overseas publicity activities, international education fairs, sister school exchanges and so on. In addition, local tertiary institutions can draw on the experience of popular countries for overseas studies such as those in Europe and the United States, and explore the possibility of strengthening cooperation with overseas studies agencies, so as to establish a well-developed global student recruitment network with the help of commercial forces.

Thank you, President. With these remarks, I support the motion and the amendments.

MS CHAN YUET-MING (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. I speak in support of Mr TANG Fei’s motion on “Actively building Hong Kong into an international education hub by formulating a comprehensive strategic development blueprint for Hong Kong’s education” and the amendments proposed by the other Honourable colleagues.

As mentioned in the original motion, our country is continuously improving the strategy of opening up, with a view to making our country an influential and important education hub in the world. This year's Policy Address has followed up on the national strategy in a timely manner. It clearly mentions the need to develop Hong Kong into an international hub for post-secondary education, and relaxes the admission quota of non-local students to publicly-funded post-secondary institutions to 40%, with a view to continuously attracting more students from overseas, especially those from the Belt and Road countries and the Mainland, to pursue further studies in Hong Kong. Development of tertiary education will also be followed up in the Northern Metropolis, the newest development area, where the Northern Metropolis University Town will be developed. The original motion which proposes that the SAR Government should formulate a comprehensive strategic development blueprint for Hong Kong's education is worthy of our strong support; and reference can be drawn from the precedents in other countries and regions.

By leveraging the advantage of internationalization to establish itself as a hub for post-secondary education, Hong Kong can not only boost its global influence and promote the building of China's education brand, but also help turn tertiary education into an economic industry, rectify the situation of homogeneity of industries, and bring about long-term and sustainable economic benefits. Taking the United Kingdom as an example, in 2020, the total annual revenue of tertiary institutions in the United Kingdom exceeded £40 billion, most of which was generated by overseas students. In 2022, Australia's overseas students brought revenue amounting to A\$25.5 billion, making education services one of the country's important service industries.

Given the current global economic downturn, the SAR Government will face a deficit of hundreds of billions of dollars this year, and I believe the problem will persist in the next few years. Therefore, opening up new sources of revenue will be a key concern of the Government, and I believe developing Hong Kong into an international hub for post-secondary education and turning our education services into one of the economic industries are in line with the Government's objective of opening up new sources of revenue.

In addition, actively building Hong Kong into an international education hub will also help the Government realize its overall goal of trawling for and nurturing talents. The 14th Five-Year Plan has established Hong Kong's positioning in developing the "eight centres", and with an ageing population, Hong Kong is

experiencing a structural decline in the workforce. The development of an international education hub will help the medium- and long-term supply of manpower to various industries, so as to nurture more talents who are familiar with and love Hong Kong.

On the other hand, I am also concerned about the development of the Northern Metropolis University Town. Last week, when I moved a Members' motion on the development of the Northern Metropolis, a colleague proposed an amendment which specifically mentioned the hope that the Northern Metropolis University Town could be constructed as a research and development and technology transfer base supporting the area. However, the current plan for the Northern Metropolis University Town has adopted a model similar to that of some overseas countries where one university is allocated to each site, which is different from the model of university towns in the Mainland. In this year's Policy Address, the Government mentioned that it will continue to take forward a number of hostel projects to meet the living needs of students arising from the additional intake, indicating that ancillary living facilities and the costs of living for students coming to Hong Kong would be important considerations in building a well-developed and attractive university town. Reference can be drawn from the Mainland model of grouping a number of universities in developing a university town. This will create a stronger clustering effect in academic studies and scientific researches; besides, as more commercial tenants will move in, the ancillary living facilities for students in the campuses in terms of clothing, food, housing and transportation will be more plentiful and complete, thus substantially reducing the costs of living and other social construction costs. In this connection, I will continue to pay close attention to whether this overseas model is suitable for collaboration among the industry, academic and research sectors in the Northern Metropolis, and whether local, overseas or Mainland universities should settle in which part of the Northern Metropolis for development.

Thank you, President. I so submit.

MR CHAN PUI-LEUNG (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. President, in the 2023 Policy Address, the Chief Executive proposed to develop Hong Kong into an international hub for post-secondary education to attract more outstanding talents to study in Hong Kong. In the ranking of the most international universities in the world released by Times Higher Education of the United Kingdom in 2023, a total of five universities in Hong Kong were on the list, of

which four were ranked among the top 10 and the University of Hong Kong was ranked first in the world, which clearly indicates that Hong Kong has the conditions to become an international education hub. Academic studies and scientific research in Hong Kong have attained world-class standards, and the articulation and accreditation systems are in line with the international world, thus, many non-local students have been attracted to come to Hong Kong for further studies all along. To further develop Hong Kong into an international education hub, I believe that it is very important to maintain an international composition of students and teaching staff.

In the 2024-2025 academic year, the SAR Government will double the admission quota of non-local students to publicly-funded tertiary institutions to 40%, and we can foresee that more non-local students will come to Hong Kong for further studies in the future. However, referring to the data of the past four years, the proportion of Mainland students among non-local students has remained at about 70%, with an average growth rate of about 5% over the past four years, while students from other parts of Asia account for about 25%, and those from other parts of the world have all along accounted for less than 5%, with very low growth rates in recent years. In order to become an international education hub, I think we should strive for a more balanced ratio of non-local students and even teaching staff in terms of nationalities.

However, the numbers of teaching staff and students from Europe and the United States in Hong Kong's tertiary institutions have been decreasing gradually in the past few years due to various reasons. With increasing exchanges between Hong Kong and member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, coupled with the establishment of the Belt and Road Scholarship in 2015, overseas students from these countries have been attracted to come to Hong Kong. Starting from the 2024-2025 academic year, the quota of Belt and Road Scholarship places will be increased by 50% and the number of award places under the Hong Kong PhD Fellowship Scheme will be gradually increased to 400, thus, it is believed that more students from the Belt and Road countries and the Mainland will be attracted to study in Hong Kong.

President, I think that while we put in more resources to attract students from the Mainland and countries along the Belt and Road, we should also continue to proactively promote Hong Kong's tertiary education through the Education Bureau, the overseas Hong Kong Economic and Trade Offices or various tertiary institutions by going to the European countries and the United States. This can

be done by means of activities such as organizing education fairs, forums and conferences, and even giving talks on campus. After all, it is necessary for Hong Kong, as Asia's world city serving as a window linking the Mainland of China with the rest of the world, to maintain its international feature.

In fact, Hong Kong's institutional and geographical advantages are conducive to building itself as an international education hub. For example, China Studies has all along been a popular major chosen by students and scholars in Europe and the United States, and many universities in Hong Kong are offering this course at present, but I think it is necessary for Hong Kong to further strengthen its own brand building.

In this regard, Hong Kong may as well draw reference from Schwarzman Scholars of the Tsinghua University and build its own scholar programmes, set proportions of student admission by different regions, and provide admitted students with a comprehensive scholarship covering tuition fees, accommodation and transportation costs, etc. By adhering to the principle of "being based in Hong Kong, understanding China, and having a global outlook", we can provide a unique platform for learning and knowledge application in terms of curriculum design, career planning, and resource support, so as to attract more overseas students who wish to learn about the Chinese society and study Chinese issues and are interested in Chinese culture to study and live in Hong Kong where East meets West, and strive to become the forerunner in promoting innovation of higher education in China and the rest of the world.

With these remarks, President, I support Mr TANG Fei's original motion and the amendments proposed by the other Members.

IR DR LO WAI-KWOK (in Cantonese): President, first of all, I would like to thank Mr TANG Fei for moving the original motion and the other five Members for proposing their amendments.

President, the report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China has emphasized speeding up work to build a strong educational system. Subsequently, General Secretary XI Jinping delivered an important speech, further pointing out that we should put equal emphasis on introducing overseas educational resources and going global, and put to good use world-class educational resources and innovative factors, so as to make China an important education hub in the

world. Hong Kong has consistently maintained its high-quality education system and academic environment, with a total of five universities in the world's top 100, and the quality of teaching and the standard of research are internationally recognized, so we should “capitalize on Hong Kong's strengths to serve the country's needs”. Both the Business and Professionals Alliance for Hong Kong and I very much agree with the thrust of the motion, urging the SAR Government to formulate a comprehensive blueprint for the development of Hong Kong's education, provide more diversified education services and support measures, and strive to develop Hong Kong into an international education hub.

President, the 14th Five-Year Plan clearly supports Hong Kong's development of the “eight centres”, including the international financial centre, international innovation and technology centre, East-meets-West centre for international cultural exchange, international trade centre, international shipping centre, international aviation hub, centre for international legal and dispute resolution services in the Asia-Pacific region as well as regional intellectual property trading centre. Undoubtedly, abundant and diversified manpower is the key engine for promoting the development of the “eight centres”. The SAR Government should not only speed up its work to “trawl talents” from outside Hong Kong, but also proactively nurture talents. It should take the “eight centres” as the primary analytical framework and promptly initiate a new round of manpower projections to conduct big data analysis of relevant industries and occupations as well as the skills they require, so as to more accurately formulate short-, medium- and long-term strategies for manpower as well as education and training.

In my opinion, there are at least two major concerns in the development blueprint for Hong Kong's education.

Firstly, the authorities must make full use of Hong Kong's advantages in internationalized education and put equal emphasis on introducing overseas educational resources and going global. I am pleased to note that the Chief Executive has announced in the 2023 Policy Address that starting from the 2024-2025 academic year, the admission quota for non-local students to government-funded post-secondary institutions will be doubled to 40%, and an additional \$1 billion will be injected into the Government Scholarship Fund to attract more outstanding talents to come to Hong Kong for studies and research, and 100 outstanding local students will be supported to pursue their studies in world-renowned universities outside Hong Kong annually to broaden their global perspectives. Meanwhile, the authorities will strive to develop the Northern

Metropolis University Town and encourage tertiary institutions to strengthen cooperation with renowned institutions in the Mainland and overseas. In respect of introducing overseas educational resources, I think the authorities should learn from experience. The Savannah College of Design (“SCAD”), an art, design and digital media university in the United States, opened a branch campus in Hong Kong in 2010, which was not an opportune time unfortunately, and it eventually ceased operation in 2020 due to deficits and other reasons. In the future, the authorities should provide more targeted policy support to attract more renowned institutions from the Mainland and overseas to come to Hong Kong to operate, or facilitate their offering of more double degree programmes with local institutions.

Secondly, I have repeatedly suggested that the SAR Government should improve the education system from pre-primary to post-secondary education, step up the promotion of STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts and Mathematics) education at the primary and secondary level, and increase the support for the STEM Internship Scheme to enable students to receive specialized training in innovation and technology earlier. The Government should enhance the status and recognition of vocational and professional education and training (“VPET”), transform the Technological and Higher Education Institute of Hong Kong (“THEi”) into a publicly-funded applied university, and continuously review and revamp the positioning and curriculum of VPET institutions. Meanwhile, VPET should be further incorporated into the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework and articulation with the degree programmes of tertiary institutions should be strengthened, so as to meet the needs of the development of the industries and technological changes. I am glad about the Chief Executive’s announcement that the authorities will further strengthen the promotion of STEAM education in primary and secondary schools, including the introduction of Science subject in primary schools, and that they will also promote the establishment of universities of applied sciences, striving to raise the status of VPET. In my opinion, the authorities should also actively establish a mutual recognition mechanism for VPET certificates with other regions, so as to attract more overseas students to come to study in Hong Kong.

I so submit. (*The buzzer sounded*)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok, please stop speaking.

Mr Tony TSE, please speak.

MR TONY TSE (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. President, although some people have been critical of the primary and secondary education in Hong Kong and the governance of individual universities and institutions, the standards of teaching and scientific research, the qualifications of teaching staff and the facilities of universities in Hong Kong are quite high on the whole. Several more renowned universities in Hong Kong have all along been admitting quite a number of foreign students. However, compared with universities in the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia and Canada, including those with relatively low international rankings, it seems that our universities have not displayed proactive efforts in striving for internationalization and industrialization. Therefore, we can adopt a more proactive approach in external publicity and in attracting foreign students.

Regarding this situation, some people think that perhaps the funding for universities provided by the SAR Government is already plentiful, and there is also a sufficient intake of quality Mainland and local students, so there is no need for universities to proactively “trawl for talents” outside Hong Kong. However, with the decline in the number of students in the relevant age group in Hong Kong and the more options for further studies in the Mainland and overseas, it is necessary for local universities to change their “good wine needs no bush” attitude.

The original motion proposes to “actively build Hong Kong into an international education hub”. This is not only for the benefit of the universities, but more importantly, to assist Hong Kong and the country in attracting and nurturing more talents from all over the world, hoping that some of them can contribute to the development of Hong Kong and the country after completion of their studies and graduation.

Even if they eventually choose not to stay and work in Hong Kong, through studying and living in Hong Kong, they can learn about the real situation of the SAR, the development, culture and values of our country, and build up friendship with local and Mainland students, which is the best way to tell the stories of Hong Kong and China well.

Many universities and even secondary schools in Europe and the United States have been actively recruiting students from all over the world for years with the support of their governments. Apart from attracting talents and increasing foreign exchange earnings, these countries also want to make young people from

other countries understand and identify with their cultures and values through subtle influence, which can be called a kind of education diplomacy. Education institutions in Hong Kong must step up their efforts in this regard, and the Government should also support them in its policies and systems (including immigration and employment arrangements) so as to recruit students and attract talents from all over the world.

President, a total of five Members have proposed amendments to this motion, and three of them have coincidentally mentioned the need for Hong Kong to strengthen vocational and professional education and training (“VPET”), including facilitating the establishment of universities of applied science, so that students taking VPET programmes can, hopefully, obtain university degrees too; striving for the recognition of Hong Kong’s VPET qualifications by different regions; and enhancing the knowledge of and training for the new generation in craftsmanship. These are also my proposals all along.

At present, Hong Kong is facing the problem of labour shortage. Not only is there a lack of high-end financial, technological and healthcare talents, there is also a shortage of various types of middle-level technicians and frontline skilled workers. The majority of parents in Hong Kong hold high aspirations for their children, hoping that they will not only be admitted to universities, but to some popular programmes, and preferably, they should also be able to obtain a master’s degree, a doctor’s degree or a double degree. However, academic and theoretical subjects are not for every young person. Some may be good at construction and design, while others enjoy culinary arts and cooking, and they are equally capable of developing a good career and contributing to their industries and society.

President, our education system should achieve the goals of “producing outstanding talents in every trade” and “enabling technicians to have a bright future”. Students should have the opportunity to give full play to their abilities and have good career prospects regardless of the subjects taken. This will provide alternative career pathways for young people who may not have performed well in DSE (the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination) but are still motivated and “willing to learn and work hard”.

With these remarks, President, I support the original motion and all the amendments.

MR CHU KWOK-KEUNG (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. I would like to thank Mr TANG Fei for proposing the original motion and the five Members for proposing their amendments.

China is striving to develop into a leading country in education. As mentioned by General Secretary XI Jinping in his speech in May last year, there is a need to improve the strategy of educational opening up, and put equal emphasis on introducing overseas educational resources and going global. As an international education hub, Hong Kong has five universities in the world's top 100; the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (“HKDSE”) is an internationally recognized public examination; and quality education is precisely the reason for our golden reputation which attracts talents from the Mainland and overseas. However, the Government's attitude and role in both introducing overseas educational resources and going global are relatively passive.

Given the complexity and volatility of the global flow of talents, overseas publicity should not be confined to “attracting enterprises and investments”, more importance should be attached to “recruiting students and talents”. In the past, the universities and institutions were left to fight on their own in their overseas publicity and recruitment efforts, and there was a lack of coordination and support by the Government. In my opinion, the Government's overseas Economic and Trade Offices and Mainland Offices should play a more important role in vigorously publicizing Hong Kong's edges in education, targeting the Belt and Road countries and Southeast Asian countries in particular, so as to bring in students and talents, promote the exchange of talents, and enhance the international standard of Hong Kong's education.

Some Members have mentioned vocational and professional education and training (“VPET”) in their amendments, and I very much agree with them. However, the prerequisite for bringing in students and talents is the accreditation of VPET qualifications, and we need to make this kind of accreditation go global. The qualifications obtained by overseas students must be recognized in the places where they will pursue further studies and work in the future. Otherwise, unless the students choose to stay in Hong Kong for development, it will be difficult to attract them to come to Hong Kong for studies.

Mutual recognition of qualifications needs to be led by the Government, and the qualifications framework collaboration between Guangdong and Hong Kong under development is a good example. Apart from strengthening mutual

recognition of professional qualifications with the Mainland, we should also grasp the opportunities presented by our country's development into a leading country in education to foster mutual recognition of qualifications with overseas countries, so that VPET can play a more active role in the development of Hong Kong into an international education hub.

President, efforts in “bringing in” and going global are not limited to higher education, they are equally important in basic education. HKDSE is widely recognized internationally, with the unique advantages of providing the option of taking examinations in Chinese or English and enabling students to apply directly to overseas universities with the qualifications. In fact, HKDSE is capable of becoming a highlight in the process of introducing overseas educational resources and enabling Hong Kong's education to go global. The Hong Kong Federation of Education Workers and the Hong Kong Top Talent Services Association released a survey in October last year, which shows that 39.7% and 27.5% of the Mainland talents who intend to let their children come to Hong Kong plan to make applications to government and aided schools and Direct Subsidy Scheme schools respectively; and as many as 63.2% of them intend to let their children enrol in the HKDSE programme, which is five times the percentage of those who will opt for enrolment in the IB (International Baccalaureate) programmes.

At present, the Government allows the children of applicants of the Top Talent Pass Scheme to study in government and aided schools and Direct Subsidy Scheme schools in Hong Kong, and they are entitled to the same government subsidy as local students. In other words, the Government is “trawling for talents” by subsidizing the unit cost of school places. For talents coming to Hong Kong who are parents, the HKDSE programme obviously offers better value for money than the IB (International Baccalaureate) programmes. In fact, in many Mainland cities, education institutions offering the HKDSE programme are mushrooming, and there is a strong demand for students to come to Hong Kong to sit for the examination as private candidates.

With the development of schools for children of Hong Kong people in the Mainland, it will be necessary to set up examination centres in the Mainland to enable these students to sit for the examination conveniently. However, the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority's recent announcement that there will be no Mainland examination centres for HKDSE this year has undoubtedly

illustrated the technical problems and challenges encountered in making HKDSE go global.

In recent years, some members of the education sector have suggested that more proactive efforts should be made to make HKDSE go global and develop it into a public examination called IDSE (International Diploma of Secondary Education Examination), especially to capture the education needs of the Chinese-speaking population in the Mainland and Southeast Asia, just like the International General Certificate of Secondary Education Examinations in the United Kingdom, but the Government's attitude has not been enthusiastic, thus failing to use this "good card" well.

MR TANG KA-PIU (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. I also thank Mr TANG Fei for his proposal. The international education hub mentioned in the motion may not be related to universities only, but a number of Honourable colleagues are nonetheless concerned about the internationalization of universities.

According to my shallow understanding, the term "internationalization" means attracting overseas students (such as those from Europe, the United States, Japan and Korea, Southeast Asia and even the Middle East) to study in universities in Hong Kong. I think they choose to study here not only because of the high rankings of universities in Hong Kong, but also because, on a practical level, they can learn about Hong Kong and China through university life, which can become a springboard for their career development in China. I must highlight this point. On the other hand, why do so many outstanding students from our motherland come to Hong Kong to study in our universities? Such preference is not only driven by the international rankings of the universities, but also by their desire to experience the internationalized environment in Hong Kong.

How can these two important sources of students be combined in an organic manner? The operation involved is actually quite complicated and not easy. However, I think that if we can move in the direction of combining the two sources of students and setting the admission ratios, and instruct the universities or certain faculties to consciously follow the ratios, we will be able to realize Hong Kong's status as an international education or university hub. The ratios can be set at "3-3-3", that is, 30% for local students, 30% for overseas students and 30% for Mainland students, so that the universities can become real melting pots where everyone can get what they need. This is the first point.

Secondly, many academics or entrepreneurs engaging in scientific research or innovation and technology in Hong Kong have told us that the biggest problem in Hong Kong lies in the lack of use cases for outstanding research results. Some friends have asked me to relay to the Government in my speech today that, Singapore is a small country with a small population or few use cases for scientific research results, so enterprises there have been very proactive in signing cooperation agreements with the Mainland to establish industrial parks in the Mainland; they asked whether Hong Kong could follow the example of Singapore.

As we all know, the universities in Hong Kong are very actively seeking development in the Mainland. The Government should clearly inform the universities in Hong Kong how they can cooperate with the industrial parks in the Mainland (especially those in the Greater Bay Area), so that teaching staff and students in Hong Kong understand that their research results can be applied in the Greater Bay Area; and through signing cooperation agreements, teaching staff and students with excellent research capabilities and standards can be retained in Hong Kong without feeling that since they are unable to apply the results of the researches conducted in Hong Kong, they may as well go to the Mainland. In fact, organic cooperation between the Mainland and Hong Kong can be forged, with the Mainland providing use cases of industries.

The third point is about corporate universities. There are universities with commemorative names in Hong Kong, and The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong is an example. However, renowned international corporations have never established universities in Hong Kong making use of their expertise or industrial knowledge. Can the Government consider developing this feature into one of the characteristics of Hong Kong as an international education hub?

Another point shared by Members is the hope to increase the number of non-local students. Of course, these students will not receive any direct subsidy from the SAR Government, but if we want to attract them to Hong Kong, we have to solve their accommodation problem. The Government has now relaxed the restrictions for them to take up part-time jobs. However, in respect of accommodation, the Government should build more parks, not just hostels, for overseas students, and let them know that they are actually welcome in some large communities. In my opinion, districts such as Tung Chung and Tseung Kwan O are communities with suitable conditions for such development. Will the Government take this into consideration?

Lastly, I would like to share that as a member of the Council of The Chinese University of Hong Kong (“CUHK”), I am now facing the issue of the appointment of the next Vice-Chancellor/President of CUHK. I remember that I have told reporters that we hope to maintain the tradition that the Vice-Chancellor/President of CUHK should be a Chinese scholar of the highest academic standard who can lead CUHK towards internationalization. I would like to take this opportunity to call upon top academics who are committed to education in Hong Kong and the development of our universities to actively consider applying for the post of Vice-Chancellor/President of CUHK.

I so submit.

DR JOHNNY NG (in Cantonese): President, I speak in support of Mr TANG Fei’s motion and the other Honourable colleagues’ amendments.

President XI Jinping has emphasized the importance of education in different speeches, raising the point that “when education in a country thrives, the country will thrive, and strong education makes a strong nation”. Among these speeches was an important one delivered on 1 July 2022, in which he asked Hong Kong to capitalize on its own advantages and fully utilize the good foundation of its higher education system to build itself into a regional education hub, attract Mainland and foreign students to study in its tertiary institutions, and devise opportunities to facilitate their stay in Hong Kong for work, so as to properly nurture necessary talent for Hong Kong’s development.

Hong Kong’s post-secondary education is international and highly diversified. Hong Kong is acclaimed to be the only city with five universities in the world’s top 100. In my view, development of Hong Kong into an international education hub makes it possible to not only widen students’ international perspectives, increase talent supply and enhance Hong Kong’s competitiveness, but also “export” Hong Kong’s excellent education services, thus enabling upgrade and development of Hong Kong’s education industry.

As a matter of fact, Hong Kong is faced with problems such as population ageing, labour force shrinkage and talent shortage, so ramping up the development of higher education to attract more non-local students is indeed an important way out. In the following, I would like to raise a few points.

First, in a bid to attract more non-local students to further their studies in Hong Kong, especially those from the Mainland and countries along the Belt and Road, the Government plans to raise the non-local student admission quotas applicable to taught programmes in eight subsidized universities from the current 20% to 40% of the local student places starting from the 2024-2025 academic year. It is estimated that the universities will double their intake of non-local undergraduates from 3 000 to 6 000 as a result. Alongside that, the Government also plans to increase the quota of the Belt and Road Scholarship by half to 150 from the 2024-2025 academic year onwards. I reckon that this increase is still relatively conservative and the quotas can be raised further.

Secondly, putting higher education on track to a high level of internationalization can more possibly attract non-local students to stay in Hong Kong for work after graduation, thereby boosting talent supply to alleviate the current talent shortage problem in Hong Kong. At present, non-local graduates who wish to stay and work in Hong Kong are allowed up to 24 months for job seeking after graduation. The Immigration Arrangements for Non-local Graduates (“IANG”) has received a good response since its introduction in 2008. In my view, the arrangements can be refined. In addition to extending the stay period to facilitate employment of non-local students in Hong Kong, the authorities should provide non-local students with more support, such as job matching to help them work in Hong Kong, or even with a living allowance. At the same time, the authorities should also extend visa schemes for non-local students to come to Hong Kong for studies or employment, for example by expanding IANG to Higher Diploma graduates.

Thirdly, the Policy Address proposes to build the Northern Metropolis University Town in the Northern Metropolis, which can effectively fit in with promoting Hong Kong’s further development into an international education hub. Meanwhile, through relevant planning exercises, the SAR Government can provide a platform for innovation and technology (“I&T”) enterprises, research and development (“R&D”) institutions and academia from around the world to collaborate on R&D and commercialization activities, thereby attracting large-scale Mainland and international enterprises to establish their foothold.

The SAR Government should take full advantage of the development of the Northern Metropolis and the Northern Metropolis University Town to strengthen business-school partnership, and for good measure set up industry-academia-research bases in the Northern Metropolis, so as to bring

together university/institution premises and industrial organizations and attract more I&T companies and organizations to set up their operations in Hong Kong. Concurrently, the collaboration between Hong Kong's higher education institutions and their Greater Bay Area campuses should be deepened to increase the opportunities for Hong Kong and Mainland students to gain exposure to the characteristic industries and cultures of the two places and learn from the experience of each other.

In sum, by fast-tracking building Hong Kong into an international education hub, we can attract more non-local talent to come and stay for development. Meanwhile, establishment of the international education brand of "Study in Hong Kong" can even increase the SAR Government's revenue through tuition fees and charges for peripheral services and hence promote Hong Kong's economic growth, which not only boosts Hong Kong's own growth impetus and competitiveness, but also helps the country further enhance its international influence.

Thank you, President. I so submit.

MS STARRY LEE (in Cantonese): President, I am very grateful to Mr TANG Fei for proposing today's motion and also very supportive of building Hong Kong into an international education hub.

On the reasons for support, Honourable colleagues have already spoken a lot just now. First, it is necessary to tie in with the national development and work together to build a leading country in education. If successful, the development of Hong Kong into an education hub will definitely further enhance our role in telling the stories of China and Hong Kong well. Moreover, I even hope for a reversal of our certain past mindsets. In the past, when we talked about studying abroad, the primary destinations of choice would definitely be the United Kingdom, the United States and Europe, but why could it not be Hong Kong, China? If our efforts culminate in international students choosing Hong Kong, China, as their top study-abroad destination, in my opinion, we are also playing a part in making contributions to our country.

The second reason for my support is that Hong Kong has advantages. As many Honourable colleagues have just mentioned, we have many outstanding tertiary institutions. In fact, it is no small feat for a small-sized city to have a number of outstanding tertiary institutions. Thirdly, Hong Kong has its own

needs. We need talent and we have to develop the “eight centres”, but there is a talent shortage. Fourthly, as Hong Kong’s population is ageing, it is actually all the more necessary to have folks from various places study in local education institutions and join our workforce in the future.

The Policy Address has introduced a number of measures to fulfil the vision of making Hong Kong an international education hub. However, I earnestly wish to share a story with the Secretary here. Much as I support the relevant policy, we all remember that back in the day when the Honourable Mr TSANG proposed to turn Hong Kong into an education hub and develop education services, the proposal was not free from controversy in society. I recall visiting a district after the Policy Address was announced on that day, only to be stopped right away by a parent, who said to me, “Honourable Member, now that you are bringing in so many non-local students, local students will face tough competition in the future.” I have to tell the Secretary that I must admit this is a good policy, but in the course of implementation, we should prevent or avoid social conflicts arising from this good policy.

I have a few suggestions, which I hope the Secretary will consider. First, never let Hong Kong students and parents think that non-local students are taking up the resources of local students. Despite the Secretary’s repeated emphasis in this regard, parents do not see it the same way. At present, 18% to 20% of the students are eligible for University Grants Committee (“UGC”)-funded degree programmes. The remaining students, who are not eligible for UGC-funded programmes, still have to utilize their own resources to pursue further studies overseas or take self-financing programmes. Alternatively, they may take associate degree or higher diploma programmes. Therefore, in my view, we have to not only place emphasis on nurturing and attracting more non-local students, but also, if resources permit, increase the number of education vouchers for local students and the number of subsidized places in self-financing programmes, so that local students can pursue these degrees with the help of subsidies and subsequently contribute their strengths to building the future of Hong Kong.

