

LCQ19: Air quality in Public Transport Interchanges

Following is a question by the Hon Kenneth Leung and a written reply by the Acting Secretary for Transport and Housing, Dr Raymond So Wai-man, at the Legislative Council meeting today (May 16):

Question:

The Practice Note on Control of Air Pollution in Semi-confined Public Transport Interchanges, which was issued by the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) in 1998, provides guidelines on aspects such as the air quality, the design required as well as the operation and maintenance of the ventilation systems of semi-confined public transport interchanges (PTIs). Recently, a newspaper reported that the concentrations of two types of air pollutants, namely nitrogen dioxide and fine suspended particulates (i.e. PM2.5) as recorded in several covered PTIs had substantially exceeded the relevant target limits under the Air Quality Guidelines of the World Health Organization. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the current total number of covered PTIs in Hong Kong and, in respect of each PTI, (i) the location, (ii) the area, (iii) the number of bus routes which can be accommodated, and (iv) the type of ventilation system installed;
- (2) of the number of complaints about the air quality of covered PTIs received by the authorities in the past five years; the contents of the complaints and the names of the PTIs involved;
- (3) whether it conducted any detailed study in the past five years on ways to improve the related facilities and environment (including air quality or ventilation systems) of covered PTIs; if so, of the details, if not, the reasons for that; and
- (4) given that in the light of the latest development in air quality standards, EPD is liaising with the relevant government departments so as to review the aforesaid guidelines, of the details of such review, and how EPD will improve the air quality of PTIs?

Reply:

President,

My reply to various parts of the Hon Kenneth Leung's question is as follows:

- (1) At present, there are a total of 65 covered public transport interchanges (PTIs) managed by the Transport Department (TD) in Hong Kong to facilitate passengers' interchange between different public transport services. The locations of the covered PTIs managed by the TD, their respective size, the number of bus routes observing the PTIs and the type of ventilation systems

installed are at Annex 1.

(2) From 2014 to April 2018, the TD received a total of 111 complaint cases concerning PTIs' air quality or ventilation systems, involving 37 PTIs (details at Annex 2). The complaint cases were mainly about the insufficient ventilation, air quality, damages and noise nuisance of ventilation systems, etc.

(3)&(4) In respect of the daily operation and management of PTIs, the TD, together with the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD), have been monitoring the air quality of the PTIs as well as the operation of the ventilation systems regularly, and have carried out repair and maintenance works as appropriate. Besides, the TD commissions the EMSD to conduct air quality measurements in the covered PTIs managed by the TD approximately every two years. The frequency of measurements would be increased as the actual situation requires. Every air quality measurement covers 24 hours a day, including both the morning and evening peak hours, and collects data about the concentration of carbon monoxide (CO), sulphur dioxide (SO₂) and nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) in the PTIs. Based on the measurement results, the TD will work with the relevant government departments to consider and implement appropriate improvement measures, including extending the operating hours of ventilation systems, increasing the air volume, strengthening the management of switching off idling engines at PTIs and requesting the bus companies to deploy more environmentally friendly models of buses (including Euro IV and V) to operate the routes involved.

As regards the formulation and review of the Practice Note for Professional Persons – Control of Air Pollution in Semi-Confined Public Transport Interchanges (Practice Note), the existing Practice Note sets out the air quality (including CO, NO₂ and SO₂) guidelines for semi-confined PTIs, as well as the design of the PTIs and operation and maintenance of the systems required to meet the air quality guidelines for reference by the relevant professionals. The Environmental Protection Department (EPD) will work with relevant government departments to review the Practice Note. According to the EPD, factors including the actual operation and need of the PTIs as well as the local and overseas short-term air quality standards of similar air pollutants will be taken into consideration when reviewing the Practice Note.

The Government will continue to closely monitor the air quality and the operation of ventilation systems in the PTIs, and examine the causes of the unsatisfactory air quality. Additional measures will be taken based on the actual situation in order to enhance the air quality in the PTIs.

