

SJ to lead Hong Kong legal sector delegation to visit Mainland cities of GBA

The Secretary for Justice, Mr Paul Lam, SC, leading a delegation of over 30 representatives from Hong Kong's legal sector, will depart for Guangzhou for a three-day visit to the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) tomorrow (December 5). The delegation comprises representatives from the Law Society of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Bar Association, as well as representatives from local, international and registered foreign law firms, including various non-Chinese lawyers.

Mr Lam and his delegation will visit Guangzhou and Shenzhen to meet with local government representatives to learn more about the latest developments in Guangdong and the GBA, and to explore opportunities for further co-operation between the Hong Kong legal sector and Mainland authorities, as well as legal and business sectors of the Mainland. They will also hold discussions with representatives from Guangdong legal and business sectors in Guangzhou and with representatives of Mainland courts and law-related organisations in Shenzhen to discuss various topics of mutual interest and share practical experiences. Mr Lam and his delegation will also visit an innovation and technology enterprise's headquarters in Shenzhen and meet with its representatives.

Mr Lam will return to Hong Kong on December 7. During his absence, the Deputy Secretary for Justice, Dr Cheung Kwok-kwan, will be the Acting Secretary for Justice.

LCQ2: Relaxing restrictions on use of deployed features of electric vehicles

Following is a question by the Hon Duncan Chiu and a reply by the Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Lam Sai-hung, in the Legislative Council today (December 4):

Question:

There are views that while the Government has made efforts to promote the popularisation of electric vehicles (EVs) in recent years, the relevant legislation is outdated and restricts the use of some deployed features of many electric private cars imported into Hong Kong. This not only undermines the maximum efficiency of EVs and the convenience they bring to drivers, but

may also reduce the public's desire to switch to EVs, thus hindering the progress of the extensive use of EVs. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) regarding EVs currently imported into Hong Kong, whether it has studied and consolidated the deployed features that are restricted from use in Hong Kong; if so, set out the individual features that are restricted from use by EV brands, and the legislation involved;

(2) whether it will conduct a comprehensive review on all the provisions under the Road Traffic Ordinance which involve restrictions on the use of EV features, and study the possibility of gradually relaxing the relevant restrictions, as well as formulate a specific timetable for amending the relevant legislation; and

(3) whether it will review afresh and explore ways to improve the content of the relevant policies, regulations and testing standards, etc., so as to provide a more friendly "barrier-free" space and environment for the use of imported EVs?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Environment and Ecology Bureau, the Transport Department (TD) and the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department, my consolidated reply to the questions raised by the Hon Duncan Chiu is as follows:

(1) and (2) The TD has always kept an open mind to new vehicle technologies. When formulating relevant legislation and technical guidelines to promote the adoption of new technologies in Hong Kong, the TD conducts timely reviews on the advancement in technology and liaises closely with the trade for feedback, while taking road safety, local traffic conditions as well as the regulatory experience of other jurisdictions into consideration. All vehicles, including electric vehicles (EV), should make reference to the corresponding technical guidelines, in accordance with the Road Traffic Ordinance (Cap. 374) and its subsidiary regulations, to pass the TD's vehicle approval mechanism, such that the design, construction and emission of vehicles comply with the legal requirements and are fit for road use before they are registered, licensed and used on roads in Hong Kong. The Road Traffic (Traffic Control) Regulations (Cap. 374G) also set out relevant traffic equipment, traffic regulations and traffic control matters to ensure road safety.

Considering the above factors, except for the following two functions, the TD has already approved the usage of all advanced driver assistance systems on the market including automatic parking, side collision warning, vehicle hold, automatic steer, automatic lane change, lane keeping, cruise control and automatic emergency braking system, etc. under specific driving environments in compliance with the China National Standards (GuoBiao) or relevant internationally recognised standards.