Secondly, attention should be paid to the actual operation. With the current increase from 10% to 40%, I find it a must to pay attention to the actual situation by then, as many practical problems will arise. For example, in respect of dormitories, facilities, teachers’ time allocation and even the overall teaching arrangements, what will the actual operation be like on campus? I very much hope that the Education Bureau and the institutions pay attention to the actual

situation. We know that this is a policy that Hong Kong needs and is a good one, but it must never lead to more conflicts in actual operation.

Thirdly, regarding the use of the term “industry”, I can understand that it is because Hong Kong needs new industries. However, it is undesirable to place too much emphasis on considering education as an industry. Personally, I find it preferable to explore turning Hong Kong into a talent training base, which might be more acceptable to all. To develop a talent training base or retain talent in Hong Kong, the authorities must express in numbers how many non-local students will ultimately stay in Hong Kong, or point out in future whether the proportion of those staying in Hong Kong exceeds the current level. Many Members have earlier said that not many of the non-local students studying in Hong Kong will stay. In this regard, I hope that the Secretary will explore more ways and make greater efforts to keep them here in order to truly serve the future development of Hong Kong. If these can be pulled off, I believe this policy will receive more public support and everyone will see the importance of this pool of talent to the future development of Hong Kong. Therefore, I very much hope that the Secretary exercises extra caution in implementing the policy so that this good policy (*The buzzer sounded*) ...

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Ms Starry LEE, please stop speaking.

Mr CHAN Hok-fung, please speak.

MR CHAN HOK-FUNG (in Cantonese): President, the 2024 World University Rankings released in September last year ranked five Hong Kong universities among the global top 100, signifying outstanding achievements in scientific research capabilities of Hong Kong’s higher education. Today, I would like to thank Principal TANG Fei for proposing this motion, which affords us an opportunity to explore how to leverage the advantages of Hong Kong’s higher education institutions to build an international hub for post-secondary education and an Asian ecosystem for education and research. In my opinion, the phrase “attract talent and wealth and bring in treasures” can serve as a future development blueprint.

Why do I use the expression “attract talent and wealth”? What does “talent and wealth” refer to? Talented people and money. They are essential for Hong

Kong to secure its position as an international hub for higher education. What does “bring in treasures” mean? It means to bring Hong Kong’s scientific research outcomes across the Greater Bay Area and even the globe, while liaising with universities in the Mainland and overseas to co-organize programmes, so as to turn Hong Kong’s post-secondary education into a crown jewel.

To begin with, “attracting talent” can be done on two levels. The first one refers to Mainland or overseas students coming to study in Hong Kong. According to information provided by the Ministry of Education, about eight million Mainland students have gone abroad to study over the past 40-odd years, revealing a vast market for higher education. Furthermore, the study-abroad destinations in the past were predominantly countries belonging to the Five Eyes alliance, such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada and Australia; but in recent years, the geopolitical factors, coupled with the frequent occurrence of school shootings, have resulted in the number of overseas students dropping instead of rising in many places.

Therefore, this represents a perfect opportunity for Hong Kong. According to a rough estimate, the annual number of international students across the globe exceeds 4.5 million. Hong Kong should leverage its advantages in post-secondary education, as well as in convergence of Chinese and Western cultures, to attract more research-based master’s and doctoral students, thereby expanding our talent pool and reserve.

On the second level, we should strive to attract top scholars from around the globe to conduct scientific research in Hong Kong. President, there is no time like the present to attract scholars of Chinese descent to Hong Kong for development. After the Trump administration initiated the China Action Plan in 2018, many Chinese-American scientists accelerated their return to China, with Hong Kong being also one of their initial destinations. According to an article published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America in June last year, the number of scientists of Chinese descent leaving the United States for China or elsewhere surged from 900 to 2 621 between 2010 and 2021. Hong Kong should proactively attract top scholars to make Hong Kong their home. It is necessary not only for post-secondary institutions to show sincerity, but also for the SAR Government to extend an olive branch and refrain from using institutional autonomy as an excuse to remain aloof.

Recently, I had a chat with a professor of The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (“HKUST”). He mentioned that although the Business School is the most famous faculty of HKUST, in recent years some job candidates have chosen to accept offers from Tsinghua University or other Mainland institutions rather than HKUST. Why? The reason turns out to be that in recent years Hong Kong universities have fallen far behind their Mainland counterparts in respect of employment terms. Simply put, they are not financially robust enough to attract scholars to come.

President, in 2022, Tsinghua University received RMB36.2 billion in recurrent funding, topping all higher education institutions across China. However, I have looked up the data and found that the combined funding for The Chinese University of Hong Kong, the University of Hong Kong and HKUST over the past three academic years was only about \$36 billion. I look forward the Government, the business sector and the public making concerted efforts as soon as possible to increase the recurrent funding for scientific research in universities, with a view to firmly preserving Hong Kong’s existing strengths in this regard.

The final point is to make Hong Kong an Eastern hub for higher education, as well as a treasure trove where knowledge is transformed into results. According to a research publication released by the Legislative Council in March last year, the number of invention patents in the Greater Bay Area in 2020 reached some 366 000, far more than those bay areas of San Francisco, New York and Tokyo, but there is room to raise the overall quality. Hong Kong’s higher education institutions are more advantageous and internationally renowned in the context of basic research, whereas the cities in the Greater Bay Area have strengths in applied scientific research. If synergy can be created between them and the Greater Bay Area cities can complement each other’s strengths, I believe that building an oriental Silicon Valley will not be empty talk in the future.

Lastly, I would like Members to join me in recalling the 1980s and 1990s that saw Hong Kong’s economic take-off. During that period, many people, both from the Mainland and overseas, came to Hong Kong to contribute great efforts. Hong Kong should embrace talent from all corners of the world and foster an environment conducive to seeking education, knowledge and development in the global arena, thus positioning itself as an international education hub.

I so submit. Thank you, President.

MR BENSON LUK (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. President, I would like to thank Mr TANG Fei for moving a Members' motion on "Actively building Hong Kong into an international education hub by formulating a comprehensive strategic development blueprint for Hong Kong's education" and a number of Members for proposing their amendments.

During the fifth group study session on building a leading country in education held by the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee on 29 May last year, General Secretary XI Jinping pointed out the need to improve the strategy of educational opening up, put equal emphasis on introducing overseas educational resources and going global, and put to good use world-class educational resources and innovative factors, so as to make China an influential and important education hub in the world. He also stressed the importance of participating in global education governance, vigorously promoting the brand of "Study in China", telling China's stories well, spreading China's experience, making China's voice heard, and enabling China's education to be more influential and have a greater say in the world.

In actuality, as one of the important bridges between our country and overseas regions, the SAR Government and Hong Kong are certainly duty-bound to make outgoing efforts to promote the building of the "Study in China" brand. The 2023 Policy Address has proposed to build Hong Kong into an international hub for post-secondary education. The key measures include increasing the admission quota of non-local students to government-funded post-secondary institutions and expanding scholarship schemes to attract more outstanding talents to study and conduct researches in Hong Kong.

The aforesaid measures have actually touched on the key points we wish to discuss today. In my opinion, however, if we wish to truly become an international education hub, the authorities can take note of the following three aspects to further improve our policy.

Firstly, by and large, the SAR Government's role in the collaboration or student recruitment exercises of institutions is currently not evident. For example, at present, local universities mainly rely on their own brand effect and publicity strategy to recruit overseas students, and the role of the SAR Government in this regard is relatively limited. Although institutions have autonomy, I suggest that the authorities consider pushing forward regular cooperation among local institutions to jointly publicize their characteristics and programmes overseas, so

as to increase the international visibility and influence of Hong Kong education. To this end, I hope that the SAR Government can formulate a broader scope and direction for higher education enrolment to ensure that Hong Kong can move towards the goal of becoming an international education hub.

Secondly, Hong Kong universities should expand their student recruitment networks and target countries and regions along the Belt and Road as main sources for recruiting overseas students. The Government can encourage local universities to participate directly in overseas promotional exhibitions and exchange activities organized by Mainland higher education institutions. At the same time, local universities can also draw on some Mainland universities' practices, such as initiating close cooperative relationships with individual overseas universities in the form of mutual recognition of academic credits, awarding of joint degrees and teacher exchanges, so as to attract more overseas students to study in Hong Kong.

Thirdly, in the long run, in order to expand the quality and scale of teaching in Hong Kong's tertiary institutions, the SAR Government should also be mindful of the importance of maintaining education quality. According to a survey released by the University Grants Committee ("UGC"), the student-teacher ratio of UGC-funded universities in 2022-2023 was about 1:12, compared with about 1:5 or 1:6 for some leading institutions abroad. Therefore, if we wish to grow in scale and strength, one of the development priorities is to maintain the quantity and quality of our teaching personnel, as well as a smooth and stable succession between different generations of educators. I hope that the authorities continue to proactively train more teaching staff for local universities and recruit education professionals of Chinese descent from, say, the Mainland or overseas, so as to strengthen the teaching force of Hong Kong's tertiary education.

With these remarks, President, I support the original motion and the amendments.

PROF LAU CHI-PANG (in Cantonese): President, I would like to offer my thanks and support to Mr TANG Fei for proposing the motion on "Actively building Hong Kong into an international education hub by formulating a comprehensive strategic development blueprint for Hong Kong's education" and to the several other Members for proposing their amendments.

When presiding over a study session of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and attending several other different occasions between May and November 2023, General Secretary XI Jinping made an important speech on building a leading country in education, where he pointed out the need for China to participate in global education governance, vigorously promote the brand of “Study in China”, tell China’s stories well, spread China’s experience, make China’s voice heard, and enable China’s education to be more influential and have a greater say in the world.

Forty-five years into the reform and opening up, China has the second highest GDP (Gross Domestic Product) in the world, and its scientific research investment also ranks second worldwide. In recent years, China has even leapt to the top of the world in terms of the number of scientific research papers. A multitude of world-class, state-of-the-art technologies have reached advanced European and American levels, with some in leading positions. With the advanced development of its hard power, China has laid a solid foundation for boosting its soft power.

As education is a form of soft power and Hong Kong’s higher education holds an advantageous position in Greater China and even Asia, the Chief Executive has proposed in the 2023 Policy Address to build Hong Kong into an international hub for post-secondary education and develop Hong Kong as a first-class education and talents hub, moving in lockstep with the country’s tactical and strategic adjustments to soft power.

Starting from the 2024-2025 academic year, the admission quota of non-local students to eight subsidized universities will be doubled from 20% to 40%. The institutions may proceed, step by step, with admission of more non-local students, especially students from the Belt and Road countries and from the Mainland. The University Grants Committee will fund universities to continue taking forward a number of hostel projects, which will cumulatively provide about 13 500 additional hostel places by 2027 to cater for the additional intake of non-local students arising from the increased admission quota. In 2024 (as referred to as “next year” in the 2023 Policy Address), the Government will also launch a new round of the Land Grant Scheme and Start-up Loan Scheme in a bid to support self-financing post-secondary institutions in developing and enhancing their campuses.

President, Hong Kong is one of the leading cities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (“GBA”) and possesses the distinct advantage of being closely connected to the world in terms of economy, culture, education, etc. I suggest that on the basis of its proposal to build an international hub for post-secondary education, the SAR Government should seize the opportunity of the Northern Metropolis development to take forward integrated campus planning and expand local universities’ intake of international students and science education personnel, with a view to furthering the collaboration with higher education institutions in GBA Mainland cities in a joint effort to push forward the national strategy of building a leading country in education.

Apart from higher education, Hong Kong’s primary and secondary education should also develop with the times by introducing diversity, along with international perspectives. In recent years, Hong Kong’s policy of attracting talents and investors to come for development has achieved considerable results, but there are also underlying causes for concern. Quite a few professionals and investors find it not easy to enrol their young children in preferred schools under the current school system. Under the established school places allocation mechanism, it is often difficult to secure a place in top-ranking government, aided and private schools in the mainstream school system, whereas international schools mainly provide education under the British or IB (International Baccalaureate) school system, failing to meet the demand for school places under American and other school systems.

I suggest that the Government should re-examine the configuration of primary and secondary education and proactively promote the development of diversified and internationalized schools, taking into account various aspects such as education, talent, investment and development, so as to tie in with the internationalized development of higher education and build Hong Kong into a comprehensive and full-fledged international education hub.

With these remarks, President, I support Mr TANG Fei’s original motion and the several other Members’ amendments.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I remind Members that according to the time limit for motion debates set out in the House Rules, this debate will end at 5:39 pm today at the latest. I will call upon the mover of the motion to speak on the amendments

at about 5:13 pm, and then the remaining proceedings of the motion debate will be dealt with.

Ir Gary ZHANG, please speak.

IR GARY ZHANG (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. I also thank Mr TANG Fei for proposing the motion and the other Members for proposing their amendments.

Hong Kong's higher education has always been our pride. According to the latest QS rankings for 2024, five universities in Hong Kong continue to sit firmly among the world's top 100 and Asia's top 30. Our strength in education primarily stems from our highly internationalized environment. As China's gateway to the world defined by a blend of Chinese and Western elements, biliteracy and trilingualism, as well as mature multicultural adaptability, Hong Kong is able to maintain close and barrier-free connection with the global academic community while preserving rich Chinese cultural characteristics, thus providing favourable conditions for attracting global talent. Therefore, it is also our mission to further develop Hong Kong into an international education hub and thereby enable the SAR's and even the whole country's education to be more influential and have a greater say in the world.

Meanwhile, we also need to recognize the existence of unignorable differences in education system and culture between Hong Kong and the Mainland. These differences are rooted in history, social systems, and different considerations regarding academic freedom and institutional autonomy between the two places, but it is precisely these differences that constitute an important factor for many students outside Hong Kong in choosing their study-abroad destination. Therefore, to build a nationwide education brand capitalizing on Hong Kong's strength in education, we should not simply replicate and promote the notion of "Study in China" in Hong Kong, but rather adopt the Hong Kong model to expand and broaden the brand connotation of "Study in China".

One of the key points to note is that, as far as higher education is concerned, Hong Kong regards academic freedom and institutional autonomy as a cornerstone of university governance and has always been very flexible in terms of academic freedom and freedom of expression. This is not only a strength in Hong Kong's higher education, but also an important attractive factor for international scholars,

students and talents from various backgrounds. Academic freedom and institutional autonomy not only form the core values of Hong Kong's higher education, but are also closely linked to the very social values that champion space for free speech and expression, so they must be safeguarded in our future development if we wish to properly establish Hong Kong's education brand. Looking around the world today, there are actually many lessons to be learned. For example, the United States, which is most traditionally perceived as a powerhouse of education, today also leaves political interference in academics unchecked, resulting in disruption to the ecology of universities due to ideological disputes and successive forced resignations of presidents of prestigious universities, such as Harvard and Pennsylvania, or obviously unfair treatment of scholars and students from Asia, especially those with Chinese backgrounds, in their campus settings. These consequences have an impact on not just the educational reputation of individual institutions, but also the worldwide confidence in a country or region. Therefore, in the case of Hong Kong, we should also pay special attention to these problems, or even stay alert to them.

In addition, the number of non-local students is one of the criteria for assessing the degree of internationalization. Although there are numerous non-local students in Hong Kong, we are still relatively reliant on the Mainland as the main source of students. That is why, in the past, some members of the community have criticized Hong Kong's education as being actually just "Mainlandized" rather than "internationalized". Although biased in some aspects, this viewpoint is not entirely without revelations. To establish Hong Kong as a genuine international education hub, we need to further strengthen our international academic exchanges while maintaining close connection with the Mainland, enabling Hong Kong to serve as not only China's gateway but also a metropolis of the world.

President, I so submit.

MR ROBERT LEE (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. I speak in support of the motion moved by Mr TANG Fei and the amendments proposed by the other five Members.

I share the vision of building Hong Kong into an international hub for post-secondary education while promoting the brand of "Study in China", as mentioned in the motion. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF),

in terms of purchasing power parity (PPP)-adjusted Gross Domestic Product (“GDP”), China had already surpassed the United States (“US”) early in 2016, and even outpaced the US by 20% in 2023. Given China’s growing influence in various domains such as economics, technology, culture, education, national defence and diplomacy, we should let students and parents from around the globe experience the achievements and scale of China’s development, with a view to attracting them to learn and study in China.

The SAR Government should seize every opportunity to attract more students from the Belt and Road (“B&R”) countries. First, as a melting pot of East and West cultures, Hong Kong is in an advantageous position for facilitating foreign students’ understanding of Chinese and international cultures. Second, China’s state-owned enterprises and central enterprises have invested heavily in the development of B&R countries, offering a large number of new jobs in those countries. If students from such countries choose to study in China, we believe that this will be conducive to promoting good relationships between China and the B&R countries, whether they choose to work in China or return to their home countries upon graduation.

Despite the numerous education policies proposed in the Policy Address to attract more students from outside Hong Kong, such as increasing the non-local student quota of publicly-funded post-secondary institutions, increasing the quota of the B&R Scholarship, and increasing the number of hostel places, the current ratio of Hong Kong’s education services in GDP is still lower than that of some major exporters of education services like the US, the United Kingdom, and Australia. Therefore, there is still much room for development in that the Government may work towards attracting students from outside Hong Kong, particularly those from the B&R countries.

First, one of the purposes of those B&R students coming to study in Hong Kong is to learn about China through Hong Kong. To this end, it is a must for them to get familiar with the use of Chinese. As Chinese language education in Hong Kong is currently targeted at students whose mother tongue is Chinese, the Government should thus require post-secondary institutions to set up language centres for developing curricula, teaching materials, and related assessment tools customized for such students learning Chinese as a second language in order to help them integrate into Hong Kong while providing them with a solid foundation for their future development in the Mainland.

Second, collaboration between Hong Kong's tertiary institutions and their branches in the Greater Bay Area ("GBA") should be deepened. While several Hong Kong universities have set up branches in GBA, the tertiary institutions here in Hong Kong may also design study programmes for foreign students. For example, foreign students of four-year bachelor's degree programmes are to spend three years studying in Hong Kong and one year on the branch campuses in GBA. This is meant to provide foreign students with more opportunities to learn about China's development and enhance the attractiveness of the programmes to them.

Third, a closer tie between universities and society should be fostered. Acknowledging the influence of universities on the community's living environment and working closely with local industries, the Government should capitalize on the development of the "eight centres", GBA, the Northern Metropolis, etc., to provide more employment and internship opportunities, so as to attract and retain talents through the development of universities of applied sciences and technology. In addition, the Government may also ameliorate overseas student visas as an incentive that allows foreign students greater flexibility in seeking part-time jobs in Hong Kong. That helps subsidize payments of their tuition fees on the one hand and provides them with more opportunities to integrate into our society on the other.

Last but not least, the Government should proactively coordinate local tertiary institutions to organize education exhibitions, forums and conferences in member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations ("ASEAN") and the B&R countries to promote Hong Kong's ascendancy of international education. This should include enhancing the functions of the Hong Kong Trade Development Council as well as those of the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Offices in ASEAN countries, so that they can take the lead in working closely with local tertiary institutions to take forward promotional work overseas.

In conclusion, now is an opportune time for Hong Kong to develop into an international education hub. We should proactively seek an understanding of the needs of students coming from the B&R countries to study in Hong Kong, give full play to Hong Kong's advantages as a cultural melting pot of East and West, and attract them to study in Hong Kong and gain an understanding of China's economic, cultural and political development, thereby telling the stories of China and Hong Kong well.

With these remarks, President, I support the motion.

MR YIU PAK-LEUNG (in Cantonese): President, Mr TANG Fei’s original motion mentions optimizing the use of Hong Kong’s quality education services in building Hong Kong into an international education hub and creating the brand of “Study in China”, which I very much agree with. By doing so, not only will Hong Kong reap economic benefits, but it will also contribute to the development of soft power for both our country and Hong Kong. In addition, this will help attract talents from across the globe to Hong Kong, further establishing Hong Kong as a pivotal hub for training and amassing talents.

Actually, the development of local study tours has an active role to play in building Hong Kong into an international education hub. Precedents in the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States serve to prove that study tours as a soft approach can help enhance primary and secondary students’ understanding of the education of the places they have visited, thereby sowing the seeds of attracting them to pursue further studies at senior secondary and university levels in those places. This approach has proved fruitful. Hong Kong has an abundance of educational resources with diversified types of schools. Besides, its higher education and scientific research standards do give Hong Kong an edge over other places in the international arena. Hence, while the promotion of study tours helps build Hong Kong into an international education hub, study tours themselves can be made the signature products of our characteristic local tourism.

At present, there are quite a lot of local travel agencies specializing in business related to study tours, meaning that Hong Kong is well-equipped to develop two-way study tours. By “two-way”, it means that in addition to leading our teenage students out of Hong Kong to broaden their horizons through exchange and study tours in the Mainland or overseas countries, we also bring in young people both from home and abroad to gain a deeper understanding of Hong Kong.

Our neighbour, the Macao SAR, has already been conducting similar work, and a study programme named “City of Education and Study Tour” was launched by its government in collaboration with the tourism industry, the Education and Youth Development Bureau, the Cultural Affairs Bureau, the Sports Bureau and education institutes in July last year, offering approximately 7 000 places for participation. Conversely, Hong Kong is indeed more well-positioned to implement similar initiatives. Some members of the sector specializing in organizing study tours relayed to me that study tours to Hong Kong are very popular among the Mainland people, which means a big market for Hong Kong because parents, schools, and students in the Mainland are more than willing to

take part in Hong Kong's educational exchanges. Despite the presence of potential clients, it is still difficult for the sector in securing partnerships with local universities, secondary and primary schools or post-secondary institutions in organizing such tours. In my opinion, better efforts should be made to promote the mode of learning through study tours in Hong Kong, so as to enable students to engage in experiential learning while travelling. Drawing reference from Macao's approach in handling study tours and learning activities, the Education Bureau may establish a regular cooperation and communication mechanism with the tourism industry, creating a matching platform to facilitate the collaboration between interested education institutes and professional travel agencies, with a view to promoting the development of quality study tours in Hong Kong.

President, the key objective of establishing an international education hub is to attract talents to Hong Kong. Given the severe manpower shortage in Hong Kong, the tourism sector has to bear the brunt. Even though certain barriers to labour importation have been removed, the problem of manpower shortage at the front line remains challenging. Thus, it is incumbent upon the Government to adopt a multi-pronged approach to nurture, retain, and even "snatch" talents.

I noticed that Mr Stanley NG, Ms Lillian KWOK and Mr Frankie YICK have made mention of vocational and professional education and training ("VPET") in their amendments, with a shared focus on strengthening the development of local VPET and enhancing its recognition. I definitely concur with them on all such arguments. Last Friday, I attended the founding ceremony of The Chinese Occupational Education Association of Hong Kong in my capacity as one of its council members, and the President was also present. This organization has the vision of promoting the development of local VPET and serving as a communication link between the Mainland and Hong Kong. This marks a key milestone in the future development of Hong Kong's VPET.

(THE PRESIDENT'S DEPUTY, MS STARRY LEE, took the Chair)

According to the report by the Research Office of the Legislative Council Secretariat last year, the number of non-local students of University Grants Committee-funded programmes applying to stay in/return to Hong Kong for employment accounted for 50% to 60% of the total number of students enrolled in general, excluding the brief setbacks in 2021 and 2022. This reflects the fact that

staying in Hong Kong for employment does sound attractive to non-local students. Hong Kong's VPET involves the Education Bureau, the Labour and Welfare Bureau ("LWB") as well as various education institutes and tertiary institutions. I hope that LWB, in addition to expeditiously conducting a review on the Vocational Professionals Admission Scheme to include programmes on hotel and tourism management, will extend the time limit of the scheme while maintaining close liaison with relevant sectors and expanding the coverage of the scheme in accordance with the actual needs of the sectors concerned. To give full play to Hong Kong's important role as an international education hub, the Government should strive for international recognition of local VPET. Besides, VPET should be utilized as a pathway to nurture students into competent individuals with professional skills, enabling them to enter the local workforce and take up jobs at the junior or middle level.

With these remarks, Deputy President, I support the motion and the amendments.

MR TOMMY CHEUNG (in Cantonese): Deputy President, today's motion for debate is about urging the SAR Government to adopt more proactive measures to formulate a comprehensive strategic development blueprint for Hong Kong's education and provide more diversified education services and support measures, thereby playing the role of leveraging the SAR's advantages for meeting the country's needs in the field of education, maintaining and strengthening Hong Kong's edge as an international city, and enabling the country's and the SAR's education to be more influential and have a greater say in the world.

The Chief Executive advocated in last year's Policy Address the building of an international hub for post-secondary education and the promotion of diversified youth development, mentioning eight proposed initiatives under this section. The first three of which are the most crucial and closely connected with one other. Here are the key points: first, doubling the admission quota of non-local students by government-funded post-secondary institutions to 40%, and strengthening scholarship and related support to attract more overseas and Mainland students to further studies in Hong Kong; second, developing the Northern Metropolis University Town; and third, facilitating establishment of universities of applied sciences to upgrade vocational and professional education and training to university level.

In my opinion, we will be on the road to success in building an international hub for post-secondary education should the aforesaid three initiatives be effectively implemented in an expeditious manner. Here, I would suggest that the Government should take a more aggressive approach in attracting students both from abroad and the Mainland to pursue post-secondary education in Hong Kong, with a further move of offering subsidies to attract more Mainland students to study in Hong Kong's secondary schools. I think this approach has three advantages: first, this will allow such Mainland students to adapt to Hong Kong's academic structure at an earlier stage, which will be of great help to them in securing a path for further studies in the future; second, this serves as the basis for further development of Hong Kong's education services; and third, this helps Hong Kong build up its talent pool.

I think Hong Kong is now in a position to embark on this proposal of mine. According to the Education Bureau's latest Report on Student Enrolment Statistics, the total number of students who dropped out from primary and secondary schools exceeded 27 000 in the current academic year, representing an overall wastage rate of about 4% (with 4.56% in secondary schools and 3.43% in primary schools). While society at large is worrying about whether the student wastage rate will remain high or is on the rise, I consider this an opportunity to expand the scope of government subsidy for Mainland students to include those pursuing studies in Hong Kong's secondary schools with boarding placement.

Regrettably, the student wastage in Hong Kong has forced the closure of a number of local primary and secondary schools and even kindergartens one after another, among which are long-established schools known for their excellence in education. These high-quality schools can, nevertheless, carry on educating and nurturing elites if more Mainland students further their studies in Hong Kong. The Liberal Party has been proposing over the years the adding of a brand new "education voucher scheme" for permanent residents of Hong Kong under the existing 15-year free education system. Such a proposed scheme may help encourage childbearing among middle-class families, and we hope its scope of application will include all those private independent nurseries and kindergartens currently not receiving government subsidies (excluding subsidized or DSS (Direct Subsidy Scheme) primary schools and secondary schools as they are all receiving government subsidies), covering international schools and private primary and secondary schools as well. In this case, the parents can have genuine freedom of choice in making decisions on resource allocation, thereby enhancing the incentive for middle-class families to give birth. Under the proposed education voucher

scheme, subsidies equivalent to the current average amount of per student funding will be offered in the form of education vouchers instead of additional subsidies to middle-class families. In my opinion, the Government may explore the possibility of expanding the target beneficiaries of the proposed scheme to those Mainland students choosing to further their studies in Hong Kong, so that we should be able to, at least in the initial stage, attract Mainland students to come to Hong Kong for furthering their studies in secondary schools. Schools with boarding placement should be selected for the scheme to save students from cross-boundary commuting in the future.

Lastly, as mentioned in the first paragraph of the motion for today's debate, President XI Jinping stated in May 2023 "the need to improve the strategy of educational opening up, put equal emphasis on introducing overseas educational resources and going global, and put to good use world-class educational resources and innovative factors, so as to make China an influential and important education hub in the world. It is important to participate in global education governance and vigorously promote the brand of 'Study in China'".

With these remarks, Deputy President, I support the motion.

MR MARTIN LIAO (in Cantonese): Deputy President, the building of an international education hub has something to do with the soft power and international competitiveness of a country or place. While the report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China has emphasized speeding up work to build a leading country with a strong education system and put forward the objective of becoming a leading country in education by 2035, President XI Jinping further stated the need to participate in global education governance and vigorously promote the brand of "Study in China".

Education in Hong Kong is an integral part of the national education system. With five universities in the world's top 100, Hong Kong is among those cities having the highest density of top-ranked universities in the world and, coupled with a secondary school system aligned with international standards, it has the ability and potential to build itself into an international education hub by giving full play to its strengths. In the meantime, enabling Hong Kong's and our country's higher education to go global and introducing overseas educational resources will allow us to exert greater influence internationally.

Having accepted the G19 Members' proposal, Deputy President, the 2023 Policy Address puts forth the initiative of doubling the admission quota for non-local students to government-funded post-secondary institutions to 40% starting from the 2024-2025 academic year. On the basis of the current 15 000 subsidized places for undergraduates in Hong Kong, the ceiling for annual intake of non-local undergraduates will be raised from 3 000 to 6 000. I opine that in building Hong Kong into an international education hub, it is necessary to focus not only on quantity but also on quality, in order to truly achieve expanded capacity and enhanced standard.