LCQ16: Control of unauthorised signboards

Following is a question by the Dr Hon Chiang Lai-wan and a written reply by the Secretary for Development, Mr Michael Wong, in the Legislative Council today (May 16):

Question:

At present, there are tens of thousands of unauthorised signboards in the territory, and abandoned signboards that may endanger public safety are not uncommon. The Government launched the Validation Scheme for Unauthorised Signboards in 2013 to allow the continued use of certain unauthorised signboards after they have undergone safety inspection, strengthening (if necessary), and certification by prescribed building professionals or registered contractors. On the other hand, it has been reported recently that although the Buildings Department (BD) has arranged to remove some abandoned signboards upon receipt of reports from members of the public, most of the abandoned signboards are still left unattended. Each year, BD issues a number of removal orders in respect of dangerous, abandoned and unauthorised signboards, and there are nearly 2 000 signboards in respect of which the removal orders have not been complied with. Some experts have warned that such type of signboards, if become dilapidated, will pose hazards to public safety at any time. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the respective numbers of dangerous, abandoned and unauthorised signboards which the authorities arranged to remove in each of the past five years, broken down by District Council district;
- (2) whether it will, for the purpose of safeguarding public safety, allocate additional resources and manpower to expedite the handling of abandoned signboards and cases of signboard owners' failure to comply with the removal orders upon expiry of the deadlines; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (3) given that under urgent circumstances, BD will engage government contractors to remove dangerous signboards and recover the cost of such works plus supervision charge and surcharge from the signboard owners afterwards, of the number of such cases, the total expenses involved and the sum of money recovered, in each of the past three years;
- (4) whether it will set up a hotline dedicated to reporting abandoned signboards by the public with a view to removing abandoned signboards expeditiously; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (5) whether it will publish regularly the locations of the abandoned signboards which have yet to be removed by signboard owners pursuant to the removal orders, so as to raise the alertness of the public; if so, of the

details; if not, the reasons for that;

(6) whether it will review and improve the Validation Scheme for Unauthorised Signboards, e.g. stepping up the promotional work and changing the nature of the scheme from voluntary to mandatory so as to enhance the effectiveness of the Scheme; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(7) whether it will increase the penalties to be imposed on signboard owners who have failed to comply with the removal orders, so as to enhance the deterrent effect; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Government has all along attached great importance to signboard safety. At present, any signboards erected without obtaining the approval and consent of the Buildings Department (BD) or following the requirements under the Minor Works Control System (MWCS) are unauthorised building works (except that the signboard, due to its scale, is regarded as designated exempted works (DEW) which can be carried out without obtaining prior approval and consent of BD or complying with the MWCS requirements)(Note). BD may issue statutory removal orders to signboard owners or individuals concerned in accordance with section 24 of the Buildings Ordinance (BO) (Cap. 123). Regarding abandoned or dangerous signboards, BD may issue Dangerous Structure Removal Notices (DSRNs) to their owners in accordance with section 105(1) of the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (PHMSO) (Cap. 132), requiring removal of the signboards concerned. In emergency situations, BD may engage government contractors to remove dangerous signboards immediately and then recover the costs from the individuals concerned.

Taking into consideration the fact that many of the existing signboards in Hong Kong are in active use by business operators and that their existence carries considerable value for sustaining local commercial activities and contributing to Hong Kong's prosperity, BD has implemented the Signboard Validation Scheme (SVS) since September 2, 2013. The SVS allows the continued use of signboards that are relatively small in scale, pose less potential risk, were erected before the implementation date of the scheme and meet the prescribed technical specifications for minor works on the condition that they have undergone safety inspection and strengthening (if necessary) by prescribed building professionals and/or prescribed registered contractors validated by BD, and undergone inspection on a regular basis.