Currently, the Road Traffic (Construction and Maintenance of Vehicles) Regulations (Cap. 374A) does not allow vehicles, not limited to EV, to display information other than driving information in visual display unit in front of the driver's seat. In addition, if a driver uses a mobile phone or mobile communication device to remotely park a vehicle, he will contravene the Road Traffic (Traffic Control) Regulations (Cap. 374G) which stipulates that a driver is prohibited from holding a mobile phone or a mobile communication device while driving a car. The Government is actively working on the legislative amendment and plans to submit the proposals to the Legislative Council within this year, such that the vehicle trade will be able to introduce the above two functions for drivers' use under the premise of ensuring road safety.

(3) The Government strives to promote the green transformation of vehicles, including offering first registration tax concessions to encourage purchase of EV. The government is also taking a multi-pronged approach to expand the EV charging network, to ensure sufficient and convenient charging facilities to cater for the needs of different types of EV.

The TD has been working closely with the Environmental Protection Department to support the policy of carbon neutrality and climate action plan that promote the use of EV. For instance, with a view to supporting the introduction of different new energy vehicles, the TD issued a guideline document titled "Vehicle Construction Approval Requirements for Electric Vehicles" in 2010 to elaborate in detail the technical and safety requirements for EV in Hong Kong. Meanwhile, the TD has also reviewed and updated guidelines, including the adoption of the GuoBiao safety requirements for EV. The latest version was released in May 2023, providing further guidance and specifications on the technical and safety requirements for EV and facilitating the vehicle trades in providing relevant information on EV to the TD to simplify applications for EV approval. The TD also updated the annex to the above guidelines in June 2024 to accept applications for vehicle type approval of EV with battery swapping technology.

In fact, over the past three years, the annual number of pure EV passing vehicle type approval has generally increased from a total of 145 pure EV models in 2021 to 164 models in 2023. As of the end of October 2024, the TD approved 144 EV models from the Mainland and 400 EV models from other regions.

To promote the usage of EV and meet the needs of drivers, the Government introduced EV maintenance service to the "Voluntary Registration Scheme for Vehicle Mechanics" and the "Voluntary Registration Scheme for Vehicle Maintenance Workshops" in July 2024, so as to keep up with providing continuous professional training to related technicians. As of November 2024, the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department has received approximately 400 applications from registered vehicle maintenance technicians seeking to add EV maintenance service qualifications, and the applications are being processed.

The TD will continue to maintain close communication with the trade, update technical guidelines and streamline approval process in a timely

manner, to facilitate the introduction of more EV models that comply with relevant technical requirements.

Thank you.

LCQ21: Gambling counselling and prevention of gambling addiction

Following is a question by the Hon Lillian Kwok and a written reply by the Secretary for Home and Youth Affairs, Miss Alice Mak, in the Legislative Council today (December 4):

Question:

In Hong Kong, there are a number of counselling, treatment and other support services provided for people with gambling disorders and those affected by them. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the monthly number of user-times of various gambling counselling hotlines and gambling counselling centres in the past five years and, among them, the respective ratios of first-time and repeated service users;
- (2) whether the Government has explored introducing a wider range of gambling counselling services or programmes; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (3) of the average expenditure on civic education about anti-gambling and publicity about gambling counselling in each of the past five years, and the percentage of the part spent on anti-gambling publicity in schools;
- (4) whether the Government will assess the effectiveness of the work mentioned in (3); if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (5) of the names of gambling counselling organizations subsidised by the Government in the past five years and the amounts of subsidies, as well as the support services provided by such organisations?

Reply:

President,

It is the Government's policy not to encourage gambling. To address problems caused by gambling, the Government adopts a multi-pronged strategy, including regulation over gambling activities through legislation, stringent

law enforcement against illegal gambling, public education on the harms of gambling addiction, and provision of counselling and support services to people in need. On public education and provision of counselling and support services front, the Government set up the Ping Wo Fund (the Fund) in 2003 to fund preventive and remedial measures to address the gambling-related problems. The Government also established the Ping Wo Fund Advisory Committee to give advice to the Secretary for Home and Youth Affairs on the use and application of the Fund.