Early in 2009, the Government had actually put forward the proposal of developing education services as an industry, but it turned out to be a castle in the air when it was called off in 2013 due to the shortage of land, insufficient supporting resources, and the lack of consideration for a rational balance between localized and internationalized education. As far as building an international education hub is concerned, it is imperative to restore the very essence of education, that is, to impart knowledge and cultivate personality, instead of turning education into a business without regard to the quality of education.

Deputy President, Hong Kong should make efforts in the direction of becoming a talent base in the future, ensuring that the academic qualifications of those who study in Hong Kong are recognized, no matter if they stay behind to take up employment here or return to their home countries. Upon completion of their studies, these students are expected to have acquired the necessary survival skills and become an asset to society and make contributions to the trades/industries which they engage in. Only with ongoing efforts in gate-keeping and improving tertiary institutions (including self-financed tertiary institutions) in terms of both quality and quantity of operation will the brands of "Study in Hong Kong" and "Study in China" be well established and of good standing, thus fostering a virtuous circle in which talents and schools complement each other to forge ahead together, further enhancing the competitiveness of Hong Kong and the soft power of our country, and telling the stories of Hong Kong and China well. It would be rather irresponsible to blindly build more local universities, increase the number of places in local schools, or attract overseas education institutions to set up branch campuses here and organize joint programmes without considering the standards of the education institutions and the programmes offered, as this will lead to academic inflation and the risk of turning those education institutions into "diploma mills" in Hong Kong. In case the brand of "Study in Hong Kong" falters, it will be rather

difficult for society and enterprises to rebuild confidence in the academic qualifications conferred locally.

On the other hand, in building Hong Kong into an international education hub, considerable weight should also be given to the aspects of living and learning experiences, which entails not only the construction of more hardware facilities (such as student hostels) but also the creation of a more inclusive social environment. All the more so when the authorities plan to enrich the composition of international students in the future, particularly by attracting students from the Belt and Road countries to study in Hong Kong. Recognizing the different cultures and customs of students from these countries, Hong Kong should have respect for them.

With these remarks, Deputy President, I support Mr TANG Fei's original motion and the amendments proposed by the other five Members.

DEPUTY PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr TANG Fei, you may now speak on the amendments.

MR TANG FEI (in Cantonese): Deputy President, first of all, I must thank Prof William WONG, Mr Stanley NG, Ms Lillian KWOK, Mr Frankie YICK and Prof Priscilla LEUNG for enriching the details of the original motion with their amendments, and also the several dozens of Members who have spoken on the motion, tendering their advice from different perspectives on how to take forward the internationalization of Hong Kong's education and realize our status as a post-secondary education hub.

I notice that a number of Members have talked about how China's soft power serves its function in developing education and they have also mentioned vocational and professional education and training ("VPET"), crafts education, etc. Mr Stanley NG has mentioned in his amendment speech that in the process of furthering the internationalization of education, we should promote our excellent traditional Chinese culture to overseas countries. Prof Priscilla LEUNG has highlighted in her amendment speech the need for Hong Kong to promote legal education, and also the International Organization for Mediation as well as the Hong Kong International Academy Against Corruption mentioned by the Chief Executive in the Policy Address, both of which fall under VPET in a broader sense.

Mr Stanley NG's and Prof Priscilla LEUNG's amendments precisely reflect tradition and modernity. The former talks about the tradition of China, and the latter the characteristics of Hong Kong, but by way of internationalization of education, they can promote to the outside world the brand of China having excellent traditional culture and the brand of Hong Kong SAR excelling in the rule of law. This is a very impressive argument. Moreover, other Members also mentioned VPET and crafts education, and these are very important. When it comes to the internationalization of education, most commentators focus on higher education first, followed by basic education in primary and secondary schools, with little mention of VPET.

In fact, by allowing our VPET to go global and attracting more non-local students to come here to study vocational courses, we can export the vocational standards in Hong Kong, China at a much faster pace, thereby truly and more quickly achieving the exportation of our soft power. Training non-local students with Hong Kong's vocational standards can make up for the talent shortage in Hong Kong; and influencing neighbouring countries and regions with Hong Kong's vocational standards is tantamount to using Hong Kong's vocational standards, or professional standards, to shape the economic patterns and concepts of talents in other countries and regions. As mentioned by a number of Members in their amendments, the key to promoting the internationalization of vocational education lies in the mutual recognition of our vocational qualifications framework and its interface with those of other countries and regions, and this is probably more complicated than the mutual recognition of and interface between university and primary and secondary school qualifications. As the saying goes, "mutual recognition is essential for all trades and professions". The SAR Government needs to take a more proactive role in negotiating with the vocational education departments and institutions in member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations ("ASEAN") and countries along the Belt and Road.

We can learn from the more successful experience of the Mainland. The Ministry of Education has signed an action plan with the ASEAN countries titled the Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN-China Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity, which focuses on exploring vocational education. Our country has initiated at least 70 joint student training programmes with ASEAN vocational colleges and universities, and established platforms for international cooperation in vocational education according to different professional categories, with a view to constructing a more standardized evaluation system of quality indicators for vocational education and establishing a framework of mutual trust and mutual

recognition of vocational education interface and standards between China and ASEAN, thereby ensuring long-term and stable cooperation in vocational education. It is worthwhile for the SAR Government to learn from these successful experiences.

Deputy President, I hope that today's motion can urge the SAR Government to expedite and strengthen the development of higher education, basic education and vocational education in Hong Kong, so that we can truly go global and work together to build the brand of "Study in Hong Kong, China".

Thank you, Deputy President.

SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION (in Cantonese): Deputy President, here, I would like to thank Mr TANG Fei once again for his motion and the several Members for their amendments. I would also like to thank the Members who have shared their valuable views on how to formulate a comprehensive strategic development blueprint for Hong Kong's education in relation to the objective of building Hong Kong into an international education hub as set out in the Chief Executive's 2023 Policy Address. We will study and consider Members' suggestions in detail with a view to enriching the design of the Hong Kong education blueprint. As for the views on the development of talents in other policy areas, we will convey them to the relevant bureaux for consideration.

Being an international metropolis where Chinese and Western cultures converge, Hong Kong has its unique advantages. At the same time, however, we are faced with the constraints of a rapidly developing society with limited natural resources. We urgently need to strengthen the manpower reserve for Hong Kong. To this end, Hong Kong's higher education should capitalize on our advantages of being diversified and highly internationalized, and strive to nurture a new generation of young people with affection for the country and Hong Kong and an international perspective. Our higher education must master high-end technology as well as biliteracy and trilingualism for the conduct of world-class research, so as to provide quality manpower training and solid academic foundation research for the country's rapid development. Through expanding the capacity and improving the quality, strengthening publicity, exchange and cooperation, as well as synergistic development, we can further develop Hong Kong's positioning and role of leveraging our advantages to meet the country's needs.

To tie in with the objective of building a leading country in education, the Education Bureau supports Hong Kong's higher education institutions to give full play to their overall strengths to break through limitations, and work together to promote innovation and drive the development momentum of Hong Kong, so as to contribute to the strategy of invigorating our country through science and education as well as modernization.

On the front of promoting the synergistic development of higher education in the Mainland and Hong Kong, the Government has made tremendous efforts to promote, facilitate and encourage cooperation in higher education between Hong Kong and the Mainland, so as to support the complementarity of the institutions in the two places, especially on maintaining close liaison in the areas of scientific research and development ("R&D"), student exchanges, manpower nurturing and cooperative education. As of November 2022, 2 320 ongoing academic research collaboration projects were being conducted between higher education institutions in Hong Kong and the Mainland. So far, six higher education institutions in Hong Kong have set up industry-academia-research bases or research institutes in Shenzhen, which have further strengthened our R&D collaboration with the Mainland institutions. Excellent R&D talents are an important force to support Hong Kong's function as an international innovation and technology centre.

In addition, the Education Bureau has separately signed education cooperation agreements with a number of provinces and municipalities in the Mainland, which has provided a cooperation framework for education exchanges between the two places and encouraged higher education institutions in the two places to strengthen cooperation in areas such as nurturing of talents, exchanges of teachers and academic research, and to support these institutions in exploring cooperative education in the light of their respective strengths and specialities, thereby promoting the synergistic development of the higher education institutions in the two places.

At present, in addition to several higher education institutions that have already settled in the Greater Bay Area ("GBA"), the City University of Hong Kong ("CityU") is also pressing ahead with preparation of its campus to be opened in Dongguan. We believe that after the commissioning of the City University of Hong Kong (Dongguan), CityU will capitalize on its first-class education resources and strengths in various disciplines to nurture top innovative talents with a global perspective for the country and contribute to its objective of becoming a leading country in education.

In addition, under the policy direction of developing GBA, we support Hong Kong's institutions to establish multilateral and cross-disciplinary collaborations in the Mainland cities of GBA, so as to give full play to the characteristics and strengths of Hong Kong's higher education, and at the same time create favourable conditions for R&D, knowledge transfer and industrialization, so as to facilitate the conduct of high quality researches in GBA, which will become the key impetus for Hong Kong to develop the "eight centres".

The Government will continue to actively participate in and promote cooperation in higher education in GBA, and assist Hong Kong's higher education institutions in exploring the adoption of more flexible and innovative modes of operation to promote closer cooperation between institutions in the two places and facilitate exchanges of their teaching staff and students. The complementary academic frameworks and facilities of these institutions will help nurture quality talents essential for the country's development while expanding the room for Hong Kong to develop its higher education and make an impact.

We support the establishment of alliances between higher education institutions of Hong Kong and the Mainland. Hong Kong's higher education institutions have established five alliances with those in the Mainland and Macao, namely the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao University Alliance, the Beijing-Hong Kong University Alliance, the Shanghai-Hong Kong University Alliance, the Jiangsu-Hong Kong-Macao University Alliance and an alliance of institutions in Shandong, Hong Kong and Macao to collaborate in higher education and research development. These alliances bring together over 80 elite institutions. Through a comprehensive cooperation mechanism, the alliances gather high-quality teaching and research resources and deepen the mutual benefits of member institutions in areas such as scientific innovation and talent exchange, thereby raising the level and standard of regional cooperation and promoting different development in GBA.

Separately, the University Grants Committee ("UGC") has been encouraging local universities to make active use of the cooperation platform of university alliances, so as to provide more opportunities for Hong Kong teachers and students to exchange experiences with their Mainland partners. To this end, UGC has provided a total funding of about \$10 million in the 2022-2025 triennium to support universities to coordinate and organize various academic and exchange activities through the university alliances between the Mainland and Hong Kong.

Regarding the joint offer of more double degree programmes by higher education institutions in Hong Kong and the Mainland, apart from the fact that the universities have been successfully co-organizing a number of programmes in different modes, according to the relevant UGC guidelines, UGC encourages the universities to provide more opportunities for non-local learning experiences to their students. On the premise that no less than 50% of the teaching time of a programme is spent in Hong Kong, the universities may make use of the block grants to cater for the needs of the programme, including learning experiences outside Hong Kong, so as to enable local students to further benefit from activities for non-local learning experiences. For non-local students, the universities will admit them on an over-enrolment basis in accordance with their existing policies and arrangements, and charge them tuition fees at least sufficient to recover all additional direct costs. Although joint programmes are arranged by the institutions on their own, they still require the Government to provide relevant complementary policies to render more flexibility for them to offer different quality programmes.

At present, Hong Kong has entered the stage of advancing from stability to prosperity. To cope with the opportunities brought about by the latest development of our country, the Government will develop education in the light of the overall situation and long-term needs, and give full play to Hong Kong's unique position and advantages under "one country, two systems", so as to cultivate and attract outstanding talents, enhance Hong Kong's development momentum and integrate into our country's development. Building an international education hub is to give full play to Hong Kong's education as an important part of the national education system. To this end, we must not only synergistically develop with higher education institutions in the Mainland, but also expand the capacity and enhance the quality of our higher education institutions.

(THE PRESIDENT resumed the Chair)

Starting from the 2024-2025 academic year, we will expand the non-local student quota for publicly-funded post-secondary institutions, which will be doubled from 20% to 40%. Post-secondary institutions can take into account their own conditions and progress in a gradual manner to guarantee their quality of education and at the same time ensure a good learning experience for their students, so as to attract more non-local students, especially those from the Belt and Road

(“B&R”) countries and the Mainland, to come to Hong Kong for further studies; and to expand the capacity and enhance the quality of our post-secondary institutions through high-quality teaching and support programmes, so as to develop the post-secondary education in Hong Kong. On ancillary facilities, the UGC-funded universities will continue to implement a number of hostel projects, with the target of providing a total of about 13 500 additional hostel places by 2027 to cater for the needs of students, including those of the additional students.

Regarding scholarship schemes, in the last academic year, some 2 500 students were the recipients of the B&R Scholarship and various university scholarship schemes. In the 2023 Policy Address, the Government has announced that an additional \$1 billion will be injected into the Government Scholarship Fund to increase quota of the B&R Scholarship to 150, which will fully subsidize students from the B&R regions to come to Hong Kong to study undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. In the future, UGC will also lead tertiary institutions to organize overseas promotion activities to attract more students from abroad to further studies in Hong Kong. At the same time, the SAR Government will gradually increase the quota of the Hong Kong PhD Fellowship Scheme to 400 to attract more outstanding talents to study and conduct research in Hong Kong.

On strengthening international exchanges and cooperation, the SAR Government supports the UGC-funded universities to strengthen international exchanges and liaison, and to establish strategic partnerships with academic institutions around the world, so as to broaden the international perspectives of faculty members and students and grasp the opportunities arising from the country’s development. UGC has earmarked about \$10 million to support the Standing Committee on Internationalization of the Heads of Universities Committee (“HUCOM”) in launching a new project to promote Hong Kong’s higher education in the B&R countries, including formulating publicity and promotional strategies, and producing promotional publications and videos. The HUCOM Standing Committee on Internationalization has already started its work and commissioned a consultant to formulate a publicity and promotion strategy and conduct market research.

In addition, UGC has been supporting universities to internationalize their campuses, promote multiculturalism and provide more opportunities for local students to acquire non-local learning experience, so as to broaden their international perspectives, help them grasp the development opportunities of the country and enhance the competitiveness of graduates, and in the long run to

optimize the quality of the local population, strengthen Hong Kong's development edge, as well as to promote the Chinese culture and showcase Hong Kong's unique characteristics to the world.

Starting from the 2023-2024 academic year, UGC will inject an additional \$100 million into the Funding Scheme for Mainland and Global Engagement and Student Learning Experience to enable universities to provide more exchange and learning opportunities outside Hong Kong in the coming three academic years and to enhance cross-cultural exchanges within the campuses, so as to create a diversified and inclusive international learning environment. With the funding, universities can support local students to participate in learning experiences outside Hong Kong, such as exchange programmes, study visits, internships, field trips, service learning and international activities.

To tie in with the strategic development of our country, one of the foci of the GBA funding schemes is to use the funding on organizing activities that promote a diversified school culture and facilitate exchanges among students of different backgrounds and cultures, so that they can benefit from the internationalized learning environment and broaden their horizons. The Education Bureau also provides subsidies through the Mainland Experience Scheme for Post-secondary Students for post-secondary students to participate in short-term internships or study programmes in the Mainland, and encourage them to learn through first-hand experience the latest social, economic and cultural landscape of the country.

I would like to thank a number of Members for their views and suggestions on the development of vocational and professional education and training ("VPET") in their amendments, as well as expressing support for the Chief Executive's proposal in the 2023 Policy Address to promote the establishment of universities of applied sciences ("UASs"). At present, the Education Bureau is actively taking forward the related work and has appointed the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications ("HKCAAVQ") as a consultant to draw reference from international experience and examine the formulation of criteria for the establishment of UASs. We encourage institutions to obtain the title of university in accordance with the existing mechanism, and support self-financing post-secondary institutions with the relevant capacities and experience to make early planning for commencement of their work.

To enhance the status of VPET in society and among parents and students, the Education Bureau has set aside a start-up fund to support prospective

post-secondary institutions to form an alliance of UASs for joint promotion, including collaboration with UASs in the Mainland and overseas, initiating collaboration and research about applied education at the post-secondary level, and organizing joint promotion activities. The alliance is expected to be officially launched this year with the establishment of the first university of applied science. At present, many self-financing post-secondary institutions have expressed active support and have tied in with the Government's efforts in promoting VPET, improving the VPET progression pathways, strengthening the status of VPET at degree level, etc.

In addition, the SAR Government is actively taking forward a series of measures to improve the progression pathways of VPET and encourage students of different backgrounds to choose further studies and career pathways that suit their abilities and aspirations. Starting from the 2023-2024 academic year, we will launch the Diploma of Applied Education Programme on a regular basis to provide an alternative pathway for Secondary Six school leavers and adult learners to obtain formal qualifications for employment and further studies. We will strengthen the relevant elements to enable them to enrol in other VPET programmes and enhance their employability. In addition, the Education Bureau supports the Vocational Training Council ("VTC") in launching the Diploma of Vocational Education (Senior Secondary Curriculum) ("DVS(SSC)") Pilot Project starting from the 2023-2024 academic year. The Pilot Project incorporates vocational studies into the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education ("HKDSE") framework to enable participating senior secondary school students to simultaneously study VPET-related courses under the HKDSE framework. Upon graduation, they will obtain a DVS(SSC) qualification at Level 3 of the Qualifications Framework ("QF") awarded by VTC, alongside their HKDSE qualification, thereby widening their pathways for further studies. Since the introduction of the above measures in this academic year, the response has been very positive.

In line with the national policy of promoting the high-quality development of modernized vocational education, the SAR Government has been actively responding to and cooperating with the Mainland authorities in promoting mutual recognition of sub-degree qualifications, including Higher Diploma qualifications, and exploring the possibility of taking forward this initiative in GBA. In November 2023, the Education Bureau, together with HKCAAVQ, VTC and the Hong Kong Metropolitan University, conducted a research tour to Guangdong Province, meeting and exchanging views with the Mainland authorities and visiting the top vocational colleges in the region, so as to learn more about the specific

situation and latest development of vocational education and related qualifications in the Mainland. Moreover, under the support of the Education Bureau, HKCAAVQ has also provided a consultancy service to Guangdong Province. Leveraging its experience in the establishment of QF in Hong Kong, HKCAAVQ provided support to the development of the Guangdong Lifelong Education QF, including assisting in the setting up of a quality assurance mechanism, accreditation standards and processes, pilot accreditation activities and the formulation of guidelines for the establishment of a qualification register. We will continue the work in this regard.

The SAR Government will continue to adopt the strategy of fostering industry-institution collaboration and diversified development to further promote VPET by a multi-pronged approach at different levels, as well as supporting VPET as a parallel pathway to conventional academic education, so as to create multiple pathways for students and nurture diverse talents and professionals for society.

Regarding some Members' concern that the Government should make good use of the self-financing post-secondary sector to promote Hong Kong as an international hub for post-secondary education, the Government is in fact committed to promoting the parallel development of the publicly-funded and self-financing post-secondary sectors. Self-financing institutions play an important role in Hong Kong's post-secondary education sector. They provide diversified, flexible and quality programmes that respond quickly to the manpower needs of the developing economy. With the maturity of some self-financing institutions in recent years, these institutions have been actively stepping up their recruitment of non-local students and strengthening their international network. To provide more targeted support to the self-financing sector in performing the above roles, the Chief Executive announced in the 2023 Policy Address that a new round of the Land Grant Scheme and Start-up Loan Scheme will be launched this year through the granting of land at nominal premium and the provision of interest-free loans, so as to support self-financing post-secondary institutions in developing and enhancing their campuses for more teaching and learning activities. In addition, the Education Bureau will continue to implement a series of support measures, including the \$1.26 billion Enhancement and Start-up Grant Scheme for Self-financing Post-secondary Education, which aims to support self-financing institutions in developing post-secondary programmes that meet market needs but require high start-up costs, and to help them to more effectively develop their own strengths and areas of expertise. So far, a total of \$311 million has been allocated under the Scheme to 12 applications.

Education is an investment for the future. It is a national project to raise the level of science and technology, to nurture human resources, and to stimulate innovation and vitality. Hong Kong is a small and densely populated city lacking natural resources, and we are in dire need of talents for our future development. With our excellent education infrastructure, world-renowned universities, outstanding R&D talents and diversified and quality basic education, Hong Kong's education is recognized at the international and national levels both in terms of quality and quantity, which is precisely the key to strengthening Hong Kong's development momentum. Building on the existing strengths, Hong Kong should take proactive actions not only to create strong impetus for growth, but also to better integrate into the country's overall development and contribute to its needs. In the future, we will continue to maintain close communication with different stakeholders, listen to their views and gather their strengths, so as to give full play to our unique advantages under "one country, two systems" and nurture outstanding talents.

Finally, I would like to thank Members once again for their valuable views, which have greatly enhanced the Government's understanding of the multifaceted needs and aspirations of the community in nurturing talents from various perspectives. This will enable us to formulate more tailored blueprints and strategies for the development of education in Hong Kong, and to proactively build Hong Kong into an international education hub.

With this remark, President, I so submit. Thank you.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now call upon Prof William WONG to move an amendment.

PROF WILLIAM WONG (in Cantonese): President, I move my amendment.

The amendment moved by Prof William WONG (See the marked-up version at Appendix 4)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the amendment moved by Prof William WONG be passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you as stated. Will those in favour please raise their hands?

(Members raised their hands)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Those against please raise their hands.

(No hands raised)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I think the question is agreed by a majority of each of the two groups of Members present, that is, those returned by the Election Committee and those returned by functional constituencies and geographical constituencies.

I declare the amendment passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr Stanley NG, as the preceding amendment has been passed, you may move your further amendment.

MR STANLEY NG (in Cantonese): President, I move my further amendment.

The further amendment moved by Mr Stanley NG (See the marked-up version at Appendix 5)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the further amendment moved by Mr Stanley NG be passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you as stated. Will those in favour please raise their hands?

(Members raised their hands)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Those against please raise their hands.

(No hands raised)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I think the question is agreed by a majority of each of the two groups of Members present, that is, those returned by the Election Committee and those returned by functional constituencies and geographical constituencies.

I declare the amendment passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Ms Lillian KWOK, as the amendments have been passed, you may move your further amendment.

MS LILLIAN KWOK (in Cantonese): President, I move my further amendment.

The further amendment moved by Ms Lillian KWOK (See the marked-up version at Appendix 6)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the further amendment moved by Ms Lillian KWOK be passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you as stated. Will those in favour please raise their hands?

(Members raised their hands)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Those against please raise their hands.

(No hands raised)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I think the question is agreed by a majority of each of the two groups of Members present, that is, those returned by the Election

Committee and those returned by functional constituencies and geographical constituencies.

I declare the amendment passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr Frankie YICK, as the amendments have been passed, you may move your further amendment.

MR FRANKIE YICK (in Cantonese): President, I move my further amendment.

The further amendment moved by Mr Frankie YICK (See the marked-up version at Appendix 7)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the further amendment moved by Mr Frankie YICK be passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you as stated. Will those in favour please raise their hands?

(Members raised their hands)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Those against please raise their hands.

(No hands raised)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I think the question is agreed by a majority of each of the two groups of Members present, that is, those returned by the Election Committee and those returned by functional constituencies and geographical constituencies.

I declare the amendment passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Prof Priscilla LEUNG, as the amendments have been passed, you may move your further amendment.

PROF PRISCILLA LEUNG (in Cantonese): President, I move my further amendment.

The further amendment moved by Prof Priscilla LEUNG (See the marked-up version at Appendix 8)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the further amendment moved by Prof Priscilla LEUNG be passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you as stated. Will those in favour please raise their hands?

(Members raised their hands)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Those against please raise their hands.

(No hands raised)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I think the question is agreed by a majority of each of the two groups of Members present, that is, those returned by the Election Committee and those returned by functional constituencies and geographical constituencies.

I declare the amendment passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr TANG Fei, you still have 6 seconds to reply. Then, the debate will come to a close.

MR TANG FEI (in Cantonese): I thank the Bureau for its active response and I urge Members to support my motion.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you and that is: That the motion moved by Mr TANG Fei, as amended by Prof William WONG, Mr Stanley NG, Ms Lillian KWOK, Mr Frankie YICK and Prof Priscilla LEUNG, be passed. Will those in favour please raise their hands?

(Members raised their hands)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Those against please raise their hands.

(No hands raised)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I think the question is agreed by a majority of each of the two groups of Members present, that is, those returned by the Election Committee and those returned by functional constituencies and geographical constituencies.

I declare the motion as amended passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Members' motion with no legislative effect.

Ms YUNG Hoi-yan will move a motion on “Strengthening the joint development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area”.

Four Members will move amendments to the motion.

This Council will proceed to a joint debate on the motion and the amendments.

Later, I will first call upon Ms YUNG Hoi-yan to speak and move the motion. Then I will call upon Mr Kenneth LEUNG, Mr Duncan CHIU, Ms Carmen KAN and Mr CHAN Yung to speak in sequence, but they may not move the amendments at this stage.

The joint debate now begins. Members who wish to speak please press the “Request to speak” button.

I now call upon Ms YUNG Hoi-yan to speak and move the motion.

MOTION ON “STRENGTHENING THE JOINT DEVELOPMENT OF THE GUANGDONG-HONG KONG-MACAO GREATER BAY AREA”

MS YUNG HOI-YAN (in Cantonese): President, I move that the motion, as printed on the Agenda, be passed.

President, since the promulgation of the Outline Development Plan for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (“the Outline Development Plan”) by the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council in 2019, the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (“GBA”) has all along been one of the most open and economically vibrant regions in the country, and plays a significant strategic role in the overall development of the country. I have proposed this motion because I believe the SAR Government is duty-bound to strengthen Hong Kong’s integration into the development of GBA. I urge the Government to dovetail with the various policies introduced by the country for GBA, so as to further enhance the cooperation between Hong Kong and other cities in GBA, strive to achieve integrated development and create a quality business environment.

The Central Government has been introducing new policies for GBA from time to time. For example, last month (i.e. in December 2023), it promulgated the Three-year Action Plan for the Development of International First-class Business Environment in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (“the Three-year Plan”), the Overall Development Plan on Hong Kong/Shenzhen Co-operation on Modern Service Industries in Qianhai Area (“the Qianhai Plan”), the Overall Development Plan for the Guangdong-Macao Zone in Hengqin (“the Hengqin Plan”) and other policies. Among these policies, the objective of the Three-year Plan is to optimize the business environment continuously. Given the differences in social systems, legal systems, taxation systems, etc. of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao, there is a need to enhance the interconnectivity among them, so as to promote the synergy and inclusiveness of the development, achieve market integration in GBA, fully align with advanced international market regulatory regimes and standards, and jointly develop new edges in economic and trade cooperation.

This year marks the fifth anniversary of the promulgation of the Outline Development Plan. Over the past five years, GBA’s achievements can be said to be very fruitful, with various industries expanding continuously, some enterprises

being able to leverage data sharing within the region to promote their business development, and entrepreneurial opportunities continuing to increase. For example, it was proposed in the 2023 Policy Address to promote the extension of the application of “allowing Hong Kong-invested enterprises to adopt Hong Kong law” and “allowing Hong Kong-invested enterprises to choose for arbitration to be seated in Hong Kong” to the whole GBA. At the same time, with the continuous policy innovations in GBA, such as promoting mutual recognition of more professional qualifications and implementing policies for the open recruitment of Hong Kong and Macao residents by public institutions, the employment opportunities for Hong Kong people in Guangdong continue to expand. Coupled with the commissioning of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link and the implementation of measures such as the “Northbound Travel for Hong Kong Vehicles”, the travel time between Hong Kong and other cities has effectively been reduced, indicating that the integration between the two places is continuously deepening.

The Hong Kong Guangdong Youth Association conducted a questionnaire survey entitled “Hong Kong Youth Greater Bay Area Development Index 2023 Academic Chapter” from September to October last year, the results of which were announced yesterday. A total of 1 000 young people aged 15 to 39 were interviewed. Among the respondents, over 70% of them expressed interest in studying or furthering their education in the Mainland, and 66% of them indicated their willingness to pursue development in the Mainland cities of GBA, representing a significant increase compared to 41% in 2021. Additionally, 42% of the Hong Kong young people who have already studied in Guangdong expressed their intention to return to Hong Kong for development within the next five years. From this, it can be seen the potential for Hong Kong people to move between the two places is very high.

In this connection, I believe the SAR Government should step up its efforts in dovetailing with the Three-year Plan, the Qianhai Plan and the Hengqin Plan, with a view to capitalizing on Hong Kong’s advantages in GBA. In particular, the Three-year Plan has already proposed 24 specific measures under 7 major items, focusing on the construction of a business environment. Its goal is to enable GBA to interface with international rules within three years, so as to develop a market-oriented, rule of law-based and internationalized business environment through establishing a fundamental business system.