The current Signboard Control System is adopting the "risk-based" principle. Apart from implementing the SVS on an ongoing basis, BD also carries out large scale operations (LSO) in selected target streets to comprehensively handle the unauthorised signboards of particular sections of the selected target streets. When carrying out the LSOs, BD officers will issue statutory removal orders against unauthorised signboards that have yet joined the SVS in order to urge the relevant owners to join the SVS as early

as possible, as well as issue statutory removal orders or DSRNs against those large-scaled unauthorised signboards which are ineligible for the SVS, so as to eliminate the possible public safety risks.

Besides, BD will take immediate enforcement action against signboards constituting obvious hazard to life or property, and give priority to enforce against unauthorised signboards under construction or newly erected.

Note: One of the examples of signboard falls under the category of DEW is the erection of a wall signboard fixed to the external wall of a building with display area of not more than 1 square meter, not comprising any display system consisting of light emitting diodes, projecting not more than 150 millimeter from the wall, and with a distance of not more than 3 meters from the ground.

In consultation with BD, the Development Bureau provides a consolidated reply as follows:

(1) As mentioned above, at present, BD mainly issues statutory removal orders or DSRNs in accordance with the relevant provisions of the BO or the PHMSO to signboard owners or individuals concerned, requiring them to remove or repair the unauthorised signboards concerned within the time specified in the orders or DSRNs. The geographical distribution of the numbers of unauthorised signboards handled by BD with the aforesaid approach in each of the past five years are tabulated below:

District	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Central and Western	115	214	230	173	262
Eastern	149	101	234	227	226
Kowloon City	281	235	241	169	244
Kwai Tsing	27	18	27	38	16
Kwun Tong	10	83	61	37	84
North	30	10	42	132	69
Islands	0	2	1	44	2
Sai Kung	3	13	40	8	9
Sham Shui Po	155	270	203	237	271
Sha Tin	0	38	53	32	57
Southern	55	16	53	49	29
Tai Po	15	18	39	59	44
Tsuen Wan	28	84	74	56	149
Tuen Mun	16	12	22	37	32
Wan Chai	164	252	350	434	356
Wong Tai Sin	22	22	20	38	26
Yau Tsim Mong	208	602	868	737	632
Yuen Long	12	72	86	116	143

Total	1 290	2 062	2 644	2 623	2 651
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(2) BD has been taking enforcement action against unauthorised signboards by following up public reports and taking proactive inspections including carrying out LSOs. In 2017-18, the number of professional and technical staff of the Signboard Control Unit in BD had increased from 35 to 42 to centralise the handling of cases related to unauthorised signboards as well as to step up the enforcement actions against them.

BD will continue to closely monitor the effectiveness of enforcement and manpower requirement, and would bid for additional resources in accordance with the established procedures as necessary.

(3) At present, BD engages government contractors to deal with unauthorised signboards in relation to expired non-compliant statutory removal orders or DSRNs to avoid them from affecting public safety. In the past three financial years, the numbers of relevant cases are 387, 410 and 280 (up to the end of 2017) respectively. BD will recover the costs from the signboard owners or individuals concerned after the completion of works. BD however does not compile readily available separate statistics on the expenses involved and the sum of money recovered from relevant signboard owners of these cases.

On the other hand, if any signboards are found to constitute obvious hazard to life or property through public reports or when conducting proactive inspections, BD will immediately appoint government contractor to remove the dangerous signboards and will recover the costs from the individuals concerned afterwards. The statistics on emergency works to remove dangerous signboards by government contractors appointed by BD in the past three financial years are tabulated below:

	Number of cases with emergency removal of dangerous signboards by government contractors (Note 1)	Expenditure on removal works covered by government funding due to failure to identify signboard owners (\$)	Expenditure on removal works with signboard owners identified (\$)	Amount recovered from signboard owners (Note 3) (\$)
2015-16	5(1)	11,064	40,063	22,626
2016-17	6(1)	9,707	68,240	60,987
2017-18	4(2)	11,792 (Note 2)	28,043	0 (Note 4)

Note 1: Figures in brackets denote the number of cases in which signboard owners could not be identified.