The Government's reply to Hon Lilian Kwok's question is as follows:

(1) The Fund has been funding four counselling and treatment centres (counselling centres), namely Tung Wah Group of Hospitals Even Centre, Caritas Addicted Gamblers Counselling Centre, Zion Social Service Yuk Lai Hin Counselling Centre and Sunshine Lutheran Centre of the Hong Kong Lutheran Social Service, to provide telephone counselling, face-to-face counselling and other professional treatment services for people with gambling disorders as well as their family members and friends. The four counselling centres also assist in the operation of the gambling counselling hotline (1834 633) and answer enquiries from those in need and the members of the public through their instant messaging applications and social media platforms.

The monthly figures on the enquiries received by the four counselling centres through channels such as the hotline, as well as the number of clients who received services provided by the counselling centres in the past five years are at Annex. We do not maintain the breakdown of the frequency of the individuals using the hotline and counselling services.

(2) Apart from financing the operation of the above-mentioned four counselling centres, the Fund is engaging a non-governmental organisation to establish and operate an online counselling platform having regard to the trend that people having gambling-related problems tend to make enquiry and seek assistance through online means. The platform will utilise a chatbot service to offer preliminary anti-gambling advice to individuals seeking help and encourage them to have further telephone or face-to-face counselling services.

(3) and (4) On public education and publicity front, in order to promote the no-gambling messages to members of the public, in particular the youth, the Fund has been funding non-governmental organisations and schools to organise anti-gambling public education activities under the Ping Wo Fund Sponsorship Scheme (Sponsorship Scheme) and the Ping Wo Fund School Project Grants (School Project Grants) since 2009 and 2010 respectively. The Fund has also publicised the harms of gambling at school and community levels and the ways to prevent and alleviate gambling-related problems through the public education activities organised by the four counselling centres, as well as a publicity truck programme. In addition, the Home and Youth Affairs Bureau (HYAB) and the Fund have been launching territory-wide anti-gambling publicity and public education campaigns during mega football events (such as FIFA World Cup and UEFA European Football Championship) to raise public awareness (including the students) of the gambling-related problems.

The Fund also continues to enhance the publicity efforts made via traditional media as well as online and social media platforms, including advertising on public transport and online platforms. These efforts aim to promote the gambling counselling hotline (183 4633) and the related anti-gambling messages and encourage individuals to promptly seek assistance.

The Ping Wo Fund Advisory Committee and its secretariat conduct regular reviews of the effectiveness of relevant measures, which include evaluating the outcomes of the sponsored activities when processing the reimbursement claims from the funded organisations, and exchanging views with stakeholders to enhance the overall effectiveness.

The funding support to public education and other publicity measures (including those provided to schools) by the Fund to prevent and alleviate gambling-related problems in the past five years are as follows:

Year	Funding support	
	Public Education [^] (including Sponsorship Scheme and School Project Grants)	Other publicity measures (including publicity truck programme)
2019	About \$4.0 million	About \$8.5 million*
2020	About \$3.9 million	About \$1.9 million
2021	About \$4.9 million	About \$1.3 million
2022	About \$4.8 million	About \$6.6 million*
2023	About \$5.3 million	About \$8.0 million*

[^]Not all projects under the Sponsorship Scheme involve publicity at schools. Hence, we do not maintain the breakdown of the funding support provided for promoting the anti-gambling messages at schools.

*Including the funding support provided for the territory-wide anti-gambling publicity and public education campaigns during the mega football events.

(5) As mentioned in the first part of the reply, the Fund has been funding four counselling centres to provide telephone counselling, face-to-face counselling and other professional treatment services for people with gambling disorders, as well as their family members and friends. The centres also offer preventive public education on gambling-related problems to the community and schools, as well as professional training for the industry or interested organisations to enhance understanding about the behaviour and risk factors of gamblers with gambling disorder. Furthermore, the centres will render advice to the Fund to facilitate the development of the best practices for the screening of and remedial services and treatments for gamblers with gambling disorder.