The relevant measures are all centred around four major environments, namely, market environment, government environment, rule of law environment and open environment, such as removing or relaxing restrictions on Hong Kong and Macao investors, implementing special support measures targeting talents from Hong Kong and Macao, and supporting Hong Kong's and Macao's full participation in and contribution to the Belt and Road Initiative. Specific measures have also been proposed for cross-boundary customs clearance, cross-boundary practice, mutual access between financial markets, and so on.

In this connection, I believe the SAR Government should assist in better promoting the implementation of the Three-year Plan and do a good job in the following four areas of work, with a view to leading the comprehensive cooperation among Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao. First, it should publicize and explain policies well, and mobilize relevant departments and experts to conduct on-site publicity in Hong Kong, so as to create a favourable public opinion atmosphere and social discussion for a first-class business environment in GBA. Second, it should work with the Mainland to take forward and refine the key tasks of the Three-year Plan, specify the progress in the timetables, and clarify the responsibilities, powers and duties of government departments, so as to ensure the effective implementation of policies. Third, it should tell success stories, give full play to Hong Kong's open platform and demonstration effect, and make full use of Hong Kong's "eight centres" positioning, its "one country, two systems" principle, its two-way development of being backed by the country and connecting the world, and other advantages, so as to jointly expand the economic cooperation with Macao and the nine Mainland cities. Fourth, it should actively address the difficulties in implementation, and provide assistance to enterprises and individuals seeking to establish a presence in GBA in a result-oriented manner.

In addition, the Three-year Plan also mentions a series of policies to support Hong Kong's development, such as the expansion of CEPA (the Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement). For instance, these policies include considering further lifting or relaxing investor restrictions on Hong Kong and Macao such as qualification requirements, percentage of shareholding, as well as market access; cancelling the differential treatment for Hong Kong and Macao enterprises in bidding and tendering, government procurement, protection of rights and interests, and other areas; and promoting the entry of Hong Kong's arbitration industry into the nine Mainland cities of GBA. All of these policies demonstrate the Central Authorities' support for Hong Kong, and broaden the channels for Hong Kong's integration into the overall development of the country.

Therefore, the SAR Government should straighten out the details of various cooperation initiatives, so as to avoid the awkward situation where “big doors are opened, but small doors are not yet opened”.

However, I think the SAR Government must be more proactive at present. The SAR Government should take a more proactive approach to connect with GBA cities to seek more room for development and cooperation, instead of only gradually aligning with the policies of GBA every time the Central Government launches them. This attitude is very passive.

On the other hand, I also suggest that the Government should give priority to striving for more facilitation measures for Hong Kong people, such as optimizing immigration clearance procedures and practices by allowing more boundary control points (“BCPs”) to implement the operational modes of “co-location” and “collaborative inspection and joint clearance”, and promoting the implementation of 24-hour immigration customs clearance at more BCPs in line with the actual needs to facilitate the convenient flow of vehicles between the two places on an ongoing basis. To assist Hong Kong people in pursuing development in Guangdong, the SAR Government may thoroughly take forward initiatives such as the GBA Shebao Tong and the measure of using Hong Kong-registered drugs and medical devices used in Hong Kong public hospitals in GBA, explore the possibility of cross-boundary settlement of medical insurance for Hong Kong and Macao within GBA, and facilitate the convenient use of the Mainland Travel Permits for Hong Kong and Macao Residents, public services and the Internet.

Furthermore, some people have recently pointed out that Hong Kong people’s going north for consumption will affect the local economy of Hong Kong. However, given the trend of increasingly frequent exchanges between the two places, the SAR Government should also study ways to promote Hong Kong effectively. For example, in view of Mainland visitors’ travel pattern of not staying overnight in Hong Kong or of having budget travel to Hong Kong, the Government needs to study the relevant culture, and focus on how to promote Hong Kong under this new pattern. Moreover, the Government should respond to the trend by developing new types of industries, logistics industries and other supporting measures, so that people’s going north for consumption will benefit Hong Kong.

Indeed, at present, the Government can do better in its collaboration with the Mainland. For instance, after the fireworks display on New Year’s Day some

days ago, the poor arrangements at BCPs and for cross-boundary coaches rendered some tourists unable to return to the Mainland and forced them to be stranded, thus causing a lot of chaos. The traffic arrangements at the cruise terminal were also inadequate, failing to meet the tourists' demands and causing a large number of tourists to wait for a long time at the terminal. All these are examples of insufficient supporting measures. The Government may consider allocating more resources to the tourism industry to enable industry players to provide better arrangements and services during large-scale exhibitions and activities. As mentioned earlier, the Government should strive for the opening of more BCPs with 24-hour immigration clearance services to facilitate smoother travel for both Hong Kong and Mainland residents, promoting better connectivity between the two places.

In conclusion, I hope the Government will actively promote and achieve win-win cooperation, create an open environment, expeditiously increase the degree of market integration, jointly promote the upgrading and transformation of industries in GBA to achieve the joint development between Hong Kong and other cities in GBA, and expand the living circle in Hong Kong to provide convenience to Hong Kong residents in developing in Guangdong and pursuing a quality life in a more diversified manner.

With these remarks, President, I hope Members will support my motion.

Ms YUNG Hoi-yan moved the following motion: (Translation)

“That in December 2023, the Central Authorities successively promulgated the Three-year Action Plan for the Development of International First-class Business Environment in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, the Overall Development Plan on Hong Kong/Shenzhen Cooperation on Modern Service Industries in Qianhai Area, the Overall Development Plan for the Guangdong-Macao Zone in Hengqin and other policies, so as to further strengthen the integrated development of Hong Kong and other cities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (‘GBA’); in this connection, the HKSAR Government should, in line with the development of various policies of the Central Authorities, enhance the connection with other cities in GBA, and actively optimize the market environment, promote data sharing and drive the healthy development of the rule of law, with a view to creating an open environment which features smooth circulation and win-win cooperation, expeditiously

increasing the degree of market integration, and jointly promoting the upgrading and transformation of industries in GBA to achieve the joint development between Hong Kong and other cities in GBA, as well as expanding the living circle in Hong Kong to provide convenience to Hong Kong residents in developing and living in Guangdong and pursuing a quality life in a more diversified manner.”

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the motion moved by Ms YUNG Hoi-yan be passed.

Honourable Members, I will suspend the meeting at about 6:30 pm.

Mr Kenneth LEUNG, please speak.

MR KENNETH LEUNG (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. I would like to thank Ms YUNG Hoi-yan for proposing today’s motion, which allows us to discuss how to strengthen the joint development of the Greater Bay Area (“GBA”). The amendment I have proposed adds two points to the original motion. The first point is promoting the interconnected flow of talents between Hong Kong and GBA. The second point is enhancing the support for Hong Kong people within GBA in their studies, careers and so on.

President, to achieve the joint development of GBA, apart from hardware support such as infrastructure and policies, the interconnected flow of talents is also crucial. In recent years, there has been a notable increase in the number of Hong Kong people going north for development. According to the information of the Census and Statistics Department, in 2022, there were over 500 000 Hong Kong residents usually staying in Guangdong Province, with nearly 140 000 of them aged between 15 and 44. Although we have put in place several measures to support them over the past two years, the flow of talents is a two-way process requiring a back-and-forth flow to achieve the effect of mutual enhancement. Therefore, I have specially proposed to strengthen the flow of talents between the two places. For example, in terms of academic qualifications, we must expeditiously promote the arrangements for professional qualification recognition in the two places, so as to enable the free flow of qualified talents of different industries within GBA, and only in this way can there be sharing of talents and a win-win development. As early as 2019, the Education Bureau signed the Letter of Intent on Qualifications

Framework Co-operation between Hong Kong and Guangdong with the Department of Education of Guangdong Province. I hope the Government can draw up a timetable to specify the order of mutual recognition of qualifications in various trades and industries, so as to expedite the flow of talents.

Another suggestion is about internships. At present, while there are many internship opportunities for Hong Kong young people in GBA, the availability of “two-way internship” arrangements remains limited. Therefore, I hope the Government can enhance these arrangements so that both young people in Hong Kong and Mainland young people in GBA can collaborate and become partners under a joint internship programme, experience the workplace atmosphere in different cities and be well-prepared for their future career development in any GBA cities.

President, it is also crucial to strengthen support for Hong Kong people in their studies and careers in GBA and to improve the support measures for Hong Kong people going to Guangdong. Let me take studying as an example. In recent years, more and more young people in Hong Kong are aspiring to pursue further studies in the Mainland. According to various information, the number of Hong Kong students studying in Mainland higher education institutions exceeded 20 000 in 2022. However, at present, the young people who go to the Mainland for studies are mainly those who have sat for the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (“HKDSE”). The rest of the young people who have not sat for HKDSE but wish to further their studies in the Mainland face difficulties in applying for admission. Therefore, I hope the authorities can provide more channels for Hong Kong citizens to apply for admission to higher education institutions in the Mainland, offer more continuing education and vocational qualification programmes that are mutually recognized by the two places at the institutions of GBA, and even establish more schools for Hong Kong children in GBA, so as to enhance Hong Kong’s role as an education hub connecting with GBA. Additionally, I hope the Government can expeditiously establish a talent pool in GBA, so that talents from GBA can help Hong Kong address the practical problem of manpower shortage.

President, GBA provides a stage for young people to advance in their careers and unleash the full potential of their youthful vigour. In recent years, the Government’s support has also started to be in place, such as the regularization of the Greater Bay Area Youth Employment Scheme (“GBAYES”) and the establishment of the Alliance of Hong Kong Youth Innovation and Entrepreneurial

Bases in the Greater Bay Area. I believe that such efforts can be further strengthened and expanded. Let me take the support services jointly provided by the Hong Kong United Youth Association and the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions for GBAYES as an example. Over the past few months of operation, we have provided research and study activities, tours, visits to enterprises and social activities for Hong Kong young people working in the Mainland. The response from young people has been very positive, which at the same time reflects the need for such support activities. Therefore, I suggest that the Government should step up the relevant efforts to allow more Hong Kong non-governmental organizations to provide services to Hong Kong people across the boundary. In fact, the current official support for Hong Kong people in GBA is mainly handled by the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in Guangdong (“GDETO”). However, has the staffing of GDETO kept up with the speed of Hong Kong people going north in recent years? For this reason, I also hope the authorities will review the staffing of GDETO to enable it to provide more diversified and user-friendly services to Hong Kong people in the Mainland, so as to fulfil its function of maintaining liaison with Hong Kong people and strengthening mutual support.

President, these serve to provide elaboration on the contents of my amendment.

I so submit.

MR DUNCAN CHIU (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. This year’s 18 February is the fifth anniversary of the promulgation of the Outline Development Plan for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. I would like to thank Ms YUNG Hoi-yan for proposing today’s motion, so that we can put forward our suggestions on how to strengthen the joint development of the Greater Bay Area (“GBA”). Apart from my amendment, the amendments proposed by the other three Members have also put forward a lot of good suggestions, including Mr Kenneth LEUNG’s suggestion of promoting the interconnected flow of talents in GBA and providing more support to Hong Kong residents who work, study, develop, live and set up businesses in Guangdong Province. I very much agree that the SAR Government should provide more support to Hong Kong people in Guangdong, especially young people who have gone to the Mainland for setting up businesses and development, so that they can integrate more actively into the overall development of the country.

President, my amendment primarily urges the Government to actively promote and achieve the model of “conducting research and development in Hong Kong and manufacturing in GBA”. To fully integrate into the overall development of the country and develop itself into an international innovation and technology (“I&T”) centre as early as possible, Hong Kong cannot rely solely on its own strengths, but must strengthen mutual cooperation, interconnectivity and complementarity of strengths through joint development with other cities in GBA. Only in this way can the benefits be maximized.

Let me take I&T as an example. Hong Kong possesses numerous outstanding universities, scientific research teams and enterprises, as well as high-level scientific research outcomes. However, successfully transforming and realizing scientific research outcomes and launching them into the market upon their commercialization has all along been challenging. Many scientific research teams and enterprises in Hong Kong have always had deficiencies and shortcomings when collaborating with the Mainland cities of GBA in the past. There is still much room for improvement in terms of the flow of people, goods, capital and data, which not only impacts the transformation of scientific research outcomes but also hampers the pace of collaboration with the industry, academia and research sectors in GBA as a whole. Therefore, how to strengthen the collaboration of Hong Kong scientific research teams and enterprises with the Mainland cities in GBA is an issue that requires significant attention from the SAR Government.

During the last Christmas holiday, I visited the Shenzhen InnoX Academy, which was founded by Professor LI Zexiang of The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology and funded by Shenzhen Municipality. Over the years, Professor LI Zexiang has nurtured many outstanding students, as well as successful enterprises and unicorns in the field of smart devices and hardware. These include Da-Jiang Innovations which we are all familiar with, Gu Gao which was established in 1999 and has been listed recently, as well as Horizon Robotics which is a technology enterprise. These are all co-founded by Professor LI Zexiang.

There are a lot of start-up teams in the Shenzhen InnoX Academy. Many of them are composed of Hong Kong young people, and Mainland students who are “drifters in Hong Kong”. After successfully setting up their own businesses, many students of Professor LI Zexiang return to the academy as mentors to assist

other students in the training on launching their products. The academy has also established its own production lines, providing hardware at cost prices to start-up teams and even offering factory support to help them upgrade their products. With Shenzhen's advantage of having an excellent supply chain for technology products, start-up teams can produce a low volume of physical products in a short period of time and then launch them into the market to test market response. Through this model, the academy helps young people interested in entrepreneurship by providing them with the best support, and helps nurture more prospective unicorns.

President, the Shenzhen InnoX Academy is not only an institution for training I&T talents, but also a good example to the community of what I have just referred to as “conducting research and development in Hong Kong and manufacturing in GBA”, which is very much worth encouraging. I hope the SAR Government can draw reference from this and explore how to do more at the government level in future, including further deepening this model of collaboration with the industry, academia and research sectors which has been so successful in the community, as well as fully leveraging its radiating effect to promote “conducting research and development in Hong Kong and manufacturing in GBA” on all fronts, and expedite the early transformation and realization of scientific research outcomes in Hong Kong.

Having been involved to some extent in the development of the Zhuhai Hengqin New Area in recent years, I have come to realize that in many Mainland cities, such as the new development zones in Guangdong Province, there are many aspects, including planning, development, management and policy measures, that Hong Kong should borrow and learn from. For example, the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, under the Central Authorities' unified planning and arrangement, has established for Guangdong and Macao a new cooperation system featuring mutual discussions, joint construction, joint administration and shared benefits, as well as the “line-division administration” model. These are very much worthy of serving as a reference for the cooperation between Hong Kong and Shenzhen. In particular, the Guangdong-Hong Kong in-depth cooperation zone is being developed in the Northern Metropolis, which, together with the support of policy measures, will realize the efficient and convenient flow of people, goods, capital and information. This is something we should learn from.

Under the principle of “one country, two systems”, Hong Kong enjoys the

unique advantage of having the strong support of our country and the close connection to the world. We look forward to Hong Kong continuing to deepen its exchanges and cooperation with other cities in GBA, unleashing even greater impetus for development, and jointly promoting the high-quality development of GBA.

I so submit.

MS CARMEN KAN (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. I would like to thank Ms YUNG Hoi-yan for proposing the motion.

President, there were at least four Members' motions related to the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area ("GBA") last year, highlighting the importance of this subject. President XI Jinping, during his inspection tour to Guangdong in April 2023, conferred upon GBA the new strategic positioning and historical mission of a strategic fulcrum of the new development pattern, a demonstration zone of high-quality development, and a pioneer of Chinese modernization.

I support Ms YUNG's motion, which urges the Government to tie in with the development of various policies of the Central Authorities. My amendment mainly adds two aspects, namely, enhancing the regulatory interface and connectivity of systems between Hong Kong and other cities in GBA, and enhancing the "one-hour living circle" in GBA.

President, the regulatory interface and connectivity of systems are not only points of difficulty, pain and blockade but also critical junctures that need to be broken through urgently. With "one country, two systems and three jurisdictions" being a unique advantage of GBA, as long as we make unremitting efforts in persistently overcoming the differences in the systems of the three places, and take practical actions to break through the bottlenecks that are unfavourable to the flow of key factors, we will definitely be able to create a first-class business environment for GBA.

So, how can we solve these inevitable points of difficulty and pain during the development process? I believe we need to grasp the focuses and key factors. The focuses can be said to be two major platforms, namely Qianhai and the Lok Ma Chau Loop ("the Loop"). Qianhai and the Loop are two major development

platforms of the country that play innovative, experimental, exemplary and pioneering roles in deepening comprehensive cooperation in GBA. Let us look at Qianhai's positioning: "Relying on Hong Kong, serving the Mainland and opening up to the world". In my opinion, the Government should actively align with the Overall Development Plan on Hong Kong/Shenzhen Co-operation on Modern Service Industries in Qianhai Area, deepen the "Shenzhen-Hong Kong co-operation task force" mechanisms, especially make good use of the Shenzhen-Hong Kong Financial Co-operation Committee that will soon be established this year, and focus on promoting the development of modern service industries in Qianhai. It should take Qianhai seriously as a testing ground for institutional innovations in areas such as business system reforms, relaxing control over market access and fair competition. It should explore policies and measures that fit the actual situation in a problem-oriented approach in each field and each significant matter, and steadily push forward the in-depth convergence of the relevant rules, systems, standards, etc. Personally, I advocate that priority be given to further opening up the fields of finance, commerce, law and professional services to create a first-class business environment.

Secondly, with respect to facilitating the flow of key factors, I am very pleased to see that in December last year, Hong Kong and the Cyberspace Administration of China ("CAC") jointly promulgated the Implementation Guidelines for Standard Contract for the Cross-boundary Flow of Personal Information in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (Mainland, Hong Kong), which is the first policy document that breaks through the differences in the policies and legal systems of the two places. I am very grateful to the relevant Policy Bureau and CAC for launching this ground-breaking initiative. I believe the authorities should publicize this policy more widely, so that Hong Kong and other cities in GBA can draw lessons from it when promoting regulatory interface and connectivity of systems. They should use joint announcements more frequently to seek support from the Central Authorities, which will allow the Hong Kong, Guangdong Province and Shenzhen governments to jointly promulgate some feasible innovative policies. For instance, they may enhance the practice of using innovative data flows to drive other key factors, namely, the flow of people, goods and capital, so as to facilitate their convenient flow within GBA.

As for enhancing the "one-hour living circle" in GBA, major cross-boundary infrastructure projects such as the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link (Hong Kong Section), the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, and the

Liantang/Heung Yuen Wai Boundary Control Point have been completed successively in the past few years. These projects have all contributed to the overall development of the “one-hour living circle”.

In my opinion, various facilitation measures still need to be deepened, such as actively implementing the Three-year Action Plan for the Development of International First-class Business Environment in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, opening up more 24-hour boundary control points, implementing the modes of “co-location”, “collaborative inspection and joint clearance”, and so on; resuming the issuance of the “multiple-entry” endorsements, and studying the feasibility of extending it to other cities in GBA; improving cross-boundary payments, and linking the Faster Payment System with the Mainland’s payment mechanism, etc.; promoting unified identity authentication for Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao residents using “iAM Smart” real-name authentication, among others, to materialize the Cross-boundary Public Services initiative with respect to high-frequency matters for enterprises and residents.

Over the past two weeks, we have heard the authorities say many times that they will discuss with relevant Mainland authorities in due course. I hope the authorities will act on their words and fully take forward GBA’s new mission of a strategic fulcrum of the new development pattern, a demonstration zone of high-quality development, and a pioneer of Chinese modernization.

With these remarks, President, I hope Members will support my amendment and the original motion. Thank you.

MR CHAN YUNG (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. I would also like to thank all the Secretaries and Under Secretaries. In particular, I would like to thank Ms YUNG Hoi-yan for proposing the original motion.

The amendment I have proposed mainly emphasizes that President XI Jinping, during his inspection tour to Guangdong in April 2023, mentioned that the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (“GBA”) must be developed as a strategic fulcrum of the new development pattern, a demonstration zone of high-quality development, and a pioneer of Chinese modernization. These all present significant opportunities for Hong Kong. In addition, our Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong (“DAB”) has also added eight specific suggestions to improve the original motion, including: first,

continuing to enhance the Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (“CEPA”), including driving the Mainland authorities to fully accord “national treatment” to Hong Kong service suppliers where practicable, and expanding mutual recognition of qualifications of talents between the two places.

Second, promoting mutual stock market access by collaborating with the Shenzhen Stock Exchange in launching the Primary Equity Connect on a pilot basis.

Third, establishing HKSAR’s Economic and Trade Offices in all nine Mainland cities in GBA, so as to strengthen the connectivity between Hong Kong and those cities (including important platforms such as Qianhai, Hengqin and Nansha).

Fourth, enhancing the relevant legal support for the implementation of “GBA standards”.

Fifth, opening up more 24-hour boundary control points, including the “East in East out, West in West out” strategy for coaches and goods vehicles to enhance efficiency and avoid traffic congestion in both places, as well as implementing the clearance mode of “collaborative inspection and joint clearance” and even the contactless clearance mode as mentioned by a Member when raising his question this morning to provide more convenience for everyone and accelerate the economic development.

Sixth, promoting the development of an accreditation system for care homes in the Mainland which meets the Hong Kong general standards and the service needs of Hong Kong elderly persons so that there will be a set of common standards between the two places, as well as extending the scope of application of health care vouchers to make it more convenient for elderly persons who are in need and voluntarily choose to spend their twilight years in the Mainland. Cross-boundary elderly care is greatly beneficial to both places without any disadvantages.

Seventh, promoting the connection between “iAM Smart” and “Yue Sheng Shi”.

Eighth, expanding the application of Home Visit Permits in the Mainland, whether in electronic or physical form. Of course, in the long run, we hope that Home Visit Permits will eventually be turned into local resident cards or identity

cards, so as to make it more convenient for everyone and further promote the integration and economic development of the two places. In particular, as we can see now, the Western evil forces led by the United States have imposed sanctions against our country and targeted Hong Kong. Therefore, GBA is a very significant support or strong backing for our future development. Hong Kong can root itself locally, face the world with the backing of the motherland and GBA, and promote more new economic growth points.

We also see that the National 14th Five-Year Plan has given Hong Kong new roles as an international aviation hub, an international innovation and technology centre, a regional intellectual property trading centre, an East-meets-West centre for international cultural exchange, and so on. Hong Kong should not only develop these roles, but it can also assist GBA and the country in advancing the construction of a great country and the rejuvenation of the nation.

Moreover, we are actively integrating into and promoting the development of GBA, which is also a goal set forth by Chief Executive John LEE and the SAR Government in the Policy Address. The aim is to promote the interconnectivity and integrated development among the cities in GBA. The Secretaries of Departments and Directors of Bureaux in the Government are making good use of and enhancing the cooperation mechanisms between Guangdong and Hong Kong and between Hong Kong and Shenzhen. Currently, more than 10 task forces have been set up as platforms to deepen the connectivity between the two places. Of course, we have received many views from the public regarding people's livelihood, indicating that this direction is very good and some achievements have already been made. Still, members of the public hope that the progress can be further accelerated.

It can be anticipated that our trade ties with GBA in terms of the flow of people, goods, capital, and so on will become even closer. We hope the SAR Government can take the lead in promoting the continuous optimization and development of this aspect.

Furthermore, this year also marks the 20th anniversary of the signing of CEPA. To better promote CEPA, there is the support by the Three-year Action Plan for the Development of International First-class Business Environment in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area as noted by us, which makes us feel that there is no time to lose, and we need to expedite the process further or with even greater urgency.

Regardless of whether it is the Chief Executive, the President or our DAB, we have all visited GBA and are eager to expeditiously implement many specific contents therein. This direction is the correct one, so we ultimately wish to return to the main topic, which is to expeditiously take forward the development of GBA, enhance speed, improve efficiency, and pursue our economic growth.

Thank you, President.

SECRETARY FOR CONSTITUTIONAL AND MAINLAND AFFAIRS (in Cantonese): President, first of all, I am very grateful to Ms YUNG Hoi-yun for proposing the motion on “Strengthening the joint development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area”, and to Mr Kenneth LEUNG, Mr Duncan CHIU, Ms Carmen KAN and Mr CHAN Yung for proposing their amendments, so that all Members can have the opportunity at the beginning of this legislative session to engage in in-depth exchanges on the important topic of Hong Kong’s participation in the high-quality development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (“GBA”), and to put forward their views and suggestions.

The development of GBA is a key national strategy personally devised, personally planned and personally driven by President XI Jinping. It is also the best entry point for Hong Kong to actively integrate into the overall development of the country, as well as an important source of impetus for Hong Kong’s development during the crucial stage of advancing from stability to prosperity.

During his inspection tour to Guangdong last April, President XI conferred upon GBA a new strategic positioning: GBA must be developed as a strategic fulcrum of the new development pattern, a demonstration zone of high-quality development, and a pioneer of Chinese modernization. President XI has not only pointed out the direction of advancing the development of GBA in the new era, but also injected more vigorous impetus into strengthening the joint development of GBA.

In his 2024 New Year message, President XI specifically mentioned that over the past year, GBA embraced new development opportunities; in the new year, on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the founding of New China, the country

will continue to support Hong Kong in leveraging its own advantages, and maintaining long-term prosperity and stability in the course of Hong Kong's better integration into the overall development of the country.

As one of the core cities of GBA, Hong Kong must have a deep understanding of President XI's important plans for the development of GBA and GBA's new historical mission of serving as a strategic fulcrum of the new development pattern, a demonstration zone of high-quality development, and a pioneer of Chinese modernization. It must be brave in taking on the role of a core engine for regional development, fully seize the opportunities arising from the joint development of GBA, and contribute to the country's high-quality development and high-standard opening up.

The SAR Government has all along attached great importance to the development of GBA. Based on the principles of complementarity and mutual benefits, the SAR Government has worked with relevant central ministries and the governments of Guangdong and Macao in various fields with continual and dedicated efforts, and introduced a number of policy measures to, on one hand, support Hong Kong residents and enterprises in pursuing development in the Mainland cities of GBA, and on the other hand, assist the Mainland cities of GBA in tapping into international markets, thereby fully leveraging Hong Kong's dual roles in "going global and attracting foreign investment".

At the end of last year, the Central Government promulgated the Overall Development Plan on Hong Kong/Shenzhen Co-operation on Modern Service Industries in Qianhai Area ("the Qianhai Overall Development Plan"), the Three-year Action Plan for the Development of International First-class Business Environment in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area ("the Business Environment Action Plan"), and two important documents related to the development of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin. All of these are aimed at implementing President XI's important plans for the development of GBA, providing important guidance and support for steadfastly and successfully developing GBA and better supporting the integration of Hong Kong and Macao into the overall development of the country.

Specifically, the Qianhai Overall Development Plan clearly states at the outset that the development of the Qianhai Shenzhen-Hong Kong Modern Service Industry Co-operation Zone is an important initiative for supporting Hong Kong's social and economic development, consolidating and enhancing its competitive

advantages, fostering a higher level of cooperation among Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao, and establishing a new development paradigm in pursuing opening up. It covers the strategic positioning, development objectives and so on of the Co-operation Zone, which are crucial for HKSAR's active participation in the development of Qianhai and for Hong Kong's advantageous industries to tap into the Mainland market through Qianhai.

As for the Business Environment Action Plan, it is an important plan to promote the development of GBA into a world's first-class bay area, fully leverage the consolidated advantages of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao, and enhance the country's economic innovative power and competitiveness. GBA is to be developed under the conditions of one country, two systems, three customs territories and three currencies, without any precedents internationally. To promote the development of GBA, the most important thing is to ensure the efficient and convenient flow of various production factors, including the flow of people, goods, capital and information. Focusing on developing the market environment, government environment, rule of law environment and open environment of GBA, the Business Environment Action Plan expeditiously increases GBA's degree of market integration and international competitiveness, and at the same time proposes specific measures to provide convenience to Hong Kong and Macao residents for developing and living in the Mainland cities of GBA.

The development of GBA and Qianhai is crucial to the overall development of Hong Kong. So, with the promulgation of two important planning documents, we have promptly communicated and liaised with the principal officials of the Guangdong Provincial Government and the Shenzhen Municipal Government to discuss the strengthening of joint efforts. In line with the requirements of the Business Environment Action Plan and the Qianhai Overall Development Plan, we will expeditiously promote regulatory interface and connectivity of systems among cities in GBA, and intensify efforts between Hong Kong and Shenzhen to promote the development of the Qianhai Shenzhen-Hong Kong Modern Service Industry Co-operation Zone.