Note 2: Another case involving a sum of \$11,826 will be paid to the contractor by BD in 2018-19.

Note 3: The year in which the sum was recovered may not be the same as that

in which the relevant demand note was issued.

Note 4: BD will issue demand notes to relevant signboard owners shortly.

(4) At present, members of the public may report cases in relation to unauthorised signboards to BD through various channels, including the 1823 Call Centre operating 24 hours a day, BD Hotline 2626 1616 (handled by 1823 officers), BD's e-mail (enquiry@bd.gov.hk), and the electronic reporting form on BD's website. We consider there is no need to set up a dedicated reporting hotline at this point.

(5) When handling abandoned or dangerous signboards, BD will generally require signboard owners to remove the signboards concerned within the specified time (normally 14 days) upon issuing DSRNs in accordance with section 105(1) of the PHMSO. In case of non-compliance of the DSRN, BD will also engage government contractors to remove the signboards as soon as practicable. In other words, such cases would be dealt with within a short period of time. Notwithstanding the aforesaid, to enhance transparency, BD will, having regard to cost-effectiveness consideration, consider whether and how to release information relating to unauthorised signboards.

(6) In regard to the SVS, as at the end of April 2018, BD received a total of 662 applications for validation. Among them, 274 signboards have been validated and 51 applications are being processed, whereas the remaining cases were returned due to ineligibility.

Other than participating in the SVS, owners of unauthorised signboards may choose to remove their old signboards and re-erect signboards in accordance with the specifications of the MWCS. Besides, some signboards are ineligible for the SVS. Owners of these signboards must remove and re-erect their signboards under the MWCS. We noted that in the 32 months before the implementation of the SVS (from December 31, 2010 to September 1, 2013), 2 992 minor works for signboards (Note) were received, i.e. an average of 94 submissions per month prior to the implementation of the SVS. In the 56 months after the commencement of the SVS (from September 2, 2013 to April 30, 2018), the figure rose significantly to 24 839, i.e. 444 submissions per month on average (an increase of 372%).

To enhance the participation rate of the SVS and the effectiveness of enforcement against unauthorised signboards, BD launched territory-wide LSOs against unauthorised signboards in target sections of 21 streets in various districts from 2014 to 2017. Statutory removal orders and DSRNs were issued against unauthorised signboards which had not been validated under the SVS or were ineligible for validation. In 2018, BD will launch LSOs in certain sections of 10 other target streets. BD will constantly review the effectiveness of enforcement as well as manpower resources, and make annual adjustment to the scale of annual LSOs in a timely manner.

Besides, to enhance public awareness of the SVS, BD will continue to disseminate relevant information to the public through different means, for instance, by making available relevant guidelines on the website, broadcasting Announcement in the Public Interests, conducting briefings for

the industry and public, distributing promotional leaflets, etc.

Note: Viz. the removal, erection or alteration of signboards that meet the specifications of MWCS.

(7) In accordance with section 40(1BA) of the BO, any person who, without reasonable excuse, fails to comply with a statutory removal order, including statutory removal orders issued against unauthorised signboards, shall be guilty of an offence and shall be liable on conviction to a fine of \$200,000 and to imprisonment for one year, and to a fine of \$20,000 for each day during which the offence has continued. In addition, under section 40(1AA) of the BO, any person who knowingly carries out building works, including erecting signboards, without having obtained from BD the approval of plans and consent to the commencement of works, shall be guilty of an offence and shall be liable on conviction to a fine of \$400,000 and to imprisonment for two years, and to a fine of \$20,000 for each day during which the offence has continued. Generally, the compliance rate of statutory removal orders and DSRNs is satisfactory and we consider the existing penalty level is sufficient to create a deterrent effect.