The total funding support provided to the four counselling centres in the past five years is tabulated below:

Year	Total funding support
2019	About \$22.5 million
2020	About \$23.5 million
2021	About \$24.2 million
2022	About \$24.2 million
2023	About \$24.6 million

The HYAB will continue to closely collaborate with the Ping Wo Fund Advisory Committee, observe the prevalence of gambling activities among Hong Kong people, maintain communication with relevant departments and optimise efforts to prevent and alleviate problems relating to gambling.

LCQ3: Continuing Education Fund

Following is a question by Professor the Hon Lau Chi-pang and a reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (December 4):

Question:

Regarding the Continuing Education Fund (CEF), will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that the subsidy ceiling of CEF was increased from \$20,000 to \$25,000 per applicant in 2022, whether the Government has considered further increasing the subsidy amount under CEF and lowering the co-payment ratios for subsidised learners (i.e. the percentage of fees to be borne by learners), so as to encourage members of the public to pursue continuing education;

(2) as it is learnt that some of the CEF reimbursable courses (CEF courses) differ from non-CEF courses of the same type in terms of enrolment thresholds, fees, course arrangements and assessment methods, etc., resulting in members of the public inclining to enrol in non-CEF courses, whether the Government will consider improving the design and arrangements of CEF courses to enhance their attractiveness and competitiveness; and

(3) in order to establish Hong Kong's "eight centres" positioning and develop new quality productive forces tailored to local conditions, whether the Government will review the current social positioning of CEF courses and encourage institutions to offer more continuing education courses related to emerging policies (including low-altitude economy, digital economy and innovation and technology industry), so as to keep abreast of the times in promoting the development of continuing education courses?

Reply:

President,

The Government established the Continuing Education Fund (CEF) in 2002 to provide subsidies to adults with learning aspirations to pursue continuing education and training, with a view to complementing the development trend of globalisation and meeting the needs for Hong Kong's transition to a knowledge-based economy. Hong Kong residents aged 18 or above, irrespective of education level, employment or financial status, are eligible to claim for CEF subsidy upon successful completion of CEF reimbursable course (CEF course). There are currently over 4 500 CEF courses offered by over 120 course providers, providing diversified choices for learners.

My reply to the question raised by the Member is as follows:

(1) To keep on promoting continuing education and encouraging members of the public to pursue self-enhancement, the Government raised the CEF subsidy ceiling twice in April 2019 and August 2022, from originally \$10,000 per person at the time of establishment of the CEF to currently \$25,000 per person. The co-payment ratios by learners for the first \$10,000 subsidy has been kept at 20 per cent of the course fee, and that for the remaining subsidy is 40 per cent of the course fee. The objective of putting in place the mechanism of co-payment ratio is to ensure that learners select courses prudently, while preventing course providers from arbitrarily raising the course fees in response to the adjustment to the subsidy ceiling at the same time.

As at end of October 2024, there are about 932 000 accounts under the CEF, among which about 5 700 account holders had used up the subsidy of \$25,000, representing less than one per cent of the total number of accounts under the CEF. Meanwhile, nearly 90 per cent of the accounts under the CEF have an unused balance of \$15,000 or above, enabling learners to continue to take other CEF courses. Currently, the subsidy ceiling will be used up by enrolling in CEF courses with cumulative course fees of \$37,500, while the median course fee of CEF courses is \$7,800. The Government is of the view that the current CEF subsidy ceiling and co-payment ratio arrangements could still satisfy the demand of the learners. The Government will continue to keep in view the operation of the CEF and the views of stakeholders, and consider the need to review the existing arrangements as appropriate.

(2) CEF courses are subject to quality assurance mechanism. All CEF courses must be registered under the Qualifications Register and fulfill the registration criteria under the CEF to ensure that CEF courses could meet the requirements in respect of the content, qualifications of instructors, teaching methodology and assessment methods, etc. in order to safeguard learners' interests. The Government encourages members of the public to pursue continuing education. They could freely select training courses available in the market according to their own preferences and needs.