President, if Hong Kong is to seize the opportunity to strengthen the joint development of GBA, the key lies in continuously seeking innovative breakthroughs and promoting interconnectivity to achieve integrated and mutually beneficial development. The SAR Government will take the initiative to communicate closely with relevant central ministries, the Guangdong Provincial Government and the Macao SAR Government to jointly promote the high-level

integrated development among the cities in GBA with innovative thinking and the spirit of mutual benefits and win-win cooperation. In the meantime, apart from leading the whole community in advancing the relevant work with the spirit of “daring to take up commitment and responsibilities, doing good work and achieving good results”, the full commitment of all sectors of the community, including the participation and views of the Legislative Council Members, is very important. We will listen carefully to the views and suggestions of the Members and respond to them later.

Thank you, President.

MR LAI TUNG-KWOK (in Cantonese): President, I support the motion proposed by Ms YUNG Hoi-yan.

The development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (“GBA”) is a significant national strategy, and Hong Kong bears an undeniable obligation to contribute to its development. To strengthen the joint development of GBA, I am most concerned about the flow of talents, especially our young people. The SAR Government launched a pilot Greater Bay Area Youth Employment Scheme (“GBAYES”) in 2021, which has been regularized since March last year, with the aim of nurturing Hong Kong young people with working experience in GBA. Despite being well-intentioned and fully aligned with the national strategy of building GBA, the results of the scheme are far from satisfactory.

During the pilot period of the scheme, the feedback from enterprises was quite favourable, as evidenced by a total of 417 companies offering 3 494 job vacancies; but in the end, only 1 091 graduates were successfully employed under the pilot scheme, accounting for less than one-third of the available vacancies. The notable difference between these two figures highlights that Hong Kong young people are not very interested in joining the scheme, or at the very least, the number of those showing interest falls significantly short of the SAR Government’s expectation.

Worse still, out of a total of 1 091 job entrants under the pilot scheme, as many as 404 failed to complete the 18-month employment period. In other words, the overall dropout rate for the first 18 months of the pilot scheme was as high as 37%, showing that the effectiveness of GBAYES is not as expected. Such a high

dropout rate is already a noteworthy signal, and when taking into account the additional factor of the SAR Government's provision of a monthly allowance of HK\$10,000 per person to enterprises that hire Hong Kong young people under the scheme, the overall appeal of GBA to Hong Kong young people is indeed further diminished.

After all, I think that the scheme has forcibly driven up the salaries in GBA and then unreasonably raised the expectations of Hong Kong young people, leading to a hasty dropout of many of them before the completion of the 18-month government subsidy period. To be frank, for young people who are not participants of the scheme and have just joined the labour market, the salaries in GBA of the Mainland are undoubtedly not as high as those in Hong Kong. However, when considering the cost of living in GBA, if young people choose to reside there, their living standard would likely not be inferior to that in Hong Kong. Furthermore, GBA presents great potential for development, making it a compelling choice for young people to explore and pursue their career there.

Now that there is an opportunity in front of Hong Kong young people, it is crucial for them to seize the chance to gain valuable experience in GBA before its full development takes place. I think this is already a great incentive in itself, but it turns out that we, with the provision of the \$10,000 subsidy by the Government, have only managed to attract one-third of the anticipated number of young people to work in GBA. Furthermore, many of these young people either discontinued their participation before the completion of the scheme or did not choose to stay in the Mainland cities for development once the scheme concluded. In my view, this situation not only reflects the ineffectiveness of the scheme but also suggests that it may be heading in the wrong direction.

President, I think the SAR Government may explore the option of gradually reducing the amount of the subsidy provided to enterprises under GBAYES, so as to save expenditure, mitigate the isolation experienced by Hong Kong young people from their Mainland peers due to different pay for the same work and facilitate their integration into the local community, and attract young people genuinely committed to developing their career in GBA. In addition, I also suggest that the SAR Government relax the academic qualification requirements of the scheme, especially for positions related to innovation and technology ("I&T"), because as far as I know, there are many talents in Hong Kong who have outstanding academic results in individual subjects. Despite their language proficiency limitations preventing them from attending university, these people

possess the aptitude to excel in I&T fields and represent the much-needed talent sought after in GBA. Lastly, I suggest that the SAR Government set key performance indicators for the scheme, with a view to reducing the dropout rate during the 18-month employment period as well as increasing the number of young people who are willing to stay in GBA to continue their career upon completion of the scheme.

President, I so submit.

MR CHAN PUI-LEUNG (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. President, I believe that promoting the joint development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (“GBA”) is our common goal. The signing of the Framework Agreement on Deepening Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Cooperation in the Development of the Bay Area in 2017 signified the official launch of the development of GBA. By rough estimation, since the signing of the Agreement, more than 70 planning programmes and policy documents have been introduced by various ministries and commissions of the Central Government, with Guangdong Province and the 11 cities in GBA collectively launching more than 300 policy documents. Driven by an array of supportive policies, GBA has experienced rapid development in recent years, opening up a host of new opportunities for Hong Kong people in such aspects as education, employment, entrepreneurship and living.

However, due to the differences in the systems and rules of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao, there are still a lot of obstacles in mutual access to capital, mutual recognition of products, regulatory rules, etc., resulting in the cooperation among the three places where “big doors are opened, but small doors are not yet opened”. The cross-boundary operation of financial products, including the Bond Connect, the Shenzhen-Hong Kong Stock Connect and the Cross-boundary Wealth Management Connect Scheme, has been implemented smoothly. Regarding insurance, while GBA presents an ideal entry point for Hong Kong’s insurance industry to participate in the “dual circulation” strategy and expand its market beyond Hong Kong, it is regrettable to note that the implementation of the Cross-boundary Insurance Connect Scheme is still “all thunder but no rain”, and the establishment of insurance after-sales service centres, despite being proposed for many years, has yet to be realized.

Last month, the Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury and I

attended an event on insurance technology. At the event, the Secretary announced that the preparatory work for the establishment of insurance after-sales service centres in Nansha and Qianhai had entered the final stage. This is indeed a piece of long-awaited good news for the industry. I hope that the establishment of after-sales service centres can be realized within this year to further promote insurance interconnectivity in GBA. Of course, the establishment of after-sales service centres is only the first step towards achieving mutual access to the insurance markets of Hong Kong and GBA. Hong Kong, as the leader of the insurance industry in GBA, should take a proactive role in spearheading the future implementation of the Cross-boundary Insurance Connect Scheme, develop and provide a wider range of cross-boundary insurance products to meet customers' demand for cross-boundary wealth and risk management, thereby ensuring connectivity of insurance markets between the Mainland and Hong Kong.

Ensuring the smooth flow of people and goods within GBA is also a crucial element in fostering joint development and connectivity between Hong Kong and GBA. The incident of Mainland travellers being stranded in Hong Kong on New Year's Eve highlights the necessity of augmenting and optimizing the number of 24-hour boundary control points. On that account, I agree to Mr CHAN Yung's proposal in his amendment that the SAR Government should be more proactive in proposing to the Central Authorities the opening up of more 24-hour boundary control points and the implementation of the clearance mode of "collaborative inspection and joint clearance". I think the SAR Government can convene Shenzhen-Hong Kong meetings or task forces with the Mainland when deemed necessary, so as to enhance the convenience of cross-boundary customs clearance and streamline the clearance process on various fronts.

In addition, the Northbound Travel for Hong Kong Vehicles ("the Scheme") and the "unilateral recognition" arrangement for cross-boundary motor insurance represent innovative measures under our policy system, marking the advent of a new era of transport connectivity within GBA. Despite being implemented for more than half a year, the Scheme still faces numerous implementation challenges, including complex application and administrative procedures, quota limitations and vehicle inspection restrictions, resulting in artificial barriers that require individuals intending to drive northward to find the key to open "small doors" on their own. I urge the authorities to streamline the application procedures for the Scheme as soon as possible. At present, there are only two qualified Mainland vehicle examination centres in Hong Kong, and the authorities should discuss with their Mainland counterparts the opening up of more qualified vehicle examination

centres in Hong Kong accredited by the Transport Department, so as to speed up the application process and enhance the efficiency of the services. In the long run, the authorities should progressively increase the quotas for Hong Kong vehicles, and even explore with the Mainland Government the possibility of abolishing the current daily quota for cross-boundary travel. After the full implementation of the Scheme for a period of time, I hope that Hong Kong vehicle owners will not only be allowed to go north via the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge but also be able to make use of the other land crossings, thus making it more convenient for them to visit Mainland cities.

President, I hope that Hong Kong and the Mainland will join hands to expeditiously remove the barriers to the flow of various elements in GBA and ensure the opening up of both big and small doors, thus facilitating the joint development of GBA.

With these remarks, I support Ms YUNG Hoi-yan's original motion and the other Members' amendments.

IR DR LO WAI-KWOK (in Cantonese): President, first of all, I would like to thank Ms YUNG Hoi-yan for moving the original motion and the other four Members for proposing their amendments.

During his inspection tour to Guangdong in 2023, President XI Jinping gave us important instructions, emphasizing that the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (“GBA”) must be developed as a strategic fulcrum of the new development pattern, a demonstration zone of high-quality development, and a pioneer of Chinese modernization. Subsequently, the Central Authorities have promulgated a number of policy documents, including the Three-year Action Plan for the Development of International First-class Business Environment in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, the Overall Development Plan on Hong Kong/Shenzhen Co-operation on Modern Service Industries in Qianhai Area, and the Overall Development Plan for the Guangdong-Macao Zone in Hengqin. The Business and Professionals Alliance for Hong Kong and I agree that the SAR Government should work in alignment with the relevant policy measures of the Central Authorities, strengthen connectivity with other GBA cities, complement each other's strengths and promote coordinated development, and facilitate more active integration of Hong Kong residents into the overall development of the country, thus enabling them to study, work, develop and reside in the Mainland.

President, Hong Kong has evolved into a pivotal hub that facilitates the convergence of “five flows”, encompassing the movement of people, goods, capital, information and services. It is well-positioned to give full play to its role as a “super-connector” across multiple domains, and to establish diverse platforms for capital raising and financing, high-end professional services, emerging industries as well as facilitation of trade and businesses. The key lies in how we can further leverage Hong Kong’s unique advantages by aligning our efforts with the national development strategy. At the very least, the following aspects are worth noting.

First of all, we should enhance the regulatory interface and connectivity of systems with other cities in GBA and promote the implementation of “GBA standards”. Since the implementation of the Agreement Concerning Amendment to the CEPA Agreement on Trade in Services in June 2020, the nine Mainland cities in GBA, by adopting the “early and pilot implementation” approach, have enabled eligible Hong Kong enterprises and professionals in the engineering sector and other professional fields to provide direct services through a simple registration system. In my opinion, we should expedite the regulatory interface of the two places in the future, including endeavouring to establish a construction management system that is in line with international standards. At the same time, with the promulgation of the Guidelines on the Common Needs of GBA Standards in 2023, the authorities of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao have also signed a Memorandum of Understanding on jointly promoting the development of “GBA standards”, which will help promote the harmonization of rules for the testing and certification sector and other sectors in GBA.

Second, we should further promote the interconnectivity of cross-boundary transport infrastructure, and expedite the implementation of various railway infrastructures set out in the Northern Metropolis Development Strategy, including the Hong Kong-Shenzhen Western Rail Link connecting Hung Shui Kiu/Xia Tsuen with Qianhai, Shenzhen, and make good use of the existing large-scale infrastructures connecting with the outside world, including the Hong Kong Section of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link, the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, the international cruise terminal and the international airport, so as to improve our cross-boundary land, sea and air transport systems, and to form a strategic transport network with other cities in GBA, the “Eight Verticals and Right Horizontals” high-speed rail network in China, as well as regions along the Belt and Road. Additionally, we should coordinate the

integration and utilization of resources of our existing airport, ports, railways and bridges, and divert the flow of passengers and goods from various airports and ports. Moreover, we should open up more 24-hour boundary control points and implement the clearance mode of “collaborative inspection and joint clearance”, striving to develop GBA into a world-class shipping and logistics hub, and strengthen Hong Kong’s position as an international shipping and aviation hub.

Given the institutional differences between Hong Kong and the Mainland, it is necessary to engage in high-level discussions to explore and foster various forms of cooperation. I am pleased to note that in 2022, the Chief Executive announced the establishment of the Steering Group on Integration into the National Development, assuming the role of chairman himself. In the future, the SAR Government should continue to urge the Mainland to remove barriers and restrictions in such areas as customs clearance, taxation, and the flow of people and capital. It should also promote the alignment of policies and rules, including tax concessions, business promotion and trade, admission of talents and other policy measures, as well as connectivity of cross-boundary software facilities such as digital identity authentication, electronic payment and data network. Moreover, the SAR Government should also actively collaborate with the Guangdong Provincial Government to develop the “Digital Bay Area” and promote “Cross-boundary Public Services” initiative, so as to effectively facilitate the cross-boundary flow of people, goods, capital, information and services.

I so submit.

SUSPENSION OF MEETING

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now suspend the meeting until 9:00 am tomorrow.

Suspended accordingly at 6:26 pm.

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 7

(Written Reply)

Asked by Hon Holden CHOW

Date of meeting : 17 January 2024

Replied by : Secretary for Health

Reply

President,

The Chief Executive announced in the 2022 Policy Address to conduct a comprehensive review of the dental services provided or subsidised by the Government. The Working Group on Oral Health and Dental Care (Working Group) was subsequently established in end 2022. The review covers policy objectives, implementation strategies, service scopes and delivery models of oral health and dental care, existing local dental services and supporting arrangements, primary dental services and manpower resources of dental professionals. With reference to the preliminary recommendations made by the Working Group earlier, the Chief Executive announced in the 2023 Policy Address a series of measures, to increase the manpower of dental professionals, including the introduction of the amendment bill to the Dentists Registration Ordinance (Cap. 156) into the Legislative Council to modernise the regulatory framework for dentists and ancillary dental workers (including dental hygienists and dental therapists), and to gradually increase training places for ancillary dental workers from 2023/24 academic year, with a view to enhancing the dental services for different age groups and target groups.

At present, there are two types of ancillary dental workers who provide dental care services to patients in Hong Kong, namely dental hygienists and dental therapists. Dental hygienists can work in the public or private sector, and may perform preventive dental care (e.g. education, consultation, risk assessment, regular screening, application of fluorides and scaling) in accordance with the directions of a dentist who is available in the premises at all times when such work is being carried out. Dental therapists work only under the Department of Health (DH) to provide the School Dental Care Service. Dental therapists may perform preventive dental care and basic curative dental care (e.g. dental restoration and extraction) in accordance with the directions of a dentist who is available in the premises at all times when such work is being carried out.

The reply to the questions raised by Hon Holden Chow is as follows –

(1) and (2)

According to the information provided by the Dental Council of Hong Kong, as at December 2023, the total number of dental hygienists enrolled under the Ancillary Dental Workers (Dental Hygienists) Regulations (Cap. 156B) is 612.

In the past five years, the number of newly enrolled dental hygienists in Hong Kong each year, who are graduates from the two-year Higher Diploma in Dental Hygiene programme co-organised by the Prince Philip Dental Hospital (PPDH) and School of Professional and Continuing Education of the University of Hong Kong (HKU SPACE) or holders of non-local qualifications, are tabulated below –

Year	Number of newly enrolled dental hygienists
2019	23
2020	2
2021	34
2022	27
2023	54

Note: As a result of class suspension during the COVID-19 pandemic, the enrolment of graduates for the Higher Diploma in Dental Hygiene programme from 2019/20 to 2021/22 academic year was postponed by one year respectively.

As for dental therapists, they are currently not required for statutory registration or enrolment. At present, all dental therapists work under DH to provide the School Dental Care Service. As at December 2023, there are 237 dental therapists in DH. Currently, those who have graduated from the one-year Advanced Diploma in Dental Therapy programme jointly organised by PPDH, DH and HKU SPACE (or equivalent qualifications) meet the professional requirement for pursuing career as a dental therapist.

In the past five academic years, the respective number of graduates from the programmes of Higher Diploma in Dental Hygiene and Advanced Diploma in Dental Therapy are tabulated as follows –

Academic Year	Number of graduates	
	Higher Diploma in Dental Hygiene	Advanced Diploma in Dental Therapy
2018/19	22	10
2019/20	33	10
2020/21	27	9
2021/22	28	12
2022/23	26	10

(3)

In its interim report recently promulgated in December 2023, the Working Group considered that it is insufficient to merely rely on the dentist workforce to meet the needs for enhancing dental care services, and that ancillary dental workers could play a more significant role in the delivery of dental care services. It also suggested exploring whether ancillary dental workers should be allowed to perform more primary dental services. We are considering to enable dental hygienists and dental therapists to perform preventive dental care (e.g. education, consultation, risk assessment, regular screening and application of fluorides) without the presence of a dentist, and dental therapists to perform basic curative dental care (e.g. dental restoration and extraction) in accordance with the directions of a dentist who is available in the premises at all times when such work is being carried out.

The Government plans to introduce the amendment bill to the Dentists Registration Ordinance into the Legislative Council in the first half of this year, which covers suitably adjusting the scope of work of ancillary dental workers, and introducing a statutory registration system for both dental hygienists and dental therapists to enhance the standard of professional training and management of ancillary dental workers under the regulatory control of the Dental Council of Hong Kong, with a view to establishing their professional status and ensuring patients' safety and service quality. After enhancing the training and professional development pathways for dental therapists, we will enable dental therapists to work in the public or private sectors in a timely manner so as to tie in with their roles in dental care services.

(4)

To enhance local training, in addition to increasing training places for the programmes of Higher Diploma in Dental Hygiene and Advanced Diploma in Dental Therapy organised by HKU SPACE, the Government is currently liaising with the Vocational Training Council for organising new course. The provision

of training places of dental hygienists and dental therapists will be increased to nearly double from 95 in the 2023/24 academic year to 185 in the 2024/25 academic year.

- End -

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 8

(Written Reply)

Asked by Ir Hon CHAN Siu-hung

Date of meeting : 17 January 2024

Replied by :

Secretary for Environment and Ecology

Reply

President,

In consultation with the Housing Bureau, Transport Department and Government Logistics Department, I would like to reply to the question raised by the Ir Hon Chan as follows:

- (1) As at end-November 2023, the total numbers of private cars and electric private cars (e-PCs) in Hong Kong were 645 490 and 72 011 respectively, with e-PCs accounting for about 11.2% of all private cars.

According to the statistics of the Government Logistics Department (GLD), the numbers and percentages of electric vehicles (EVs) and hybrid vehicles in the government fleet under various departments in the past three years are tabulated in Annex.

- (2) The Environmental Protection Department updated the green procurement practice for government vehicles in July 2021, setting out the use of EVs as the standard when procuring or replacing government private cars with five seats or less, unless circumstances such as operational needs that render the use of EVs infeasible. The Government has been following the green procurement practice in procuring EVs, having regard to the operational needs of the policy bureaux and departments as well as the actual market situation.

Statistics of the GLD showed that 55 (about 63.2%) of the 87 government private cars with five seats or less (including both new and replacement vehicles) procured by the Government in 2023 were EVs. According to the information from the departments concerned, the main reason for not switching to EVs is that current models of e-PCs available on the market are unable to meet the actual operational needs, such as long hours of outdoor

operations, thereby making it difficult to have sufficient time for recharging. As quick charging support is required for the daily operation of some government vehicles, relevant government departments have started installing quick chargers progressively for quick top-ups with a view to expediting the transition of their fleets to EVs.

- (3) The Government updated the Joint Circular on Green Government Buildings in March 2023, stipulating that all parking spaces for private cars, motorcycles and light goods vehicles (whether indoors or outdoors) within the boundaries of newly built government buildings with tender documents issued on or after 1 April 2023 must be fully equipped with medium EV chargers. As for existing government buildings, where technically feasible, efforts would be taken to provide EV charging facilities for all parking spaces for private cars, motorcycles and light goods vehicles. It is also noted that relevant bureaux/departments have planned to install EV chargers in the car parks of their staff quarters. We will provide technical and policy support regarding future installation of EV charging facilities for them to assist in following up on the related matters.
- (4) The Hong Kong Housing Authority classifies applicants for monthly parking spaces in its carparks into different priority categories according to the prevailing policy, and determines the priority of applicants for parking spaces allocation by ballot based on the type of parking spaces and the category of the applicant. For the sake of fairness, the same mechanism for determining the priority of allocation of monthly parking spaces is applicable to both applicants for EVs space and applicants for non-EVs space. Nevertheless, for the best use of resources, if the applicant's vehicle is an EV and he/she is allocated with a monthly parking space according to his/her priority, he/she is allowed to select a space with EV charger according to his/her priority before other applicants with non-EVs.

Annex

The Numbers and Percentages of Electric Vehicles and Hybrid Vehicles in the Government Fleet under Various Departments

Policy Bureau / Department / Organisation	(i) Total no. of vehicles (establishment)			(ii) No. of electric vehicles (establishment)			(iii) No. of hybrid vehicles (establishment)			(iv) Percentage of electric vehicles			(v) Percentage of hybrid vehicles		
	2021	2022	2023	2021	2022	2023	2021	2022	2023	2021	2022	2023	2021	2022	2023
Administration Wing	28	27	29	3	3	4	4	4	3	10.7%	11.1%	13.8%	14.3%	14.8%	10.3%
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department	211	212	212	9	9	10	0	0	0	4.3%	4.2%	4.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Auxiliary Medical Service	19	19	19	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Architectural Services Department	9	9	9	1	1	1	0	0	0	11.1%	11.1%	11.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Audit Commission	2	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Buildings Department	40	40	40	9	9	10	1	1	1	22.5%	22.5%	25.0%	2.5%	2.5%	2.5%
Customs and Excise Department	215	217	225	7	7	15	6	6	4	3.3%	3.2%	6.7%	2.8%	2.8%	1.8%
Census and Statistics Department	3	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Civil Aviation Department	15	15	15	5	5	6	0	0	0	33.3%	33.3%	40.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Civil Aid Service	40	40	40	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Commerce and Economic Development Bureau	6	4	4	1	1	1	2	1	1	16.7%	25.0%	25.0%	33.3%	25.0%	25.0%
Civil Engineering and Development Department	41	41	41	2	2	2	0	0	0	4.9%	4.9%	4.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Chief Executive's Office	8	8	8	1	1	1	2	0	0	12.5%	12.5%	12.5%	25.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau	3	3	3	0	0	0	1	1	1	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%
Companies Registry	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Policy Bureau / Department / Organisation	(i) Total no. of vehicles (establishment)			(ii) No. of electric vehicles (establishment)			(iii) No. of hybrid vehicles (establishment)			(iv) Percentage of electric vehicles			(v) Percentage of hybrid vehicles		
	2021	2022	2023	2021	2022	2023	2021	2022	2023	2021	2022	2023	2021	2022	2023
Civil Service Bureau	3	3	3	0	0	0	1	1	1	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%
Correctional Services Department	127	131	131	1	1	1	0	0	0	0.8%	0.8%	0.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau	N/A	5	5	N/A	0	0	N/A	4	4	N/A	0.0%	0.0%	N/A	80.0%	80.0%
Development Bureau	6	6	6	0	0	0	1	1	1	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	16.7%	16.7%	16.7%
Department of Health	57	57	57	1	1	2	0	0	0	1.8%	1.8%	3.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Department of Justice	8	11	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Drainage Services Department	45	45	45	6	6	5	0	0	0	13.3%	13.3%	11.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Education Bureau	6	5	6	0	0	1	2	1	1	0.0%	0.0%	16.7%	33.3%	20.0%	16.7%
Environment Bureau*	2	N/A	N/A	1	N/A	N/A	1	N/A	N/A	50.0%	N/A	N/A	50.0%	N/A	N/A
Environment and Ecology Bureau	N/A	4	8	N/A	1	2	N/A	1	1	N/A	25.0%	25.0%	N/A	25.0%	12.5%
Electrical and Mechanical Services Department	202	202	202	17	17	17	5	5	1	8.4%	8.4%	8.4%	2.5%	2.5%	0.5%
Environmental Protection Department	52	52	47	2	2	1	0	0	0	3.8%	3.8%	2.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department	718	718	718	5	4	4	2	2	2	0.7%	0.6%	0.6%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%
Fire Services Department	741	804	819	5	5	4	18	18	7	0.7%	0.6%	0.5%	2.4%	2.2%	0.9%
Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau	3	3	3	0	0	1	2	2	1	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	66.7%	66.7%	33.3%
Government Flying Service	4	4	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Government Logistics Department	61	62	63	3	3	6	5	4	3	4.9%	4.8%	9.5%	8.2%	6.5%	4.8%
Government Laboratory	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Government Property Agency	2	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Policy Bureau / Department / Organisation	(i) Total no. of vehicles (establishment)			(ii) No. of electric vehicles (establishment)			(iii) No. of hybrid vehicles (establishment)			(iv) Percentage of electric vehicles			(v) Percentage of hybrid vehicles		
	2021	2022	2023	2021	2022	2023	2021	2022	2023	2021	2022	2023	2021	2022	2023
Home Affairs Department	28	29	29	0	0	0	6	4	4	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	21.4%	13.8%	13.8%
Housing Bureau	N/A	0	0	N/A	0	0	N/A	0	0	N/A	0.0%	0.0%	N/A	0.0%	0.0%
Food and Health Bureau*	6	N/A	N/A	0	N/A	N/A	1	N/A	N/A	0.0%	N/A	N/A	16.7%	N/A	N/A
Health Bureau	N/A	4	4	N/A	0	0	N/A	1	1	N/A	0.0%	0.0%	N/A	25.0%	25.0%
Hong Kong Monetary Authority	5	5	5	0	0	0	1	1	1	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	20.0%	20.0%	20.0%
Hong Kong Observatory	8	8	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Hong Kong Police Force	2 707	2 877	2 892	35	29	34	107	109	59	1.3%	1.0%	1.2%	4.0%	3.8%	2.0%
Hongkong Post	271	267	254	9	7	7	33	12	12	3.3%	2.6%	2.8%	12.2%	4.5%	4.7%
Housing Department	51	51	51	4	4	4	1	1	1	7.8%	7.8%	7.8%	2.0%	2.0%	2.0%
Home Affairs Bureau*	7	N/A	N/A	1	N/A	N/A	3	N/A	N/A	14.3%	N/A	N/A	42.9%	N/A	N/A
Home and Youth Affairs Bureau	N/A	6	6	N/A	1	1	N/A	1	1	N/A	16.7%	16.7%	N/A	16.7%	16.7%
Highways Department	46	47	47	2	2	2	0	0	0	4.3%	4.3%	4.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Independent Commission Against Corruption	38	38	38	0	0	2	2	2	0	0.0%	0.0%	5.3%	5.3%	5.3%	0.0%
Immigration Department	36	36	36	1	1	1	0	0	0	2.8%	2.8%	2.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Invest Hong Kong	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Intellectual Property Department	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Inland Revenue Department	4	4	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Information Services Department	8	8	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Innovation and Technology Commission	3	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Policy Bureau / Department / Organisation	(i) Total no. of vehicles (establishment)			(ii) No. of electric vehicles (establishment)			(iii) No. of hybrid vehicles (establishment)			(iv) Percentage of electric vehicles			(v) Percentage of hybrid vehicles		
	2021	2022	2023	2021	2022	2023	2021	2022	2023	2021	2022	2023	2021	2022	2023
Innovation and Technology Bureau*	2	N/A	N/A	0	N/A	N/A	1	N/A	N/A	0.0%	N/A	N/A	50.0%	N/A	N/A
Innovation, Technology and Industry Bureau	N/A	2	2	N/A	0	0	N/A	1	1	N/A	0.0%	0.0%	N/A	50.0%	50.0%
Joint Secretariat for the Advisory Bodies on Civil Service and Judicial Salaries and Conditions of Service	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Judiciary	24	24	24	0	0	0	13	9	6	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	54.2%	37.5%	25.0%
Legal Aid Department	2	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Lands Department	172	172	172	5	4	4	0	0	0	2.9%	2.3%	2.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Leisure and Cultural Services Department	152	151	150	4	3	2	1	1	1	2.6%	2.0%	1.3%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%
Labour Department	27	27	27	2	2	4	0	0	0	7.4%	7.4%	14.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Land Registry	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Labour and Welfare Bureau	3	3	3	0	0	0	1	1	1	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%
Marine Department	5	5	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Office of the Communications Authority	21	21	21	2	2	2	0	0	0	9.5%	9.5%	9.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Office of the Government Chief Information Officer	3	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Official Receiver's Office	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Planning Department	12	12	12	1	1	1	0	0	0	8.3%	8.3%	8.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Public Service Commission	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Registration and Electoral Office	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Policy Bureau / Department / Organisation	(i) Total no. of vehicles (establishment)			(ii) No. of electric vehicles (establishment)			(iii) No. of hybrid vehicles (establishment)			(iv) Percentage of electric vehicles			(v) Percentage of hybrid vehicles		
	2021	2022	2023	2021	2022	2023	2021	2022	2023	2021	2022	2023	2021	2022	2023
Radio Television Hong Kong	24	24	24	1	1	1	0	0	0	4.2%	4.2%	4.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Rating and Valuation Department	7	7	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Security Bureau	3	3	3	0	0	0	2	2	2	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	66.7%	66.7%	66.7%
Secretariat, Commissioner on Interception of Communications and Surveillance	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Social Welfare Department	29	29	30	3	3	5	0	0	0	10.3%	10.3%	16.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Transport Department	213	219	241	1	1	2	0	0	0	0.5%	0.5%	0.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Trade and Industry Department	2	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Transport and Housing Bureau*	2	N/A	N/A	0	N/A	N/A	1	N/A	N/A	0.0%	N/A	N/A	50.0%	N/A	N/A
Transport and Logistics Bureau	N/A	2	2	N/A	0	0	N/A	1	1	N/A	0.0%	0.0%	N/A	50.0%	50.0%
Treasury	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
University Grants Committee Secretariat	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency	2	2	2	2	2	2	0	0	0	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Water Supplies Department	249	249	248	12	12	11	2	1	1	4.8%	4.8%	4.4%	0.8%	0.4%	0.4%
Total	6 861	7 108	7 158	164	153	179	230	201	126	2.4%	2.2%	2.5%	3.4%	2.8%	1.8%

* The policy bureaux concerned have been reorganised and replaced in the restructuring of the Government in July 2022.