[Transcript of SCMA's remarks on HK TV station cameraman being taken away by police in Beijing](#)

Following is the transcript of remarks made by the Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs, Mr Patrick Nip, at a media session at the Legislative Council Complex today (May 16):

Reporter: What specific measures will you take to protect the safety of reporters in future?

Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs: I think we are very concerned about the safety of Hong Kong residents who are staying outside Hong Kong, including our reporters working outside Hong Kong, in the Mainland. We have immediately followed up with the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council. We understand that they have already taken action to understand and to deal with the matter. I note that progress has been made and our Beijing Office (the Office of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China in Beijing) colleagues have contacted the reporter to offer all necessary assistance if required. We would continue to follow up with the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council and see what further measures we could take to prevent the occurrence of similar incidents. So at this stage, it is better for us to understand what has happened and let the relevant

authorities in the Mainland follow up the issue in accordance with the laws and regulations and the established mechanism in the Mainland.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the transcript.)

LCQ5: Issues relating to the promotion of "Hong Kong independence"

Following is a question by Dr Hon Junius Ho and a reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (May 16):

Question:

Subsequent to his initiation of the occupation movement in 2014, Associate Professor Benny Tai Yiu-ting, who teaches at the Faculty of Law of University of Hong Kong, attended an activity entitled "The 10th Anniversary of the Taiwan Youth Anti-Communist National Salvation Corps – A Forum on Freedom and Human Rights in Hong Kong, Macao, China, Taiwan and Multi-ethnic Groups" held in Taipei on March 24 this year. When speaking at the forum, he said that "the autocratic regime in China will eventually come to an end one day... With the success in toppling the autocratic regime, it is necessary to build a democratic state and a democratic society... By then, Hong Kong people can decide whether or not to found an independent state or form a federation or confederation with the ethnic groups in other regions of China". On the 30th of last month, in response to the aforesaid remarks, the Government pointed out that any advocacy of "Hong Kong independence" ran against "one country, two systems" and the Basic Law as well as the overall and long-term interest of the society of Hong Kong, and strongly condemned the remarks of Professor Tai. Professor Tai said in response to the criticisms against him that "there is a solid academic thinking behind" his remarks, and "this was what a scholar did to put the outcome of his academic researches into personal practice". However, there are public criticisms that Professor Tai is actually promoting "Hong Kong independence" under the pretext of academic freedom. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether the law enforcement agencies have studied if Professor Tai has committed any criminal offence (including the offence of "seditious intention" under section 9 of the Crimes Ordinance) by making the aforesaid remarks; if they have not studied, of the reasons for that; if they have, the outcome; whether and when law enforcement actions will be taken; if no law enforcement actions will be taken, of the reasons for that;

(2) whether the authorities will seek from Professor Tai or the University of Hong Kong the following information about the academic researches referred to by him: the titles and scopes of the research projects concerned; the commencement and completion dates of such researches; the dates of

publication of the research outcome; the amounts of expenditure incurred on the researches and the sources of funding; the numbers of working hours Professor Tai spent on such researches and the numbers of workers participating in the researches; among these research workers, the ratios of full-time workers to part-time workers, and whether students were included; if students had participated in the researches, of the numbers of hours they worked; and

(3) whether the Education Bureau has issued guidelines to various education institutions (including various tertiary institutions) to prevent school campuses from becoming the breeding ground for spreading the idea of "Hong Kong independence" or inciting students to conduct activities related to "Hong Kong independence"?

Reply:

President,

The Preamble of the Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China (Basic Law) spells out clearly that Hong Kong has been part of the territory of China since ancient times. Upholding national unity and territorial integrity, maintaining the prosperity and stability of Hong Kong, and taking account of its history and realities, the People's Republic of China (PRC) decided that upon its resumption of the exercise of sovereignty over Hong Kong, a Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) would be established and the Basic Law would be enacted by the National People's Congress in accordance with the Constitution of the PRC (Constitution).