(3) The National 14th Five-Year Plan has supported the development of Hong Kong in eight key areas ("eight centres"). Currently, many CEF courses are relevant to the business and contents of the "eight centres". The Government will continue to monitor the operation of the CEF and is open to suggestions on optimising its operation and consolidation of local training resources.

Special traffic and transport arrangements for Hong Kong Streetathon 2024 this Sunday

The Transport Department (TD) today (December 4) reminded members of the public that temporary special traffic and transport arrangements will be implemented in phases at various locations on Hong Kong Island North and in Kowloon East and Tseung Kwan O from 1am this Sunday (December 8) to facilitate the holding of the Hong Kong Streetathon 2024.

The full marathon race will start at the Island Eastern Corridor (IEC) near Hing Fat Street and route through major road sections including the IEC, the Central-Wan Chai Bypass, Lung Wo Road, then turn back and be routed through the Eastern Harbour Crossing and the Tseung Lam Highway, then turn back again and be routed via Cha Kwo Ling Road, Kwun Tong Bypass, Hoi Bun Road, Kai Fuk Road, Kai Tak Tunnel and East Kowloon Corridor to the finishing point at San Shan Road in To Kwa Wan.

The race route of the half marathon race will be similar to the full marathon race, except that it will not be routed through the Central-Wan Chai Bypass, Lung Wo Road and the Tseung Lam Highway.

The 10-kilometre race will start at the Tseung Lam Highway near Tong Yin Street and route through the Tseung Lam Highway, Cha Kwo Ling Road and Kwun Tong Bypass, and finish at Hoi Bun Road in Kwun Tong.

Subject to the race arrangements and progress, the road sections along the race routes will be temporarily closed in phases from 1am on that day, until the reopening of roads at about 1pm. Motorists are advised to pay attention to the traffic signs erected at the scene and consider using alternative routes to their destinations.

Due to the temporary road closures, the TD anticipates that the traffic at various locations on Hong Kong Island and in Kowloon will be more significantly congested when compared with normal Sundays, including:

- Hong Kong Island: King's Road, Java Road, Shau Kei Wan Road, Causeway

Road, Victoria Park Road, Yee Wo Street, Gloucester Road, Hennessy Road, Connaught Road Central, Harcourt Road, Queensway, the Aberdeen Tunnel (Wan Chai bound) and in the vicinity of Central Ferry Pier areas; and

- Kowloon: Kwun Tong Road, Wai Yip Street, Prince Edward Road East and in the vicinity of Kowloon Bay areas.

Motorists are advised to avoid driving to the above affected areas. In case of traffic congestion, motorists should exercise patience and drive with care, and follow the instructions of the Police on-site.

In view of temporary road closures, 58 bus routes (including 18 KMB routes, 20 Citybus routes and 20 Cross Harbour Bus routes) and 16 Green Minibus routes will be affected and subject to diversion, truncation or relocation of stops in phases until the reopening of the roads. During the road closure period, taxi stands (including taxi pick-up/drop-off points), public light bus stands, roadside parking spaces and private car parks on the roads affected will be suspended.

To enable participants travelling to Causeway Bay for the full and half marathon races with the earliest starting times from 5.15am and 5.55am respectively, the first departures of all MTR rail lines (except the Airport Express and Disneyland Resort Line) will be advanced suitably on Sunday, with the first departures on the Tuen Ma Line and East Rail Line to be operated at 2.50am. In addition, three special bus routes will also be operated to serve event participants travelling to Causeway Bay this Sunday.

Members of the public should plan their journeys early to avoid unexpected delays, and use public transport services (particularly railway services) as far as possible, and pay attention to the arrangements of temporary route diversions and relocations of stops. They may browse the TD's website (www.td.gov.hk) or mobile application "HKeMobility" for information about the special traffic and transport information, or may also browse relevant public transport operators' websites or mobile applications for details of service changes.

The TD and the Police will closely monitor the traffic situation. Other temporary road and traffic control measures, including adjusting the extent of road closures, and alteration or suspension of public transport services may be implemented by the Police at short notice depending on the actual traffic conditions. Members of the public are advised to stay alert to the latest traffic news.