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 9

(Written Reply)

Asked by: Hon CHAN Kin-por

Date of meeting : 17 January 2024

Replied by : Secretary for Development

Reply

President,

Regarding the Honourable Member's question about the "Mandatory Window Inspection Scheme" ("MWIS"), my reply is as follows:

- (1) In the past five years, the numbers of fallen window cases in private buildings aged 10 years or above received by the Buildings Department (BD) are listed below:-

Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
No. of fallen window cases	77	46	40	32	48

- (2) In the past five years, the BD had issued a total of about 180 000 notices under the MWIS ("notices") to some 2 800 private buildings. Breakdown by the relevant building types are tabulated below:-

Year	No. of "Notices"	No. of Buildings involved	Type of Buildings			
			Domestic/ Composite	Commercial / Hotel	Industrial	Others (e.g. Institution or community facilities)
2019	25 772	435	412	0	1	22
2020	26 322	486	475	0	4	7
2021	46 605	689	677	1	1	10
2022	49 930	603	594	0	1	8
2023	32 588	637	622	1	3	11
Total	181 217	2 850	2 780	2	10	58

Starting from 2021, BD increased the number of buildings selected for the MWIS each year from about 400 earlier to 600. A large number of these buildings have been concurrently selected for Mandatory Building Inspection Scheme (MBIS) under the risk-based approach. The remaining buildings that only received MWIS notices are selected taking into account records of fallen window cases, window conditions, building clusters¹, etc.

The current selection arrangement has not set a target number for different types of the building. It mainly takes into account the maintenance of building elements and windows, which are directly related to the management quality of the building itself. The owners of domestic/composite buildings are usually less effective in daily building management and maintenance than those of industrial and commercial buildings. In this regards, the about 600 buildings selected by the BD under the risk-based approach will mainly be domestic/ composite buildings. The figures in the table above show that the MWIS notices have been mainly issued to domestic/ composite building in the past five years, which reflects this policy intent.

The Policy Address 2023 announced a review on the execution of the MBIS policy, with one of the directions being a more precise selection of target buildings for issuance of MBIS notices. This also applies to the issuance of MWIS notices, so as to enhance building safety more comprehensively. We will put forward specific proposals in the first quarter of this year.

- (3) Generally speaking, in cases of expired “notices” that have not been complied with, the BD will first issue warning letters to the owners to urge for compliance. Otherwise, the BD may serve a penalty notice to the owner under section 40(1BE) of the Buildings Ordinance, requiring him/her to pay a fixed penalty of \$1,500. If the owner continues to fail to comply with the “notices” served without reasonable excuse, the BD may serve a further penalty notice or instigate prosecution. With prosecution instigated and once convicted, the offender is liable to a fine at level 4 (\$25,000 at present) and to imprisonment for 3 months; as well as to a further fine of \$2,000 for each day during which it is proved to the satisfaction of the court that the offence has continued.

In the past five years, the numbers of expired “notices” that have not been complied with, percentage of non-compliance, numbers of prosecution cases and fixed penalty notices issued are tabulated below. The BD does not

¹ The other buildings within the same lot or share the same Deed of Mutual Covenant (which owners share maintenance and repair responsibility for the common parts) with the selected target building will also be selected.

compile statistics on the average overdue period for non-compliant “notices” and the penalties imposed on offenders in convicted cases.

Year	No. of “notices”	No. of expired “notices” that have not been complied with	Percentage of non-compliance (%)	No. of fixed penalty notices issued ⁽¹⁾	No. of prosecution cases ⁽¹⁾
2019	25 772	2 192	8	1 687	68
2020	26 322	2 141	8	1 843	46
2021	46 605	3 343	7	3 214	270
2022	49 930	5 027	10	2 573	345
2023	32 588	5 123	16	2 967	318
Total	181 217	17 826	-	12 284	1 047

Note⁽¹⁾: Figures may not correspond to the “notices” issued in that year

The Policy Address 2023 announced that a review on the Buildings Ordinance will be conducted to enhance enforcement power by the BD. We will explore streamline the prosecution procedures, lowering the prosecution threshold, as well as rising penalties against non-compliance with notices served under the MBIS and the MWIS, so as to increase prosecution efficiency and chances of conviction, and to increase the deterrent effect. We will put forward the amendment proposal this year and conduct consultation, with the aim of submitting the amendment bill to the Legislative Council as soon as possible.

- (4) For publicity and education, the BD has all along been providing the public with information on the proper use, good maintenance, and care of windows through various channels such as official website, social media, posters, etc. These include the pamphlet “Important notes about window safety” and guideline “Layman’s guide on MWIS”. The BD has also launched a mobile application “WINSAFE” to encourage owners to, in accordance with the requirements of the MWIS, regularly appoint a qualified person to inspect and supervise repair works of the windows in their premises. The BD will continue its efforts in publicity and education work.

- End -

LEGCO QUESTION NO.10

(Written Reply)

Asked by Hon Edmund WONG

Date of meeting : 17 January 2024

Replied by : Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury

Reply

President,

With the global concern and focus on achieving carbon neutrality and promoting green transformation, allowing investors to obtain more information to understand how climate change affects the business operations, assets, and financial condition of their investments is of utmost importance.

In consultation with the Securities and Futures Commission (SFC) and Hong Kong Exchanges and Clearing Limited (HKEX), my reply to the three parts of the question is as follows.

(1) and (3)

The International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB) published the International Financial Reporting Standards - Sustainability Disclosure Standards (ISSB Standards) in June 2023, as the global baseline for corporate disclosure of climate and sustainability-related information.

In the Policy Measures of the Chief Executive's 2023 Policy Address, the Government has committed to working with financial regulators and stakeholders to develop a roadmap on the appropriate adoption of the ISSB Standards.

Formed by the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau (FSTB), the Environment and Ecology Bureau, the Hong Kong Monetary Authority, the SFC, the Insurance Authority, the Mandatory Provident Fund Schemes Authority, the Accounting and Financial Reporting Council, and HKEX, the Green and Sustainable Finance Cross-Agency Steering Group (Steering Group) has expressed support for adopting the ISSB Standards. The Steering Group has set up a working group, which is co-led by FSTB and the SFC with members comprising financial regulatory authorities and stakeholders (including HKEX

and the Hong Kong Institute of Certified Public Accountants), to prepare the roadmap. The roadmap will comprise four key areas, namely sustainability reporting, assurance, data and technology, and capacity building. The working group will start the engagement with stakeholders to identify the specific circumstances that should be considered when implementing the ISSB Standards in Hong Kong.

In 2019, HKEX conducted consultation on assurance arrangements in its consultation paper on environmental, social and governance (ESG) reporting. Respondents raised concerns on the varied quality of assurance in the absence of an accredited authority to govern the standards of assurance service. As an internationally-recognised ESG assurance standard was yet to be available, HKEX decided not to require issuers to obtain independent assurance for ESG information, and included provisions in the ESG Reporting Guide (Guide) published in July 2020 to encourage (instead of require) issuers to seek independence assurance to enhance the credibility of ESG information.

In March 2023, the International Organization of Securities Commissions (IOSCO) Sustainable Finance Task Force (STF) set out its expectations of a global assurance framework for sustainability reporting. In August 2023, the International Auditing and Assurance Standards Board (IAASB) launched a consultation on its proposed International Standard on Sustainability Assurance 5000, which closed on 1 December. The final standards to be published by the IAASB are expected to be the globally-accepted sustainability assurance standards. The STF will review the final standards developed by the IAASB and the International Ethics Standards Board for Accountants respectively. If these final standards are considered as agreeable, the IOSCO will encourage its members to adopt or apply them voluntarily or mandatorily (or through other means) based on their own needs.

Establishing assurance standards can increase the credibility of sustainability-related information. We in collaboration with regulatory authorities concerned and HKEX will closely monitor international developments and diligently work with stakeholders in considering the approach suited to Hong Kong's needs.

(2)

Since July 2020, the Guide has included requirements for listed companies to disclose their boards' oversight and governance of ESG issues, ESG management approach and strategy, and how the boards review progress against ESG-related goals. Listed companies' ESG reports have showed that the vast majority have disclosed how their boards oversee and manage ESG issues, and provided

information on their ESG governance structures as well as ESG working groups or committees. There is no plan at this stage to mandate issuers to establish ESG committees under the Guide.

- End -

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 11

(Written Reply)

Asked by: Hon Dominic LEE

Date of meeting: 17 January 2024

**Replied by: Secretary for Environment
and Ecology**

Reply

President,

My consolidated reply to the questions raised by the Hon Dominic Lee is as follows:

(1) and (2)

The policy objective of municipal solid waste charging (MSW charging) is to encourage the community to reduce waste at source and strengthen recycling efforts by creating financial disincentives through quantity-based charging, with a view to reducing the overall waste disposal amount. To be prudent in the use of public resources, we will focus on assisting households that genuinely require more support in adapting to MSW charging. The Government will distribute free DBs to residents of “three-nil” buildings, rural village houses and public rental housing (PRH) estates during the initial stage of implementation of MSW charging, taking into account that many of the “three-nil” buildings and rural village houses are old buildings without proper building management hence their residents might require longer time and more support to adapt to MSW charging as compared with residential buildings with PMCs. Moreover, residents of PRH estates account for about 30 per cent of the Hong Kong population with grassroots as the majority, and many of whom are the elderly. They might also need more backing to adapt to MSW charging and change their habits.

As for other private residential premises, property management, security or cleansing companies may apply for bulk purchase of DBs from the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) with the approval of relevant owners’ organisations, and distribute the DBs to residents for use to facilitate the residents to adapt to the MSW charging arrangements. After the applications are approved, the EPD will offer a service fee equivalent to 3 per cent of the statutory price of each DB to applicants so as to cover their additional operating expenses.

Furthermore, we have arranged briefings for different building organisations (including the property management trade, cleansing companies and owners' organisations). As at end December 2023, the EPD has organised 52 briefings, reaching out to over 6 000 stakeholders. To facilitate the property management industry in better understanding the arrangements of MSW charging, the EPD is working with the Property Management Services Authority to organise continuing professional development seminars on MSW charging under its Continuing Professional Development Scheme, which are targeted at holders of the Property Management Practitioner Licence and representatives of licensed property management companies, to enhance their knowledge on MSW charging for handling property management duties.

The EPD's Green Outreach has commenced promotion for MSW charging in mid-August 2023 by providing support for waste reduction and recycling in the community and through promotional activities and on-site demonstrations at housing estates, residential buildings, GREEN@COMMUNITY facilities (such as Recycling Spots in old districts), etc., to engage different groups of citizens, including students, the elderly, housewives, residents of single-block buildings and "three-nil" buildings, foreign domestic helpers, ethnic minorities, etc., so as to enhance public understanding of MSW charging and educate citizens and frontline staff of housing estates and residential buildings to comply with the legislative requirements and proactively practise waste reduction and recycling for the implementation of MSW charging. As at end December 2023, the Green Outreach has organised about 900 promotional activities in relation to MSW charging, attracting over 90 thousand participants, with the promotions covering housing estates and residential buildings which house around 60 per cent of the Hong Kong population. We are also discussing with the Home Affairs Department on promoting MSW charging through Care Teams in the 18 Districts at their respective districts.

(3)

To encourage members of the public for the active participation in waste separation and recycling, the EPD has been expanding the community recycling network to strengthen support for recycling facilities at the district level. There are currently 11 Recycling Stations emphasising on both environmental education and recycling support, 34 Recycling Stores located in close proximity to residential buildings and over 130 Recycling Spots operating weekly at fixed time and locations in the form of kerb-side collection booths under the GREEN@COMMUNITY throughout the 18 districts in Hong Kong for the collection of nine common types of recyclables. These include glass containers, plastics, small electrical appliances, fluorescent

lamps, rechargeable batteries and beverage cartons, which are lack of commercial recycling values. The service of GREEN@COMMUNITY has already covered about 80 per cent of the single-block buildings (including “three-nil” buildings) across the territory.

The 12th Recycling Station, GREEN@WONG TAI SIN, is currently under construction and expected to commence services in the fourth quarter of 2024. Moreover, GREEN@TSING YI, the first Recycling Store located inside an MTR station, will also commence services in the first quarter of 2024. The Operator has already started providing Recycling Spots and housing collection services in Kwai Tsing district since October 2023.

The strengthening of the recycling support in PRH estates will support the implementation of MSW charging. The EPD is establishing small-scale Recycling Stores in 50 PRH estates progressively, thereby providing a more convenient means for PRH and nearby residents to practise clean recycling so as to complement the implementation of MSW charging. Three of the small-scale Recycling Stores have already commenced operation, including GREEN@KWAI FONG, GREEN@TAI WO HAU and GREEN@KAI YIP, with the rest of these Recycling Stores to commence operation gradually from this month onwards. The EPD will review from time to time the operation of all community recycling facilities and specific needs of individual districts for recycling facilities with a view to improving the service of the community recycling network.

(4)

The implementation of MSW charging will help promote and encourage the public to actively participate in waste separation and recycling, thereby reducing the cost of purchasing DBs. We will closely monitor the recycling situation in the early stage of implementing MSW charging, and review and improve the measures including the “GREEN\$ Electronic Participation Incentive Scheme” so as to further draw and encourage more members of the public to participate in clean recycling. Currently, the general public can use GREEN\$ to redeem gifts and daily necessities. We plan to include DBs in the gift redemption list before the implementation of MSW charging. Details will be announced later.

(5)

The Government is committed to enhancing the environmental hygiene and cityscape of Hong Kong. In 2023, the Government amended the Fixed Penalty (Public Cleanliness and Obstruction) Ordinance (Cap. 570) to raise the fixed penalty level for the scheduled offences under the Fixed Penalty Ordinance, with a view to enhancing the efficiency, effectiveness and deterrent effect of enforcement

actions against environmental hygiene problems. To tackle illegal disposal of a large amount of construction waste or other waste, the fixed penalty for “unlawful depositing of waste” has been increased from \$1,500 to \$6,000. The relevant enforcement departments including the EPD, Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD), Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department, Leisure and Cultural Services Department, and Housing Department will monitor the illegal waste disposal situation and take enforcement actions in accordance with their respective authorities.

The EPD and the FEHD have installed surveillance camera systems, which operate 24 hours a day, at more than 600 popular locations across Hong Kong for illegal disposal of construction waste or refuse. They use the information collected from the video footage to institute prosecutions and plan more effective law enforcement actions, so as to increase deterrence.

The FEHD will also adopt a risk-based approach and flexibly deploy internal resources to strengthen special cleansing and clearance operations at black spots of illegal refuse disposal in public places, as well as strengthening inspections and monitoring, etc.

Relevant departments have been maintaining close communication through inter-departmental collaboration, including exchange of intelligence, sharing of information and holding joint meetings, etc., to collectively monitor the overall illegal waste disposal situation and make concerted efforts to combat illegal disposal activities.

- End -

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 12

(Written Reply)

Asked by: Hon Stanley NG

Date of meeting : 17 January 2024

Replied by : Secretary for Home and Youth Affairs

Reply

President,

“Three-nil buildings” generally refer to buildings that neither have an owners’ corporation (OC) or any form of residents’ organisation, nor employ a property management company (PMC) to manage the buildings. The Government has been providing various support to “three-nil buildings”. The policy of the Home Affairs Department (HAD) is to assist and encourage the formation of residents’ organisations (including OCs) in “three-nil buildings”. Even if “three-nil buildings” cannot form any residents’ organisation for various reasons, HAD continues to provide support to the owners concerned to help them manage their buildings properly. Having consulted the Development Bureau (DEVB), the reply to the questions raised by the Hon Stanley NG is as follows.

- (1)&(2) HAD launched three phases of the “Building Management Professional Advisory Service Scheme” (BMPASS) from 2011 to 2020. Experienced PMCs were engaged to provide a series of free professional advice and follow-up services on building management, including assisting in the formation of OCs or assisting defunct OCs in resuming operation, assisting OC in applying for various maintenance subsidies and loan schemes, and following up on building inspections/window inspections, maintenance works and tendering, etc. The three phases of the BMPASS assisted in forming/resuming operation of 540 OCs. In view of the effectiveness of the BMPASS, the HAD has regularised it.

With reference to the earlier recommendations of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of the Legislative Council, HAD engaged community organisations/non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with experiences in building management or related fields

to reach out to the owners of “three-nil buildings”, and to encourage and assist them to form OCs under the regularised BMPASS. The scheme was first launched in June 2022, and gradually extended to cover nine districts with more “three-nil buildings” (i.e. Sham Shui Po, Tsuen Wan, Central and Western District, Eastern District, Wan Chai, Yau Tsim Mong, North District, Tai Po and Kowloon City). As of December 2023, the Pilot Scheme contacted a total of 580 “three-nil buildings” and assisted in forming 70 OCs. The scheme has achieved good results, indicating that the participation of community organisations/NGOs has helped reach out to the owners of “three-nil buildings”. HAD will therefore consider entering into service agreements of a longer term with community organisations/NGOs (e.g. by extending the contract period from currently one year to three years) to ensure the continuity of the services, so that buildings and owners in need will enjoy better support.

Besides, according to the information provided by DEVB, in the past three years, the Buildings Department (BD) has exercised its statutory power to carry out building investigation, repair and removal works for 144 “three-nil buildings” as required by statutory orders involving common parts of buildings in the owners’ default, and to recover the relevant costs from them after completion. In addition, BD has also proactively selected 504 “three-nil buildings” as Category 2 buildings of “Operation Building Bright 2.0” (“OBB 2.0”) based on risk-based approach, and carried out the required prescribed inspection and repair for the common parts of the buildings under the “Mandatory Building Inspection and Mandatory Window Inspection Schemes” on behalf of the owners. The relevant costs will be recovered from them after completion. Eligible owners can apply for “OBB 2.0” subsidies to cover all or part of the costs.

- (3) Despite our continuous support and assistance, some “three-nil buildings” may not be able to form OC due to various reasons. Nevertheless, HAD remains committed to providing support to these buildings. HAD has put in place the Resident Liaison Ambassador Scheme to recruit owners or residents living in “three-nil buildings” aged 30 years or above as Resident Liaison Ambassadors (RLAs). The scheme aims to establish a resident liaison network to facilitate residents’ discussion and handling of daily building management matters, and to assist Government departments in contacting residents and promoting effective

building management messages. As of December 2023, HAD has assisted in the formation of about 600 OCs through RLAs, and there are around 2 000 RLAs residing in “three-nil buildings”.

The RLAs play a positive role in facilitating resident liaison. HAD will continue to actively promote good building management through the RLAs and organise regular activities for them. This will enable owners to appreciate the benefits of good building management, thereby encouraging them to form OCs.

As of December 2023, there were about 3 100 “three-nil buildings” (excluding those single-owned and self-managed “three-nil buildings”) in Hong Kong. In fact, with the continuous promotion of effective building management and related support measures, the number of “three-nil buildings” has significantly decreased from the corresponding figure of about 6 700 in 2011.

- (4) The Community Care Fund (CCF) launched a programme in three phases from 2012 to 2021 to provide subsidies to eligible OCs of old buildings for specified items, including procurement of public liability insurance or third party risks insurance for the common parts of the buildings, regular inspections of fire service installations and equipment or electrical installations, examination of lifts, and clearance of fire escapes, etc. Cumulatively, about 3 500 OCs benefited from the three phases of the programme, with a total subsidy of \$64 million. The programme was not applicable to “three-nil buildings”.

Upon review, the Commission on Poverty (CoP) considered that the Government had already provided a wide range of financial support for building maintenance, as well as practical support in various aspects of building management, including legal and other advisory services, dispute resolution, education and training, etc. Considering that building management is the responsibility of owners, the CoP concluded that the recurrent expenditure of OCs of old buildings should not be subsidised on an ongoing basis through the CCF or other means, and thus the programme ended upon completion of the Phase III.

Besides, according to the information provided by DEVB, since 2018, the Government has allocated over \$19 billion to roll out various subsidy schemes relating to building safety and rehabilitation in partnership with the Urban Renewal Authority

(URA), including OBB 2.0, the Fire Safety Improvement Works Subsidy Scheme, the Lift Modernisation Subsidy Scheme, the Building Maintenance Grant Scheme for Needy Owners and the Building Drainage System Repair Subsidy Scheme to assist needy owners to maintain their properties.

Understanding the constraints faced by the owners of “three-nil buildings” in forming OCs, the URA now also accepts applications for building rehabilitation subsidy schemes from owners of these “three-nil buildings”, provided that the unanimous consent of all owners is obtained. For those “three-nil buildings” which are unable to obtain the unanimous consent of all owners, the URA would provide free legal services to assist owners in understanding whether the provisions relating to rehabilitation in their Deed of Mutual Covenant allow owners to carry out repair and improvement works in common areas of the buildings through the effective resolutions passed in owners’ meetings.

In 2022, the URA took forward the urban renewal project in “Lung Shing” area of Kowloon City with an “integrated approach” for the first time. A small focus area from Nam Kok Road to Tak Ku Ling Road, covering around 40 buildings without the imminent need for redevelopment, was mapped out for a three-year “District-based Rehabilitation Pilot Scheme” (pilot scheme). Through providing financial subsidies and technical support to the owners, the URA encourages and assists the owners to repair and maintain their buildings in a timely manner.

Through the pilot scheme, the URA encourages and assists owners of “three-nil buildings” to form OCs. The URA also implements innovative management models such as the “Joint Property Management” (JPM), hoping that the experience gained can encourage the property management industry to provide joint management services for aged building clusters, so that aged buildings with only a dozen or so of units can also obtain property management services at affordable fees, thereby enhancing their building maintenance capabilities.

Out of the buildings covered in the pilot scheme, there were nine “three-nil buildings” which were unable to form OCs over the past decades. The URA proactively provided support to the owners of these buildings through collaboration with the local community partners as well as HAD, with the aims to encourage the formation

of OCs. Three out of the nine “three-nil buildings” have successfully formed OCs and commenced preparatory work for building rehabilitation, and four intend to join the JPM. Moreover, a total of 14 buildings have joined OBB 2.0 or other building rehabilitation subsidy schemes to carry out maintenance work either by themselves or through government contractors.

Timely and proper maintenance of buildings is after all the basic responsibility of owners. As to whether more building maintenance subsidy schemes can be introduced, since the use of public funds to subsidise maintenance works in private properties will be involved, the Government has to carefully consider the pros and cons. The Government will formulate measures in the light of the latest situation, including factors such as financial resources.

LEGCO QUESTION No. 13

(Written Reply)

Asked by: Hon CHAN Hok-fung Date of meeting: 17 January 2024

Replied by: Secretary for Culture,
Sports and Tourism

Reply

President,

In respect of the question raised by the Hon CHAN Hok-fung, having consulted the Security Bureau and the Transport and Logistics Bureau, the reply is as follows:

- (1) The Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) organised the largest-ever “Hong Kong New Year Countdown Celebrations” firework musical on New Year’s Eve, which was one of the HKSAR Government’s mega events in 2023. The event attracted a total of 480 000 locals and tourists on both sides of the Victoria Harbour to welcome 2024. Visitors had very high satisfaction towards the fireworks according to HKTB’s analysis. Various media from the Mainland and overseas made live broadcast or reported the event, which brought great publicity and promotion to Hong Kong. In preparation for the firework musical, the Tourism Commission and HKTB held an inter-departmental meeting with relevant government departments and maintained close communication with them to facilitate various departments to grasp detailed information and operational issues of the event for planning ahead matters related to major events under their respective portfolios such as crowd control, land and sea transportation, as well as emergency rescue services, etc., with a view to ensuring the smooth implementation of the event.

Relevant departments of the HKSAR Government have been maintaining close liaison with relevant Mainland and Macao authorities to make comprehensive preparation and planning before festive periods, deploy staff flexibly and formulate contingency measures with a view to ensuring the orderly operation of boundary control points (BCPs).

- (2) In view of the resumption of normal travel between the Mainland and Hong Kong since early February last year, the Hong Kong and Shenzhen governments have been closely monitoring the demand for clearance services at various land BCPs. On the basis of the 24-hour passenger clearance services at Lok Ma Chau/Huanggang Control Point and Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge Hong Kong Port, we may discuss with Mainland authorities on extending the operating hours of the passenger clearance service at certain land BCPs as and when necessary to further facilitate the flow of people between the two sides.

Regarding extension of service hours of land BCPs prior to Lunar New Year next month, the HKSAR Government is actively discussing different proposals, including extending service hours of certain land BCPs, with Mainland authorities with a view to facilitating the dispersal of cross-boundary visitors during special days or major events.

- (3) Prior to major long holidays, the HKSAR Government will announce through press releases and social media apps the expected passenger flow during the holiday period, and encourage the public and passengers to plan their trips in advance and make good use of BCPs with less passenger traffic, while appealing to Mainland travellers and Hong Kong residents planning to enter or leave Hong Kong to cross the border during non-peak hours as far as possible, with a view to minimising the congestion at land BCPs during the morning and evening peak hours during holiday periods.
- (4) Currently, if visitors would like to take cross-boundary coaches to travel between the Mainland and Hong Kong, apart from purchasing tickets at cross-boundary coach terminus, they may also pre-order coach tickets on websites of relevant cross-boundary coach operators, or through mobile applications such as WeChat and Alipay. The Transport Department (TD) has all along been maintaining close liaison with the cross-boundary coach trade and urged the trade to further enhance the use of social media of the Mainland to disseminate information on the operation and ticketing in relation to cross-boundary coach service with a view to facilitating Mainland visitors to plan their journey in advance.

The HKSAR Government will also coordinate with public transport operators (including the MTR Corporation Limited) on public transport service arrangements, in order to tie in with the opening hours of BCPs.

- (5) Under the Road Traffic (Public Service Vehicles) Regulations (Cap. 374D) (the Regulations), the fare for hiring of taxis should generally be calculated

in accordance with the scale of fares specified in Schedule 5 to the Regulations (i.e. the fare as shown on the taximeter). If a taxi picks up passengers directly on the street or at a taxi stand on a non-booked basis, the taxi driver should charge the meter fare. Besides, under Regulation 38 of the Regulations, a registered owner of a general taxi may also hire the taxi to a hirer on a hire-as-a-whole basis.

On the enforcement front, the Police has been closely monitoring and following up complaints about taxi drivers suspected of committing offences. If a member of the public suspects that a taxi driver has committed offences such as refusal to hire and overcharging, he or she can record the name of the driver, vehicle registration mark, time and location, etc., and report the matter to the Police. If there is sufficient evidence, the Police will definitely take enforcement action. Besides, the Police conducted a special operation during the National Day Golden Week last year to combat illegal activities of taxi drivers. The Police will continue to deploy appropriate resources to combat taxi driver-related offences.

To facilitate passenger diversion during major festivals, TD will continue to remind the taxi trade to pay special attention to the situation at BCPs and areas with more tourists. At present, there are already taxi operators providing online taxi booking services to facilitate hailing of taxis by passengers. The HKSAR Government has also amended the legislation to introduce a taxi fleet regime, under which taxi fleet licensees will be required to provide online booking channels (including mobile application and website) for passengers to hail fleet taxis. TD plans to invite applications for taxi fleet licences in the first half of this year so that the fleet taxis may commence operation as soon as possible.

- (6) The Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism convened a meeting on 15 January 2024 to co-ordinate the preparation for visitor arrivals to Hong Kong during the eight-day Chinese New Year Golden Week of the Mainland from 10 to 17 February. In view of the anticipated increase of visitor arrivals to Hong Kong during the Chinese New Year Golden Week of the Mainland, various relevant departments of the HKSAR Government and organisations are working closely together, making early preparations for deployment of resources as well as stepping up co-ordination and communication with their respective Mainland counterparts so as to create good travel experiences for the visitors arriving in Hong Kong during the Golden Week.