Article 1 of the Basic Law clearly points out that the HKSAR is an inalienable part of the PRC. Article 12 of the Basic Law also clearly elucidates that the HKSAR shall be a local administrative region of the PRC, which shall enjoy a high degree of autonomy and come directly under the Central People's Government. This shows that Hong Kong has always been an inalienable part of China. "One country, two systems" is the best institutional arrangement to ensure Hong Kong's long-term prosperity and stability after our return to the Motherland.

Everybody with a passion for Hong Kong has the responsibility to ensure that, here in Hong Kong, "one country, two systems" advances in the right direction, the obligation to say "no" to any attempt to threaten our country's sovereignty, security and development interests, as well as the duty to nurture our next generation into citizens with a sense of national identity, an affection for Hong Kong and a sense of social responsibility. Any advocacy of "Hong Kong independence" runs against "one country, two systems", the Basic Law as well as the overall and long-term interest of the society of Hong Kong. The community has high expectations of our teachers and professors in particular. The remarks by Associate Professor Benny Tai that Hong Kong could consider becoming an independent state were strongly condemned by the HKSAR Government on March 30, 2018.

Our reply to Dr Hon Junius Ho's question is as follows:

(1) The HKSAR Government reiterated in its statement on March 30, 2018 that any advocacy of "Hong Kong independence" runs against "one country, two systems", the Basic Law as well as the overall and long-term interest of the society of Hong Kong. When meeting the media in April 2018, the Chief Executive also pointed out that the HKSAR Government and Hong Kong society both had the responsibility to safeguard national security, territorial integrity and development interests. Hence, "Hong Kong independence", in word and deed, is totally unacceptable as it violates the Constitution and the Basic Law, undermines "one country, two systems" and the prosperity and stability of the HKSAR.

With regard to any acts that may constitute criminal offences, as in the past, law enforcement departments will handle such cases in accordance with the law.

(2) To set the record straight, the HKSAR Government issued a statement on March 30, 2018 to strongly condemn Associate Professor Benny Tai's remarks related to "Hong Kong independence". This was not an issue of freedom of speech or academic freedom.

We safeguard and respect academic freedom and institutional autonomy according to the law. The universities have the authority to decide on their research disciplines and projects and those of their academic staff. According to the Notes on Procedures of the University Grants Committee (UGC), the initiation and acceptance of research proposals is a matter of institutional autonomy. That said, the Notes on Procedures also state that the autonomy does not exempt institutions from public interest. We trust that institutions will handle institutional affairs according to the law and established mechanisms. We do not maintain information on specific academic research projects.

Associate Professor Benny Tai's remarks have aroused public concern. In response to the question raised by Member of the Legislative Council, the Education Bureau (EDB) has made enquiries with the Research Grants Council (RGC) and the University of Hong Kong (HKU). According to the information provided by RGC, it has not funded Associate Professor Benny Tai to conduct any academic research projects that advocate "Hong Kong independence". HKU has advised that information on research findings, conference papers, publications, etc. of its academics (including Associate Professor Benny Tai) is available in detail at the HKU Scholars Hub (hub.hku.hk/) for public reference.

(3) Our stance all along is that any proposals or activities advocating "Hong Kong independence" should not be allowed on our campuses. We also request the education sector to guard against pro-independence activists from infiltrating into our campuses. We have all along maintained communication with the education sector on various matters and offer them support and advice as and when necessary. In fact, the education sector has gained considerable experience over the years in handling politicised incidents with appropriate responses, demonstrating professionalism in ensuring that students can study in a safe and orderly environment, are taught professionally and are offered counselling as needed.

Post-secondary institutions are autonomous bodies and the EDB believes that they have the responsibility as well as the ability to deal with incidents on their campuses properly while looking after their students' interests. Our post-secondary institutions are obliged to ensure that nothing in contravention of the Basic Law would occur in any aspect of their operation, including that none of their platforms and resources will be abused to advocate "Hong Kong independence" and promote such activities. Such obligation is in line with public expectations. In this connection, all our universities have clearly stated that they do not support "Hong Kong independence", recognising it a contravention to the Basic Law.

