

Asian Financial Forum promotes sustainable growth and inclusive future (with photos/videos)

The 12th Asian Financial Forum (AFF), co-organised by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government and the Hong Kong Trade Development Council, opened today (January 14), gathering over 3 300 influential financial and business leaders as well as global policymakers and financial regulators from over 40 countries and regions to share their insights on the role of the financial services sector in shaping a sustainable and inclusive future.

The theme of this year's forum is "Creating a Sustainable and Inclusive Future". Addressing the opening session of the AFF this morning, the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, highlighted Hong Kong's competitive edge and achievements in financial services, commenting that the financial industry, which contributed almost 19 per cent of Hong Kong's gross domestic product in 2017, was well placed to serve the economy.

While noting that the trade discord between the two largest economies in the world and uncertainties in other parts of the world had created considerable challenges ahead, Mrs Lam said she was confident that Hong Kong, by leveraging on its solid foundations and proactive policies, will turn some of those global challenges into opportunities.

"Indeed, Hong Kong is a city built on finance and possesses the singular good fortune to create opportunities both with the Mainland and the world at large," she said.

To further demonstrate that Hong Kong is well placed to navigate through challenges, Mrs Lam added, "Our economy grew 3.7 per cent in the first three quarters of 2018. Economic growth for 2018 as a whole is forecast at 3.2 per cent, which is higher than the trend growth rate in the past decade for the second consecutive year. And our unemployment rate remains at a 20-year low of 2.8 per cent. In short, we are performing as well as can be expected given the uncertainties of the global economy. No less important, we are prepared for shifting economic and political tides."

The Financial Secretary, Mr Paul Chan, in his welcome remarks at the keynote luncheon, pointed out that the trade friction had created uncertainty and added downside risk to economic growth and increased volatility in financial markets. However, he said that Hong Kong, renowned as the freest economy in the world, will not adopt protectionism. He stressed that Hong Kong supported free trade and the multilateral trading system, as well as the free flow of capital, people and information, which is the cornerstone of Hong Kong economy.

Mr Chan added that the Government is enhancing the regulatory regime and

the resilience of the financial markets to help Hong Kong maintain financial stability amid the heightened external uncertainties.

Speaking at the cocktail reception in the evening, Mr Chan introduced the Fintech Showcase, which was newly launched this year, noting that Hong Kong is well prepared to strengthen its financial and professional services which embrace the traditional and the innovative, the global and the local, the corporates and the start-ups.

In the morning, the Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury, Mr James Lau, chaired the plenary session on "Creating a Sustainable and Inclusive Future: Opportunities and Challenges", during which he exchanged insights with finance ministers, regulators and leading figures of international financial institutions on how financial policies could help to overcome challenges and create a sustainable and inclusive future. Heavyweight speakers joining Mr Lau in this session were the President and Chairman of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, Mr Jin Liqun; the Vice President of the China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission, Mr Wang Zhaoxing; the Minister of Finance of Malaysia, Mr Lim Guan Eng; the Minister of Finance of Luxembourg, Mr Pierre Gramegna; and the Minister of State at the Department of Finance with special responsibility for Financial Services and Insurance of Ireland, Mr Michael D'Arcy.

In light of the latest developments in the Sino-United States (US) trade conflict, former President of the World Bank Group and former US Deputy Secretary of State, Mr Robert Zoellick, delivered a luncheon keynote speech sharing his insights into the Sino-US trade conflict, and analysed the current global economic trends and the long-term economic outlook.

Before the luncheon, there was a panel discussion chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority, Mr Eddie Yue. Speakers included the Chairman of the Dubai Financial Services Authority, Mr Saeb Eigner; the First Deputy Governor of Banque de France, Mr Denis Beau; the First Deputy Governor of the Bank of Russia, Mr Sergey Shvetsov; and member of the Executive Board of Deutsche Bundesbank, Mr Burkhard Balz. They exchanged views on how to manage the global financial risk and opportunities ahead.

This year, there were four newly launched panel discussion sessions hosted by eminent entrepreneurs, financial regulators and academics. Representatives from the banking and financial services sector, start-ups and fintech and insurance companies engaged in in-depth discussions on a wide range of topical issues covering start-ups, financial innovation and risk management in Belt and Road infrastructure projects.

In addition, to further promote the development of fintech, a FinTech Showcase was set up this year to allow international financial institutions and technology corporations to showcase innovative solutions to industry on-site. To provide a platform for investors and industry players to explore co-operation, the forum also comprises a deal-flow matchmaking session, InnoVenture Salon and Fireside Chat, focusing on a variety of subjects in fintech, including artificial intelligence, blockchain, regulatory technology

and cyber security.

This two-day forum will continue tomorrow (January 15), with a breakfast panel, a series of Innotalks and a keynote luncheon. Given the rapid development of the sharing economy, the keynote luncheon on the second day of the forum will feature the Head of the Sharing Economy Working Group, World Economic Forum Young Global Leaders, Ms April Rinne, who will talk about how the financial services sector could contribute to the development of the sharing economy.