In view of the surge in passenger and vehicular flow during festive periods,

the Inter-departmental Joint Command Centre, composed of relevant departments including Customs and Excise Department, the Hong Kong Police Force, and the Immigration Department, etc., will be activated during the period to monitor the situation at each BCP and take contingency actions where necessary. Manpower will be deployed flexibly according to the passenger flow, and more e-Channels and counters will also be opened to facilitate passenger and vehicular movement, so as to ensure that BCPs are operating in an orderly manner.

- End -

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 14

(Written Reply)

Asked by Hon CHAN Chun-ying

Date of meeting : 17 January 2024

Replied by : Secretary for Development

Reply

President,

The reply to the various parts of the questions is as follows:

- (1) The City Gallery (CG) showcases the achievements of Hong Kong's planning and infrastructure development. It provides a venue for permanent exhibits and thematic exhibitions, and acts as a platform for collaboration and exchange of planning ideas as well as public engagement. Besides permanent exhibits, 40 thematic exhibitions were conducted in the past five years. The number and the contents of the thematic exhibitions in each of the past five years are set out at Annex.
- (2) The total number of visitation at CG in each of the past five years is:

Year ⁽¹⁾	Number of Visitation in the Whole Year
2019	147 778
2020	10 940 (on-site: 4 776 and online: 6 164)
2021	69 333 (on-site: 58 463 and online: 10 870)
2022	325 926 ⁽²⁾ (on-site: 133 696 and online: 192 230)
2023 ⁽³⁾	96 067 (on-site: 83 455 and online: 12 612)

Notes:

1. CG was closed intermittently from 29 January 2020 to 25 April 2022 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. The number of visitation of the exhibition "Envisioning Beyond Legacy" (264 000 in total, including on-site: 111 000 and online: 153 000) has been included. The exhibition, jointly presented by the Development Bureau and the Planning Department, was held from 6 July 2022 to 30 November 2022 (the outdoor exhibition ended on 2

January 2023) to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the establishment of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

3. CG was closed from 20 December 2022 to 31 March 2023 to facilitate repair works of air-conditioning facilities.

- (3) From September 2014 to June 2019, CG organised “School Thematic Tour Scheme” programmes with different themes each year. This Scheme mainly aimed to introduce the exhibits systematically via guided tour, encourage students to learn proactively and enhance their understanding about the planning and infrastructural developments of Hong Kong in the past, present and future. The themes for 2019 were “Today’s Hong Kong” and “Energy Technology and the Environment”, with six participating schools (a total of ten tours) and 274 participating students in total. The breakdown is set out below:

Learning unit	No. of participating schools	No. of participating students on each tour
“Today’s Hong Kong”	3 primary schools	32 / 30 / 30 / 28 persons
	2 secondary schools	25 / 26 / 33 / 34 / 16 persons
“Energy Technology and the Environment”	1 secondary school	20 persons

In addition to the above, CG had arranged 67 other guided tours for 43 schools (a total of 2 498 students had participated) in 2019. To maintain the provision of services during the pandemic and the renovation works, CG had continued to organise online guided tours and workshops for schools in situations where on-site educational activities and public guided tour services (including “School Thematic Tour Scheme” programmes) had to be suspended. CG has resumed guided tour services since May 2022, with a focus on the permanent exhibits and “Envisioning Beyond Legacy”, the exhibition staged to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. In addition, CG has organised summer planning schools for primary and secondary school students, as well as Youth Ambassador Schemes for university students and youths. Riding on the recent renovation of CG with new exhibition themes and innovative curatorial models, we will actively reach out to more schools and provide students with guided tour services with a view to enhancing the new generation’s understanding of the future planning and development in Hong Kong.

- (4) The “Envisioning Beyond Legacy” thematic exhibition was open at CG from 6 July to 30 November 2022, and one of the thematic exhibition areas introduced the preliminary planning concept and infrastructure development proposal of the Kau Yi Chau Artificial Island (KYCAI) project. Visitors had the opportunity to understand some of the considerations in land planning, and plan for their ideal KYCAI through the “Build the Islands of the Future” town planning game. Later on, from December 2022 to March 2023, the study team launched public engagement activities on the preliminary proposals for four aspects (namely the reclamation extent, broad land use, strategic transport infrastructure and possible financing options) of the project. About 7 800 public comments were received and the relevant Public Engagement Report has been uploaded to the website of the project study (www.centralwaters.hk).
- (5) We will update the exhibits in a timely manner so as to provide the latest information on Hong Kong’s planning and infrastructures for visitors through interactive and user-friendly means. The five floors of CG had been or planning to be renovated in recent years, including the works on the G/F, 3/F and 4/F were completed in 2021 to update the exhibits regarding the planning history of Hong Kong, the evolution of skylines and coastlines, the contrast of Hong Kong now and then and so on. In addition, renovation works on the 2/F have just been completed by providing innovative interactive exhibits to showcase Hong Kong’s macro planning, the two major strategic growth areas (Northern Metropolis and KYCAI), transportation and other infrastructure projects. We are planning for the renovation of 1/F, and exhibits in relation the theme on sustainable development will be included upon completion of works, such as green living and nature conservation, etc. and interesting parent-child interactive curatorial models will also be adopted to attract more different types of visitors.

Thematic Exhibitions Held at the City Gallery between 2019 and 2023

Year	Thematic Exhibition	Content involved in the thematic exhibition		
		Hong Kong's major planning proposals	Hong Kong's major infrastructure projects	The city's future development outlook
2019	Lantau Tomorrow Vision (development and conservation of Lantau Island)	✓	✓	✓
	Stage 2 Public Engagement for the Pilot Study on Underground Space Development in Selected Strategic Urban Areas (study on the potential for underground space developments)	✓	✓	✓
	16th Venice Biennale International Architecture Exhibition - Hong Kong Response Exhibition: "Vertical Fabric: Density in Landscape" (innovations and vision through vertical architecture)			✓
	Shaping Our Future City 2019 (exploration into the opportunities and challenges of civil engineering)			✓
	Safer Living 2.0 - School Ambassador Programme (to enhance students' interests in science, technology and engineering subjects)			✓
	Social Innovation Community 4.0 (to deepen students' understanding of the community)			✓

Year	Thematic Exhibition	Content involved in the thematic exhibition		
		Hong Kong's major planning proposals	Hong Kong's major infrastructure projects	The city's future development outlook
	Basic Law Roving Exhibition			✓
2020	The Hong Kong Institute of Planners (HKIP) Awards 2019 (exhibition of the award winning planning projects/studies)	✓		✓
	Planning Department Outreach Programme 2019-20 - Planning for a Liveable Hong Kong: Smart, Green and Resilient	✓		✓
	Relocation of Sha Tin Sewage Treatment Works to Cavern		✓	
2021	HKIP Awards 2020 (exhibition of the award winning planning projects/studies)	✓	✓	✓
	Planning for a Livable and Healthy City cum Summer Planning School	✓		
	New Territories Cycle Track Network		✓	
	“Planning and Design Competition on Transitional Housing in Hong Kong” Exhibition			✓
	Degree Show - Department of Urban Planning and Design, The University of Hong Kong			✓
	Geographic Information System Application			✓
	Cases of City Development around the World			✓
	PT 2.0 Public Toilet Design Competition			✓
	Lantau Conservation Fund			✓

Year	Thematic Exhibition	Content involved in the thematic exhibition		
		Hong Kong's major planning proposals	Hong Kong's major infrastructure projects	The city's future development outlook
	2020-21 and its Approved Projects			
	Heritage Fiesta cum Roving Exhibition 2021			✓
	Sham Chung Haven: Restoring the Relationship between Nature, Ecology and Human			✓
	HK SciFest - Smart Planning in the Digital Era (planning initiatives and application of innovation and technology)			✓
	Green Living @ Lantau (conservation and sustainable development of Lantau Island)			✓
	The Greater Bay Area Urban Design Awards			✓
	Hong Kong Collateral Event at the 17th Venice Biennale International Architecture Exhibition: "Redistribution: Land, People, and Environment" (innovative ideas about liveable cities)			✓
	Smart City Technology (spatial data and relevant studies)			✓
	National Security Public Education Exhibition			✓
2022	Signature Exhibition for HKSAR's 25th Anniversary - "Envisioning Beyond Legacy" (Hong Kong's planning and infrastructure development and future directions)	✓	✓	✓
	HKIP Awards 2021 (exhibition of the award winning planning	✓		✓

Year	Thematic Exhibition	Content involved in the thematic exhibition		
		Hong Kong's major planning proposals	Hong Kong's major infrastructure projects	The city's future development outlook
	projects/studies)			
	Urban Forestry (urban tree management)			✓
	HKIP Community Planning Lab (cases of community planning in Hong Kong)			✓
2023	Kau Yi Chau Artificial Islands (land use proposal)	✓	✓	✓
	San Tin Technopole (land use proposal)	✓	✓	✓
	HKIP Awards 2022 (exhibition of the award winning planning projects/studies)	✓		✓
	40th Anniversary of Shenzhen River Regulation		✓	
	Lantau Conservation Fund 2022-2023 and its Approved Projects			✓
	Common Spatial Data Infrastructure (spatial data application in the Government)			✓
	Carbon Neutrality Information Kiosk			✓
	Proposals for the Green Deck Project of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University			✓
	National Security Public Education Exhibition			✓

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 15

(Written Reply)

Asked by Hon Tony TSE

Date of meeting : 17 January 2024

Replied by : Secretary for Transport
and Logistics

Reply

President,

Having consulted the Environmental and Ecology Bureau, the Hong Kong Police Force (“Police”) and the Transport Department (“TD”) in respect of combating noise nuisance caused by illegally modified vehicles, my reply to various parts of the question raised by Hon Tony TSE is as follows:

- (1) and (4) Noise Control (Motor Vehicles) Regulation (Cap. 400I) stipulates that all vehicles first registered must conform to the prescribed noise emission standards. In accordance with the Road Traffic Ordinance (Cap. 374), the Commissioner for Transport may refuse to register any vehicle which does not comply with the noise emission standards.

In addition, vehicles are required to be fitted with silencers under the Road Traffic (Construction and Maintenance of Vehicles) Regulations (Cap. 374A). To prevent vehicles from emitting excessive noise due to illegal modifications after first registration, Cap. 374A also requires the silencers to be maintained in good and efficient working order, and not to be altered or replaced to avoid the emanation of greater noise. Any person who contravenes the requirement commits an offence and is liable to a maximum fine of \$10,000 and to a maximum of 6 months’ imprisonment.

Under section 80 of the Road Traffic Ordinance, if a police officer has reason to believe that a vehicle has been illegally altered (including causing excessive noise as a result of illegal modification), the police officer is empowered to direct the vehicle to be driven to a vehicle examination centre for further examination by a vehicle examiner. If it is proven that the

vehicle owner contravenes the relevant law, the Police will prosecute the vehicle owner concerned. The Police and TD will continue to work closely on the related enforcement matters.

As regards noise nuisance caused by illegal car racing, the Police and TD have been actively following up the complaints received, and the Police will from time to time carry out operations, including the joint operation with TD mentioned in Part (2) below, in accordance with the legal provisions mentioned above. The Police and TD do not keep statistics on the number of complaints about vehicle noise at individual road sections, but they will determine the locations and time of operations on the basis of the complaints and intelligence received.

- (2) and (3) The Police and TD have been working closely on tackling excessive noise emission, for instance, by suspected “defective vehicles” with modified exhaust pipes as well as complaints against vehicle noise, with a view to combating illegally modified vehicles through the existing reporting mechanism and roadside law enforcement by the Police. In 2023, the Police and TD conducted a total of 41 joint operations against illegal modification of vehicles, which was a double of the 21 joint operations conducted in 2022, while the number of vehicle examination orders issued from the joint operations decreased from about 2,400 in 2022 to about 2,000 in 2023. In addition, the number of defective vehicle reports received by the Vehicle Inspection Office of TD decreased from about 4,300 in 2022 to about 3,800 in 2023. The above figures show the effectiveness of the joint operations of the Police and TD, and that the existing legislation maintains its deterrent effect. The Police and TD will continue with the relevant work.
- (5) The Environmental Protection Department (EPD) has all along been keeping abreast of the development of overseas technologies in monitoring excessive noise emitted from modified vehicles. EPD has applied artificial intelligence in recent years in analysing sounds and images and developed technology to automatically identify illegally modified vehicles that emit excessive noise. The Police and TD will continue to keep in view technological developments (including those developed by the EPD) and introduce suitable

technologies to facilitate law enforcement in a timely manner.

-End-

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 16
(Written Reply)

Asked by Hon Paul TSE

Date of meeting : 17 Jan 2024
Replied by : Secretary for
Constitutional and Mainland Affairs

Reply

President,

In consultation with the Information Services Department (ISD), the consolidated reply to the question raised by the Hon Paul TSE is as follows:

In considering the formulation of various policies and measures, the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) has all along adhered to the “people-oriented” philosophy of governance, actively listened to the aspirations and views of the public from different sectors through various channels, and responded to their needs by making appropriate arrangements. ISD has been monitoring media reports and messages posted on major social media platforms to assist bureaux and departments in gauging public opinion in a timely manner. ISD is committed to raising public awareness and support for government policies and measures through dissemination of news and information through multiple channels, such as print and digital media, the internet, social platforms, press conferences and briefings. Views on Hong Kong, whether expressed on local or mainland social media, carry equal weight to the Government of the HKSAR.

We have noticed that Mainland residents from time to time shared and occasionally commented on content related to Hong Kong, including pop culture, social customs and tourist attractions on social media platforms, such as WeChat, Douyin, Sina Weibo, Kuaishou, Xiaohongshu and Bilibili, etc. Some of these posts may lead to heated discussion and feedback from netizens. The Mainland Offices of the Government of the HKSAR (Mainland Offices) and ISD have been keeping abreast of the reports and views related to Hong Kong on digital media and social platforms in the Mainland, responding to them when necessary and referring them to the relevant bureaux and departments for follow up as appropriate. At the same time, the Mainland Offices have made good use of the mainland social media to promote Hong Kong's advantages and enhance Mainland residents' understanding of Hong Kong.

The Government of the HKSAR will continue to listen carefully to the views of all parties and continue to enhance various policy measures in a pragmatic manner, with a view to facilitating the overall development of Hong Kong and enhancing people's sense of happiness and contentment.

LEGCO QUESTION No. 17

(Written Reply)

Asked by: Dr Hon Kennedy
WONG

Date of meeting: 17 January 2024

Replied by: Secretary for Financial
Services and the Treasury

Reply:

President,

Our reply to the question raised by Dr Hon Kennedy WONG Ying-ho is as follows:

- (1) In the past five years, the amount of net earnings or cash dividends received from the following government assets or items are set out as follows:

Item	Net earnings or cash dividends received by the Government (\$ million)				
	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
(i) MTR Corporation Limited	0 ¹	5,561.0	5,700.0	5,700.0	6,673.2
(ii) West Rail Property Development Limited	8,000.0	0	0	0	0
(iv) Tunnels and bridges ²	2,568.3	2,208.7	1,943.3	2,043.9	1,989.2
(v) Marine ferry terminals ³	190.2	103.9	1.3	0.3	1.7
(vi) Waterworks ⁴	2,749.9	2,484.2	2,401.8	2,221.3	2,208.3

¹ The Government opted for scrip dividends in lieu of cash dividends in 2018-19.

² Include government toll tunnels and bridges in items (iv) (a), (b) and (d) to (j). Since the Western Harbour Crossing (item (iv) (c)) was not yet taken over by the Government before August 2023 and the Hong Kong Section of Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (item (iv) (k)) is not toll charging, they are not taken into account.

³ The closure of the boundary control points at Hong Kong-Macau Ferry Terminal in Sheung Wan and China Ferry Terminal in Tsim Sha Tsui from early 2020 to early 2023 as a result of COVID-19, together with the abolition of embarkation fee for cross-boundary ferry passengers with effect from August 2020, have impacts on the receipts from marine ferry terminals.

⁴ In view of the continued impact of COVID-19 on economic activities, the Government has reduced 75% water charges for non-domestic accounts during the period from December 2019 to July 2023 in order to support enterprises and trades. The concession measure has impacts on the receipts from waterworks.

(vii) Sewage services ⁵	1,500.0	1,317.7	1,093.1	978.1	992.0
(viii) Government properties ⁶	1,943.0	1,371.8	477.5	464.3	646.8

The Government did not receive any cash dividend in the past five years from items (iii) Airport Authority Hong Kong⁷, (ix) Hong Kong International Theme Parks Limited, (x) Hong Kong Cyberport Development Holdings Limited, (xi) Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation, and (xii) Hong Kong IEC Limited⁸ as mentioned in the question.

As for item (xiii), Urban Renewal Authority (“URA”) was established in May 2001 under the Urban Renewal Authority Ordinance as the statutory body to undertake, encourage, promote and facilitate urban renewal of Hong Kong, with a view to addressing the problem of urban decay and improving the living conditions of residents in old districts. URA does not have a shareholding structure and does not declare dividends to the Government.

Besides, as revealed in the operating accounts in respect of government utilities over the past five years, the rate of return on average net fixed assets (“ANFA”) are set out as follows:

Item	Rate of return on ANFA				
	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
(iv) Government toll tunnels and bridges ⁹	2.4%	1.8%	0.6%	0.8%	-0.3%

⁵ In view of the continued impact of COVID-19 on economic activities, the Government has reduced 75% sewage charges for non-domestic accounts during the period from December 2019 to July 2023 and waived trade effluent surcharges fully during the period from January 2020 to December 2023 in order to support enterprises and trades. The concession measures have impacts on the receipts from sewage services.

⁶ Include rents from government properties and proceeds from sales of government properties by the Government Property Agency. In view of the continued impact of COVID-19 on economic activities, the Government has provided rental concessions to eligible tenants of government properties during the period from April 2020 to December 2023 in order to support enterprises and trades. The concession measure has impacts on the rental income from government properties.

⁷ No dividend has been declared by the Airport Authority Hong Kong since 2014-15 in order to preserve capital for the purpose of funding the Three-runway System project.

⁸ Hong Kong IEC Limited has become a wholly-owned subsidiary of Airport Authority Hong Kong since 31 March 2022.

⁹ Include only those government-built toll tunnels and bridges (i.e. the Aberdeen Tunnel, Lion Rock Tunnel, Shing Mun Tunnels, Tseung Kwan O Tunnel, Route 8 (Kowloon section) and Lantau Link (including Tsing Ma Bridge)). For Lantau Link and Tseung Kwan O Tunnel which were no longer toll charging with effect from December 2020 and December 2022 respectively, they were excluded from the operating accounts of that year. There is no relevant information for other toll free tunnels and road infrastructure taken over or operated by the Government, including Cross-Harbour Tunnel, Eastern Harbour Crossing, Western Harbour Crossing, Tate’s Cairn Tunnel and the Hong Kong Section of Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge.

(v) Marine ferry terminals	-1.5%	-23.3%	-46.3%	-41.5%	-43.4%
(vi) Waterworks	-2.7%	-2.6%	-2.7%	-2.9%	-3.2%

Note: as mentioned above, the continued impact of COVID-19 on economic activities together with concession measures on some charges have impacts on the rates of return on ANFA.

Since the introduction of the sewage services charging scheme in 1995, the sewage charge and trade effluent surcharges have been set based on only the operating cost of sewage services but not the capital cost. As such, the figures in respect of the return on ANFA are not available in the operating accounts of sewage services.

Regarding other government assets or items raised in the question, given that the Government does not keep information on their ANFA, we are unable to provide figures in respect of their rates of return on ANFA.

- (2) Trading funds are distinct accounting entities established under the Trading Funds Ordinance (Cap. 430) for the provision of specific government services. While remaining as part of the Government, they are allowed greater financial and operational flexibilities to run their operations as businesses with a view to improving the quality of services and responding to customer demands.

Generally, the Government will, based on the target rates of return on ANFA of trading funds and taking into consideration their respective operating results and financial situation in a particular year, direct the transfer of statutory return from the trading funds into the general revenue in the following financial year. In the past five years, the transfer of statutory return from trading funds are set out as follows:

Item	Transfer of Statutory Return (\$ million)				
	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
(i) Companies Registry Trading Fund	19.4	19.6	21.9	26.4	31.7
(ii) Electrical and Mechanical Services Trading Fund	56.7	63.6	73.5	82.8	89.6
(iii) Land Registry Trading Fund	16.3	16.6	17.7	19.7	20.3
(iv) Office of the Communications Authority Trading Fund	7.7	7.5	0	0	0
(v) Post Office Trading Fund	0	0	0	0	0

The target rates of return on ANFA for the five trading funds adopted in the above corresponding years are 5.7% for Companies Registry Trading Fund, 6.4% for Electrical and Mechanical Services Trading Fund, 5.9% for Land Registry Trading Fund, 5.5% for Office of the Communications Authority Trading Fund and 2.6% for Post Office Trading Fund.

- (3) Pursuant to section 3 of the Public Finance Ordinance (Cap. 2), any moneys raised or received for the purposes of the Government shall form part of the general revenue. Therefore, the financial returns generated from government assets or items in (1) and (2) above shall be covered in the Government's General Revenue Account.

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 18

(Written Reply)

Asked by Dr Hon TAN Yueheng

Date of meeting: 17 January 2024

Replied by: Secretary for Commerce
and Economic Development

Reply

President,

My consolidated reply to the question raised by the Dr Hon TAN Yueheng is as follows.

The growing elderly population in Hong Kong is emerging as an important consumer group, creating considerable demand for such products and services as medical and healthcare, leisure and recreation, and home and personal care catered for the elderly. These products and services enhance the quality of life for the elderly and spur industry growth and business opportunities. Through promoting economic activities related to products and services for the elderly, we can foster the development of silver economy, unleash the business potential of the elderly market, and strengthen support for the elderly.

At present, different bureaux and departments are implementing a number of policy measures covering various aspects to keep the elderly healthy and active. These measures have laid a foundation for the development of silver economy and provided useful references for the market to further develop and offer products and services that are suitable for the elderly.

To tap into the business potential of the silver economy, the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau (CEDB) is preparing to establish an Advisory Panel on Silver Economy comprising experts of different fields this year to conduct in-depth research on the market demands of silver economy, its related industries and business activities and offer recommendations for development in one year's time. CEDB will announce the details as soon as possible.

On regulation, various laws in Hong Kong currently protect the rights and interests of consumers (including the elderly). Among others, the Trade Descriptions Ordinance (Cap. 362) (the Ordinance) prohibits traders from subjecting consumers (including the elderly) to certain unfair trade practices,

including false trade descriptions, misleading omissions, aggressive commercial practices, bait advertising, bait-and-switch and wrongly accepting payment. The Ordinance covers goods and services, and is applicable to the trade practices of both physical and online traders.

As the principal enforcement agency of the Ordinance, the Customs and Excise Department (C&ED) adopts a three-pronged approach, which covers enforcement actions, compliance promotion and publicity and public education, to combat unfair trade practices and protect consumers' rights and interests. In particular, to protect the elderly from falling prey to consumption traps, C&ED pays attention to market trends in order to understand the unfair trade practices targeting the elderly. Publicity and public education programmes for the elderly are also conducted by C&ED proactively, including joint promotional efforts with the Police and the District Councils to distribute promotional leaflets to the elderly, and the promotion of the messages relating to fair trading and consumers' rights and interests through the District Fight Crime Committees, with a view to enhancing the elderly's awareness of "smart consumption".

In addition, the Consumer Council (the Council) conducts publicity and education work for the elderly through various channels, including:

- (1) collaborating with various social service organisations and elder academies to conduct talks to provide the elderly with relevant consumption alerts and advice, with a view to enhancing the elderly's understanding of consumers' rights and interests and unfair trade practices;
- (2) launching the "Educator Scheme for Senior Citizens" since March 2021 to provide consumer education training to soon-to-be retirees and retirees mainly aged between 50 and 64 in order to enhance their knowledge in consumers' rights and interests. Suitable participants who have completed the training will host consumer educational talks for the elderly to share the latest consumer information, and refer the elderly who have encountered consumer issues to the Council's Complaints and Enquiries Hotline for assistance; and
- (3) publishing articles on product tests and service surveys relating to the elderly in the Council's CHOICE magazine, providing them with practical consumer information.

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 19

(Written Reply)

Asked by Hon LAI Tung-kwok

Date of meeting :

17 January 2024

Replied by :

Chief Secretary for Administration

Reply

President,

Having consulted the Judiciary, my reply to the Hon LAI Tung-kwok's question is as follows:

(1) to (4)

According to the Judiciary, in consideration of the need to ensure the effective operation of all levels of court and, where reasonably feasible, they have been actively implementing a host of measures to expedite the processing of non-refoulement claim-related cases. These measures include increasing judicial manpower (including deployment of dedicated temporary judicial manpower) to specifically deal with related matters, streamlining the relevant court procedures and promoting the wider adoption of paper disposals to deal with suitable cases. The Judiciary will continue to closely monitor the progress of cases and flexibly deploy resources in response to operational needs, with a view to enhancing the efficiency in handling non-refoulement claim-related cases as far as practicable.

The relevant statistics on judicial review leave applications and appeals for non-refoulement claims are set out in the tables below (Note 1: the statistics in the following tables reflect the live data generated from the computer system as at the report generation date and time. They may be subject to further updating / refinements, where necessary.) -

Table 1: The number of cases relating to leave applications for judicial review on non-refoulement claims and related appeals completed each year by various levels of court in the past three years

Year	Number of cases		
	Court of First Instance	Court of Appeal	Court of Final Appeal
2021	1 525	846	481
2022	1 438	718	523
2023 (as at 31 October)	1 243	449	250

Table 2: The number of leave granted each year for judicial review on non-refoulement claims by the Court of First Instance in the past three years

Year	Number of cases
2021	50
2022	44
2023 (as at 31 October)	26

Table 3: The number of appeals allowed by the Court of Appeal and leave to appeal granted by the Court of Final Appeal each year for cases relating to judicial review on non-refoulement claims in the past three years

Year	Number of cases	
	Court of Appeal	Court of Final Appeal (Note 2)
2021	13	-
2022	16	-
2023 (as at 31 October)	3	-

Note 2: For the past three years, the Court of Final Appeal did not grant leave to appeal in any cases relating to judicial review on non-refoulement claims.

Table 4: The number of outstanding cases relating to leave applications for judicial review on non-refoulement claims and related appeals at various levels of court as at 31 October 2023; and the number of concerned cases completed from 1 January 2016 to 31 October 2023

Level of Court	Number of outstanding cases (as at 31 October 2023)	Number of cases completed (from 1 January 2016 to 31 October 2023)
Court of First Instance	7 423	7 480
Court of Appeal	403	3 173
Court of Final Appeal	470	1 632

(5) to (6)

In the past three years, among the civil legal aid applications received and refused as well as the legal aid certificates granted by the Legal Aid Department (LAD), the number and percentage of those involving non-refoulement claims are as follows -

Year	Civil legal aid applications	Civil legal aid applications involving non-refoulement claims [percentage to the civil legal aid applications]	Civil legal aid certificates granted (Note 3)	Civil legal aid certificates granted involving non-refoulement claims (Note 3) [percentage to the civil legal aid certificates granted]	Civil legal aid applications refused (Note 4)	Civil legal aid applications involving non-refoulement claims refused (Note 4) [percentage to the civil legal aid applications refused]
2021	11 875	427 [3.6%]	4 916	70 [1.4%]	5 496	320 [5.8%]
2022	9 480	448 [4.7%]	3 919	80 [2.0%]	4 398	334 [7.6%]
2023	9 558	378 [4.0%]	4 024	75 [1.9%]	4 220	253 [6.0%]

Note 3: Certificates may not be granted in the same year as the applications were received.

Note 4: Refusal may not be issued in the same year as the applications were received.

LAD has put in place a mechanism to guard against abuse of legal aid. The Legal Aid Ordinance (Cap. 91) provides that legal aid will only be granted to applicants who have satisfied both the merits test and the means test. As such, all legal aid applications (including the applications for judicial review in relation to non-refoulement claims) are processed by Legal Aid Counsel employed by LAD. In assessing the merits of an application, LAD will carefully look into and consider the facts of the case, evidence available and the legal principles applicable to the case to determine whether there are reasonable grounds for legal aid to be granted. Even if an applicant is successfully granted legal aid, LAD will still monitor his/her case from time to time to ensure that there are sufficient grounds for the aided person to continue to receive legal aid. Otherwise, LAD will discharge the legal aid certificate.

LAD does not maintain the breakdown of the statistics of the outcome and legal expenses for legally aided judicial review cases related to non-refoulement claims. LAD is revamping its Case Management and Case Accounting System, upon completion of which more legal aid statistics related to non-refoulement claims will be made available.

THE END

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 20

(Written Reply)

Asked by: Dr Hon TIK Chi-yuen

Date of meeting: 17 January 2024

Replied by: Secretary for Environment
and Ecology

Reply:

President,

The reply to the question raised by Dr the Hon TIK is set out below.