The Government and post-secondary institutions are committed to safeguarding academic freedom and freedom of expression as guaranteed by the Basic Law. Meanwhile, in view of the importance of higher education to the development of our society, it is incumbent upon the Government and the community at large to have a legitimate interest in the operation of the institutions. Both faculty and students should bear in mind Articles 1 and 12 of the Basic Law, respect law and order, and exercise their freedom of expression with caution.

In respect of elementary education, we elucidated in August 2016 our stance in a letter addressed to principals and teachers of all secondary schools in Hong Kong, calling upon them to uphold professionalism in discharging their duties and protect students from being misled into taking part in the promotion of any activities that contravene the Basic Law or the law. The EDB officers meet with principals of the public sector and Direct Subsidy Scheme secondary schools from time to time. In these meetings, we discuss with the principals and advise them on the proposed approach to handling controversial issues, including "Hong Kong independence". In addition, the schools are urged to make the best endeavours to implement the Basic Law education effectively. The attendees also share their past experience of dealing with similar cases and explore concertedly how to guide students in developing proper concepts on the issues in question.

LCQ17: Impacts on HK's telecommunications services caused by sanction on telecommunications equipment supplier

Following is a question by the Hon Charles Mok and a written reply by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau, in the Legislative Council today (May 16):

Question:

The authorities of the United States (US) announced on April 15 (US time) this year an immediate ban on US companies selling telecommunications equipment components to ZTE Corporation (ZTE) for a period of seven years up to March 13, 2025. It is learnt that ZTE's businesses include the supply of telecommunications equipment and network solutions. ZTE is also a supplier of mobile networks and broadband equipment for a number of telecommunications service operators (TSOs) in Hong Kong. Some members of the information technology sector are worried that the sanction will affect the stability of telecommunications services as well as commercial operations and public communications in Hong Kong. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it knows, among the TSOs currently providing local fixed carrier services, fixed network broadband services and mobile network services, the respective numbers and detailed situations of those which are using (i) the network infrastructure equipment and (ii) other telecommunications products and services provided by ZTE, with a breakdown of such numbers and information by the service scope of the TSOs (set out in a table);

(2) whether it has taken the initiative to request the various TSOs concerned to draw up contingency plans and take appropriate measures to ensure that the telecommunications services that they provide will not be affected in the event that ZTE is unable to continue its supply of the necessary network infrastructure equipment and related services to them; and

(3) whether it has studied the impacts on the development of 5G mobile communications services by TSOs in Hong Kong (including the testing and the application of the relevant network technologies) in the event that the US authorities impose similar sanctions on other Chinese-funded telecommunications equipment suppliers?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the three parts of the question is as follows:

(1) According to the information the Office of the Communications Authority (OFCA) obtained from the major local fixed network operators (FNOs) and mobile network operators (MNOs), at present four FNOs and two MNOs have respectively used some network equipment and some telecommunications equipment supplied by Zhongxing Telecommunications Equipment Corporation (ZTE).

(2) OFCA has already reminded the relevant operators that they should assess the impact on their telecommunications services in light of the ban imposed on ZTE by the authorities of the United States, and adopt appropriate responsive measures to minimise any possible impact. After conducting internal assessments, the relevant operators considered that the incident

would not cause any immediate impact on their services and network operations at this stage. Even if ZTE cannot continue to provide technical support, spare parts, or new equipment, they will be able to source such products from other suppliers in order to maintain the normal service operation.

(3) So far, the United States authorities have not announced that it would impose trade restrictions or other sanctions against other Chinese telecommunications equipment suppliers. It would be difficult at this stage to assess the impact of any such restriction or sanction on the development of fifth generation (5G) mobile services in Hong Kong. The Government will keep a close watch on the situation.