In 2022, a daily average of around 3 302 tonnes of food waste was disposed of at landfills. The quantity decreased by 3.9 per cent as compared to 2021 (a daily average of around 3 437 tonnes). Since much of the dumped food disposed of at landfills has already been mixed with other wastes and is no longer edible and hard to be identified, the Government does not have the statistics on the dumped but still edible food disposed of at landfills.

The Government has always attached great importance to promoting the reduction at source and recycling of food waste. In 2013, the former Environment Bureau launched the Food Wise Hong Kong Campaign to promote a “Food Wise, Waste Less” culture, with a focus on reducing the production of food waste at source. We have promoted slogans such as “Buy, buy, buy, all the food expires. Then, bye, bye, bye. It's all thrown away!” as well as the “Food Wise Eateries” Scheme to encourage eateries to bear social responsibilities and reduce food waste at source together with customers by adopting various means.

Since 2014, the Environmental Protection Department has also provided funding to local non-profit making organisations through the “Environment and Conservation Fund” to recover food from the commercial sector and redistribute it to the needy in the community, in order to drive joint efforts of stakeholders in cherishing food. As of December 2023, the fund has approved 89 relevant projects, with a total funding amount of about HK\$194 million.

To safeguard people’s health, donated food must also be food safety compliant. The Centre for Food Safety of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department has compiled a set of Food Safety Guidelines for Food Recovery (the Guidelines) to provide clear guidance to assist organisations in ensuring food safety during the implementation of food recovery schemes. The Guidelines cover areas on the principles of the requirements and liabilities to ensure food safety, thereby eliminating concerns from food donors about the potential liabilities as a result of food safety. The Guidelines have

been made available on Government websites since 2013 as a reference for the trades, food recovery organisations and non-government organisations on ensuring food safety and related liability issues. Since the issuance of the Guidelines, different organisations have launched various food donation programmes and have succeeded in donating food to people in need, thereby reaffirming the effectiveness of the Guidelines. The Government has no plan to introduce new legislation for this purpose.

- End -

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 21

(Written Reply)

Asked by: Hon CHAN Pui-leung

Date of meeting: 17 January 2024

Replied by: Deputy Chief Secretary
for Administration

Reply:

President,

Our consolidated reply to Hon CHAN Pui-leung's question is as follows:

The current-term Government is committed to improving environmental hygiene and street management and putting a great emphasis on district-based environmental issues. The aim is to safeguard public health, build a liveable environment for citizens and boost our city's image. In this connection, the Chief Executive (CE) appointed the Deputy Chief Secretary for Administration (DCS) in July 2022 to lead the District Matters Co-ordination Task Force for steering efforts of various bureaux and departments (B/Ds) to enhance the overall environmental hygiene and cityscape in Hong Kong, and to step up the cleansing intensity in public places and handle thorny environmental hygiene and street management issues at root. Among these efforts, the Government Programme on Tackling Hygiene Black Spots (the Programme) launched in mid-August 2022 focuses on tackling environmental hygiene black spots and strengthening the cleansing of about 4 000 public places and the clearance of dangerous or abandoned signboards.

In order to provide an additional channel for the public to report environmental hygiene issues on the district level, the Government further launched a thematic website of the Programme in January 2023. Providing a list of hygiene black spots in various districts across the city on an online map, the website enables citizens to compare the situation of these black spots before and after the Government's clearance operations, and to witness and monitor programme effectiveness, thereby enhancing the transparency of the Programme. Also, it facilitates citizens to provide feedback on listed black spots (including those which are deemed to have been rectified) or suggest new black spots for

consideration by departments. Having received information (e.g. detailed addresses and photos) from the public via the website, departments will conduct on-site inspections, take follow-up actions and make responses. Once verified, newly reported black spots will be added to the list of hygiene black spots of the Programme. As at January 2024, the thematic website accumulated nearly 24 900 hits and collected a total of 1 560 public comments. Generally speaking, the environmental hygiene problems in majority of the newly reported spots are reviewed and concluded by departments as short-term and non-continuous, and could effectively be resolved with low chance of recurrence with cleansing and inspection efforts. Since the launch of the website, 32 newly reported spots in need of sustained attention have been added by departments to the list of black spots.

According to the feedback from different organisations and citizens, the number of listed hygiene black spots has increased from the initial 663 to 738. The updated number of black spots in each district (with a breakdown by District Council district) is as follows:

District Council District	At the Start of the Programme	As at 31 December 2023
Central and Western District	65	66
Eastern District	22	24
Southern District	9	10
Wan Chai District	16	18
Kowloon City District	87	91
Kwun Tong District	24	26
Sham Shui Po District	26	31
Wong Tai Sin District	22	25
Yau Tsim Mong District	26	59
Islands District	58	60
Kwai Tsing District	10	15
North District	60	62
Sai Kung District	10	10
Sha Tin District	19	22
Tai Po District	134	135
Tsuen Wan District	23	23
Tuen Mun District	27	31
Yuen Long District	25	30
	663	738

With the concerted efforts and active facilitation of various departments, most black spots have improved in their hygiene conditions. The

average number of comments collected monthly via the thematic website has decreased from over 240 in the first three months at the start of the Programme to about 70 in the latest three months. Such a decrease could help demonstrate that citizens recognise the improved conditions of hygiene black spots. Moreover, according to the review results of various departments in December 2023, hygiene conditions of more than 80% of black spots have been significantly improved and these spots are suitable for removal from the list. In the 2022 Policy Address, the CE has set a key performance indicator (KPI) for the Programme, i.e. removing at least 75% of environmental hygiene black spots by end-2023. In other words, our work in this regard has already met the target. However, as we need to nurture a new culture of keeping the environment clean and protecting the cityscape in Hong Kong, we do not intend to actually remove any hygiene black spots from the list at this stage despite the notable improvements in their environmental hygiene conditions. The departments concerned will sustain their efforts and closely monitor the hygiene conditions of these improved spots.

Regarding the cleansing of public places and clearance of dangerous or abandoned signboards, the Government has all along attached great importance to signboard safety and adopted a multi-pronged approach to deal with unauthorised, dangerous or abandoned signboards under a “risk-based” principle. For signboards constituting obvious threats to life or property, the Buildings Department (BD) will take immediate enforcement actions. If signboards are abandoned or have become dangerous, irrespective of whether they are legal or not, BD may order their removal by issuing Dangerous Structure Removal Notices to signboard owners in accordance with section 105 of the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132). A total of 1 750 dangerous or abandoned signboards were removed/repared during the whole year of 2022, and another 1 780 from January to end-November 2023.

Under the new district governance structure, the Steering Committee on District Governance chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration will be responsible for taking a leading role on the overall strategy, specific policies and measures, work priorities and resource allocation of district governance, whereas the Task Force on District Governance (TFDG) chaired by the DCS will be responsible for steering and co-ordinating various B/Ds to carry out district work and implement corresponding policies and measures, and co-ordinating inter-departmental and/or cross-district issues as necessary. Under this structure, the District Matters Co-ordination Task Force has been revamped as the Working Group on Environmental Hygiene and Cityscape and put under the TFDG. Through the Working Group, the DCS will continue to lead the departments concerned to follow up on ongoing environmental hygiene work.

Apart from keeping a close watch over the latest situation of improvements in hygiene black spots and removal of dangerous or abandoned signboards, the TFDG and various departments will take appropriate measures to step up efforts in cleansing, inspections and law enforcement so as to achieve the goal of keeping the city clean in the long term. The Government has also conducted a comprehensive review on the existing statutory powers and penalties of environmental hygiene-related legislation to enhance its efficiency, effectiveness and deterrence in handling various thorny environmental hygiene problems. The legislative review has been implemented in two stages. The first-stage proposal on raising the fixed penalty and the maximum fines that may be imposed by the court for offences related to environmental hygiene and shopfront extension has come into effect since 22 October 2023.

The Government now proposes to amend the above-mentioned Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132) and other related ordinances, supplemented by additional administrative measures, to enhance enforcement efficiency and deterrence, so as to achieve long-term improvements in the “longstanding, big and difficult” problems on environmental hygiene, public health nuisances and street management. The Government consulted the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene of the Legislative Council on the preliminary proposals on the second-stage legislative amendments in July 2023 and subsequently launched a two-month public consultation on 21 November 2023. We will earnestly listen to the community’s views on the second-stage legislative amendment proposals before finalising them.

Legislative Council Question No. 22
(Written Reply)

Asked by: Hon Kenneth LAU Date of Sitting: 17 January 2024

Replied by: Secretary for Transport and Logistics

Reply:

President,

The Government is committed to ensuring that sufficient sheltered spaces are provided within the Hong Kong waters for local vessels (including working vessels and pleasure vessels) to take refuge during typhoons or inclement weather, so as to safeguard the safety of the vessels and their crew members. There are currently 14 typhoon shelters located in different parts of Hong Kong waters, providing 423 hectares of sheltered space for use by vessels. Apart from typhoon shelters, local vessels can also choose to berth at 18 sheltered anchorages. Under normal weather conditions, local vessels may be anchored at any safe and suitable locations within Hong Kong waters according to their daily business and operational needs subject to no obstruction being made to marine traffic.

The Marine Department (MD) carries out assessments of the territory-wide supply and demand situation of sheltered spaces on a regular basis. In the latest round of the Assessment of Typhoon Shelter Space Requirements 2022-2035, it is estimated that the supply of sheltered space substantially meet the demand of local vessels throughout the period up to 2035. The relevant report has been uploaded onto the website of the MD for public information in January 2023. In general, the MD conducts assessments every five years, and the next round of assessment is expected to commence in 2025.

After having consulted the MD, replies to the various parts of the question raised by the Hon Kenneth LAU are as follows:

- (1) The numbers of licensed Classes I to IV vessels in Hong Kong and the year-on-year change in the past three years are shown as follows:

Class of licensed vessels	Year		
	2021	2022	2023
Class I	396	390 (-1.52%)	393 (+0.77%)
Class II	1,956	1,845 (-5.67%)	1,814 (-1.68%)
Class III	6,376	6,139 (-3.72%)	6,260 (+1.97%)
Class IV	11,767	12,378 (+5.19%)	12,553 (+1.41%)

- (2) The MD does not keep statistics on the daily occupancy of typhoon shelters and sheltered anchorages, but maintains records on the highest occupancy of typhoon shelters during the passage of typhoons to ensure that the demand for sheltered spaces by vessels during inclement weather can be accommodated. In the past three years, the highest occupancy of typhoon shelters during typhoons by classes of vessels are attached at Annex.
- (3) In order to ensure safe navigation of vessels, the MD conducts inspections across the waters of Hong Kong from time to time, including those conducted in typhoon shelters. According to records, in the past five years, the MD conducted a total of about 49 000 inspections in various typhoon shelters and initiated 2 038 prosecutions against the

irregularities of vessels. The irregularities included vessels suspected of operating without a licence, vessels being let for hire or reward without permission, vessels carrying an amount of people in excess of the number specified by law, inadequate life-saving appliances or fire fighting apparatus on board the vessels, failure to produce insurance policy, breaching of licence conditions, failure to paint the mark of certificate in the most conspicuous positions on both sides of the deckhouse, failure to keep the full licence on board, dwelling vessels entering or remaining in the closed area, absence of an operator holding Local Certificate of Competency on board, pleasure vessels being used for non-pleasure purposes. As at December 31, 2023, convictions were made for a total of 1 843 cases while another 195 cases were in process.

- (4) In order to ensure smooth navigation in the passage areas of typhoon shelters and crack down on irregularities by local vessels, the MD not only carries out patrols in typhoon shelters from time to time, but also conducts special operations and fire drills in typhoon shelters with the Police and the Fire Services Department from time to time. To strengthen law enforcement, the MD has reached an agreement with the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department, the Water Supplies Department, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department and the electric companies to conduct joint operations at typhoon shelters regularly. During routine inspections or joint operations, if any vessels are suspected of violating the Electricity Ordinance, the Waterworks Ordinance or the Food Business Regulation, the MD will refer such cases to relevant departments for follow-up. In addition, the MD has also purchased drones in recent years to support investigation and law enforcement, and will review whether there are suitable smart technologies solutions on the market for related purposes.

- (5) It is the established policy of the Government to provide sheltered spaces in Hong Kong on a territory-wide basis for local vessels to take refuge during inclement weather. The MD is always willing to listen to the views of various sectors of the community, participate in study of matters relating to the management of typhoon shelters and work with the industry to discuss the issues of typhoon shelter management.

Table I – Highest occupancy of typhoon shelters during typhoons by classes of vessels in 2021

	Class I			Class II						Class III		Class IV	River Trade Vessel	Gov't Launch	Total	%*
	Ferry	Launch	Others	Dumb Steel Lighter	Cargo Vessel	Tug	Dangerous Goods Carrier	Stationary Vessel	Others	Fishing Vessel	P4 Sampan	Pleasure Vessel				
Aberdeen TS# ₁	7	35	20	2	26	2	0	87	50	425	0	668	0	12	1334	64%
Causeway Bay TS ₁	0	20	0	0	0	0	0	3	21	56	0	237	0	0	337	57%
Cheung Chau TS ₂	1	6	0	0	4	4	0	6	11	142	38	53	0	1	266	49%
Hei Ling Chau TS ₃	1	1	0	22	0	4	0	0	4	0	0	5	0	2	39	27%
Kwun Tong TS ₂	2	2	0	10	0	0	0	0	24	3	0	219	0	4	264	76%
New Yau Ma Tei TS ₂	14	35	0	187	20	52	0	1	29	28	0	150	27	7	550	100%
Rambler Channel TS ₂	0	0	0	23	0	16	0	0	3	25	0	35	36	1	139	100%
Sam Ka Tsuen TS ₁	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	2	8	44	0	80	0	0	137	49%
Shaukeiwan TS ₁	6	16	0	0	5	7	0	23	31	270	0	180	0	1	539	90%
Shuen Wan TS ₁	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	31	24	87	0	6	157	46%
To Kwa Wan TS ₂	2	8	0	74	0	23	0	0	15	0	0	7	0	0	129	94%
Tuen Mun TS ₂	0	38	0	40	10	33	0	4	69	205	0	72	9	10	490	96%
Yim Tin Tsai TS ₁	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	21	0	0	21	7%

Note: *The % refers to the highest percentage of occupancy of each typhoon shelter

#Aberdeen South Typhoon Shelter and Aberdeen West Typhoon Shelter

Permitted length: 1 – 30.4 metres, 2 – 50 metres, 3 – 75 metres

Table II – Highest occupancy of typhoon shelters during typhoons by classes of vessels in 2022

	Class I			Class II						Class III		Class	River Trade Vessel	Gov't Launch	Total	%*
	Ferry	Launch	Others	Dumb Steel Lighter	Cargo Vessel	Tug	Dangerous Goods Carrier	Stationary Vessel	Others	Fishing Vessel	P4 Sampan	IV Pleasure Vessel				
Aberdeen TS# ₁	7	31	16	3	26	2	0	88	53	406	0	678	0	12	1322	61%
Causeway Bay TS ₁	0	37	0	0	0	0	0	3	26	84	0	199	0	0	349	53%
Cheung Chau TS ₂	4	6	0	0	5	4	0	5	12	133	40	59	0	1	269	43%
Hei Ling Chau TS ₃	1	0	0	35	0	7	0	0	8	2	0	8	2	1	64	18%
Kwun Tong TS ₂	2	6	0	16	0	0	0	0	26	1	0	255	0	4	310	90%
New Yau Ma Tei TS ₂	13	35	0	192	20	34	0	1	37	30	0	151	27	5	545	100%
Rambler Channel TS ₂	0	0	0	18	1	11	0	0	1	10	0	35	51	2	129	100%
Sam Ka Tsuen TS ₁	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	2	9	28	0	27	0	0	71	51%
Shaukeiwan TS ₁	9	8	0	0	8	2	0	23	35	304	0	168	0	1	558	93%
Shuen Wan TS ₁	0	10	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	59	28	143	0	7	251	76%
To Kwa Wan TS ₂	2	6	0	78	0	15	0	0	12	0	0	6	0	0	119	93%
Tuen Mun TS ₂	0	42	0	85	10	46	0	4	63	185	0	62	14	15	526	100%
Yim Tin Tsai TS ₁	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	13	0	2	17	6%

Note: *The % refers to the highest percentage of occupancy of each typhoon shelter

#Aberdeen South Typhoon Shelter and Aberdeen West Typhoon Shelter

Permitted length: 1 – 30.4 metres, 2 – 50 metres, 3 – 75 metres

Table III – Highest occupancy of typhoon shelters during typhoons by classes of vessels in 2023

	Class I			Class II						Class III		Class	River Trade Vessel	Gov't Launch	Total	%*
	Ferry	Launch	Others	Dumb Steel Lighter	Cargo Vessel	Tug	Dangerous Goods Carrier	Stationary Vessel	Others	Fishing Vessel	P4 Sampan	IV Pleasure Vessel				
Aberdeen TS# ₁	7	30	16	4	29	3	0	88	52	390	0	697	0	12	1328	60%
Causeway Bay TS ₁	0	30	0	0	0	0	0	3	30	80	0	205	0	0	348	58%
Cheung Chau TS ₂	1	7	0	0	6	3	0	5	17	97	32	74	0	3	245	41%
Hei Ling Chau TS ₃	0	0	0	30	0	2	0	0	5	0	0	3	0	1	41	21%
Kwun Tong TS ₂	3	5	0	15	0	0	0	0	26	0	0	261	0	4	314	90%
New Yau Ma Tei TS ₂	8	30	0	177	26	37	0	1	24	19	0	134	25	4	485	91%
Rambler Channel TS ₂	0	0	0	5	0	10	0	0	4	20	0	22	50	1	112	85%
Sam Ka Tsuen TS ₁	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	2	7	36	0	42	0	0	92	58%
Shaukeiwan TS ₁	9	8	0	0	8	2	0	23	50	261	0	146	0	2	509	85%
Shuen Wan TS ₁	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	44	45	154	0	9	257	80%
To Kwa Wan TS ₂	2	6	0	80	0	18	0	0	11	0	0	6	0	1	124	92%
Tuen Mun TS ₂	0	42	0	86	4	21	5	4	49	123	0	80	13	12	439	88%
Yim Tin Tsai TS ₁	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	0	0	15	3%

Note: *The % refers to the highest percentage of occupancy of each typhoon shelter

#Aberdeen South Typhoon Shelter and Aberdeen West Typhoon Shelter

Permitted length: 1 – 30.4 metres, 2 – 50 metres, 3 – 75 metres

- End -

**Hong Kong Export Credit Insurance Corporation
Ordinance**

Resolution

(Under section 23 of the Hong Kong Export Credit Insurance Corporation
Ordinance (Cap. 1115))

Resolved that the contingent liability of the Hong Kong Export Credit Insurance Corporation under contracts of insurance must not at any time exceed the sum of 80,000 million dollars.

Interpretation and General Clauses Ordinance

Resolution

(Under section 34(4) of the Interpretation and
General Clauses Ordinance (Cap. 1))

Resolved that in relation to the —

- (a) Births and Deaths Registration Ordinance (Amendment of Second Schedule) Notice 2023, published in the Gazette as Legal Notice No. 161 of 2023; and
- (b) Coroners Ordinance (Amendment of Schedule 1) Notice 2023, published in the Gazette as Legal Notice No. 162 of 2023,

and laid on the table of the Legislative Council on 6 December 2023, the period for amending subsidiary legislation referred to in section 34(2) of the Interpretation and General Clauses Ordinance (Cap. 1) and deemed to be extended under section 34(3) of that Ordinance, be extended under section 34(4) of that Ordinance to the meeting of 21 February 2024.

**The marked-up version of the amendment moved by Prof William WONG
(Translation)**

That *education is of critical importance to the future of our country, and the report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China has emphasized speeding up work to build a strong educational system and put forward the objective of becoming a leading country in education by 2035;* General Secretary XI Jinping *also* explicitly mentioned in May 2023 ‘the need to improve the strategy of educational opening up, put equal emphasis on introducing overseas educational resources and going global, and put to good use world-class educational resources and innovative factors, so as to make China an influential and important education hub in the world. It is important to participate in global education governance, vigorously promote the brand of “Study in China” ’; as education in the HKSAR is an integral part of the national education system, it is only natural for the SAR Government to play a more proactive role in the process of promoting the building of China’s education brand; the Chief Executive has also explicitly mentioned in the 2023 Policy Address the need to build Hong Kong into an international hub for post-secondary education; in this connection, this Council urges the SAR Government to adopt more proactive measures to formulate a comprehensive strategic development blueprint for Hong Kong’s education and provide more diversified education services and support measures, *including encouraging local higher education institutions (especially local universities which have already established branches in the Mainland) to jointly offer more double degree programmes with Mainland institutions, so as to enhance the attractiveness of Mainland and Hong Kong higher education institutions to overseas students,* thereby playing the role of leveraging the SAR’s advantages for meeting the country’s needs in the field of education, maintaining and strengthening Hong Kong’s edge as an international city, and enabling the country’s and the SAR’s education to be more influential and have a greater say in the world.

Note: Prof William WONG’s amendment is marked in *bold and italic type*.

**The marked-up version of the further amendment moved by Mr Stanley NG
(Translation)**

That education is of critical importance to the future of our country, and the report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China has emphasized speeding up work to build a strong educational system and put forward the objective of becoming a leading country in education by 2035; General Secretary XI Jinping also explicitly mentioned in May 2023 ‘the need to improve the strategy of educational opening up, put equal emphasis on introducing overseas educational resources and going global, and put to good use world-class educational resources and innovative factors, so as to make China an influential and important education hub in the world. It is important to participate in global education governance, vigorously promote the brand of “Study in China”’; as education in the HKSAR is an integral part of the national education system, it is only natural for the SAR Government to play a more proactive role in the process of promoting the building of China’s education brand; the Chief Executive has also explicitly mentioned in the 2023 Policy Address the need to build Hong Kong into an international hub for post-secondary education; in this connection, this Council urges the SAR Government to adopt more proactive measures to formulate a comprehensive strategic development blueprint for Hong Kong’s education and provide more diversified education services and support measures, including encouraging local higher education institutions (especially local universities which have already established branches in the Mainland) to jointly offer more double degree programmes with Mainland institutions, so as to enhance the attractiveness of Mainland and Hong Kong higher education institutions to overseas students, thereby playing the role of leveraging the SAR’s advantages for meeting the country’s needs in the field of education, maintaining and strengthening Hong Kong’s edge as an international city, and enabling the country’s and the SAR’s education to be more influential and have a greater say in the world; ***this Council also urges the SAR Government to explore more resources for and talents in education (including traditional academic education and vocational and professional education and training).***

Note: Mr Stanley NG’s amendment is marked in ***bold and italic type***.

The marked-up version of the further amendment moved by Ms Lillian KWOK (Translation)

That education is of critical importance to the future of our country, and the report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China has emphasized speeding up work to build a strong educational system and put forward the objective of becoming a leading country in education by 2035; General Secretary XI Jinping also explicitly mentioned in May 2023 ‘the need to improve the strategy of educational opening up, put equal emphasis on introducing overseas educational resources and going global, and put to good use world-class educational resources and innovative factors, so as to make China an influential and important education hub in the world. It is important to participate in global education governance, vigorously promote the brand of “Study in China”’; as education in the HKSAR is an integral part of the national education system, it is only natural for the SAR Government to play a more proactive role in the process of promoting the building of China’s education brand; the Chief Executive has also explicitly mentioned in the 2023 Policy Address the need to build Hong Kong into an international hub for post-secondary education; in this connection, this Council urges the SAR Government to adopt more proactive measures to formulate a comprehensive strategic development blueprint for Hong Kong’s education and provide more diversified education services and support measures, including encouraging local higher education institutions (especially local universities which have already established branches in the Mainland) to jointly offer more double degree programmes with Mainland institutions, so as to enhance the attractiveness of Mainland and Hong Kong higher education institutions to overseas students, thereby playing the role of leveraging the SAR’s advantages for meeting the country’s needs in the field of education, maintaining and strengthening Hong Kong’s edge as an international city, and enabling the country’s and the SAR’s education to be more influential and have a greater say in the world; this Council also urges the SAR Government to explore more resources for and talents in education (including traditional academic education and vocational and professional education and training); ***this Council also urges the SAR Government to progressively strive for the recognition of Hong Kong’s vocational and professional education and training qualifications by different regions.***

Note: Ms Lillian KWOK’s amendment is marked in ***bold and italic type***.

The marked-up version of the further amendment moved by Mr Frankie YICK (Translation)

That education is of critical importance to the future of our country, and the report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China has emphasized speeding up work to build a strong educational system and put forward the objective of becoming a leading country in education by 2035; General Secretary XI Jinping also explicitly mentioned in May 2023 ‘the need to improve the strategy of educational opening up, put equal emphasis on introducing overseas educational resources and going global, and put to good use world-class educational resources and innovative factors, so as to make China an influential and important education hub in the world. It is important to participate in global education governance, vigorously promote the brand of “Study in China”’; as education in the HKSAR is an integral part of the national education system, it is only natural for the SAR Government to play a more proactive role in the process of promoting the building of China’s education brand; the Chief Executive has also explicitly mentioned in the 2023 Policy Address the need to build Hong Kong into an international hub for post-secondary education; in this connection, this Council urges the SAR Government to adopt more proactive measures to formulate a comprehensive strategic development blueprint for Hong Kong’s education and provide more diversified education services and support measures, including encouraging local higher education institutions (especially local universities which have already established branches in the Mainland) to jointly offer more double degree programmes with Mainland institutions, so as to enhance the attractiveness of Mainland and Hong Kong higher education institutions to overseas students, thereby playing the role of leveraging the SAR’s advantages for meeting the country’s needs in the field of education, maintaining and strengthening Hong Kong’s edge as an international city, and enabling the country’s and the SAR’s education to be more influential and have a greater say in the world; this Council also urges the SAR Government to explore more resources for and talents in education (including traditional academic education and vocational and professional education and training); this Council also urges the SAR Government to progressively strive for the recognition of Hong Kong’s vocational and professional education and training qualifications by different regions; ***this Council also urges the SAR Government to allocate more resources to promote vocational and professional education and training, and integrate technology subjects into daily teaching and learning, so as to enhance the knowledge of and training for the new generation in craftsmanship.***

Note: Mr Frankie YICK’s amendment is marked in ***bold and italic type***.

The marked-up version of the further amendment moved by Prof Priscilla LEUNG (Translation)

That education is of critical importance to the future of our country, and the report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China has emphasized speeding up work to build a strong educational system and put forward the objective of becoming a leading country in education by 2035; General Secretary XI Jinping also explicitly mentioned in May 2023 ‘the need to improve the strategy of educational opening up, put equal emphasis on introducing overseas educational resources and going global, and put to good use world-class educational resources and innovative factors, so as to make China an influential and important education hub in the world. It is important to participate in global education governance, vigorously promote the brand of “Study in China” ’; as education in the HKSAR is an integral part of the national education system, it is only natural for the SAR Government to play a more proactive role in the process of promoting the building of China’s education brand; the Chief Executive has also explicitly mentioned in the 2023 Policy Address the need to build Hong Kong into an international hub for post-secondary education; in this connection, this Council urges the SAR Government to adopt more proactive measures to formulate a comprehensive strategic development blueprint for Hong Kong’s education and provide more diversified education services and support measures, including encouraging local higher education institutions (especially local universities which have already established branches in the Mainland) to jointly offer more double degree programmes with Mainland institutions, so as to enhance the attractiveness of Mainland and Hong Kong higher education institutions to overseas students, thereby playing the role of leveraging the SAR’s advantages for meeting the country’s needs in the field of education, maintaining and strengthening Hong Kong’s edge as an international city, and enabling the country’s and the SAR’s education to be more influential and have a greater say in the world; this Council also urges the SAR Government to explore more resources for and talents in education (including traditional academic education and vocational and professional education and training); this Council also urges the SAR Government to progressively strive for the recognition of Hong Kong’s vocational and professional education and training qualifications by different regions; this Council also urges the SAR Government to allocate more resources to promote vocational and professional education and training, and integrate technology subjects into daily teaching and learning, so as to enhance the knowledge of and training for the new generation in craftsmanship; *regarding legal education, General Secretary XI Jinping has clearly pointed out the need to step up efforts in international legal education by focusing on the cultivation of talents in international law enforcement, judicial and legal services, and the cultivation of legal talents for secondments to international organizations, so as to better serve the overall situation of*

external work; therefore, the SAR Government should expeditiously implement the proposal in the Policy Address to set up a dedicated office and an expert group within 2024 to take forward the establishment of the Hong Kong International Legal Talents Training Academy, and provide adequate resources, clear directions and concrete plans for the training offered by the Academy, as well as introduce more proactive policies and facilitation measures to encourage legal professionals from around the world to enrol in the Academy's international legal training programmes, so as to further enhance the exchanges among legal professionals at home and abroad, and make Hong Kong an international hub for the exchange and education of legal talents.

Note: Prof Priscilla LEUNG's amendment is marked in *bold and italic type*.