

## LCQ2: Potential fire safety hazards of old buildings

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Lo Wai-kwok and a reply by the Acting Secretary for Security, Mr Michael Cheuk, in the Legislative Council today (May 22):

Question:

There are views pointing out that the fire broke out in an old composite building in Kowloon last month which resulted in multiple casualties has once again sounded an alarm for the potential fire safety hazards of old buildings. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will immediately conduct large-scale fire safety risk assessments on the same type of buildings across the territory and allocate additional resources to step up routine inspections and improve the monitoring system, so as to plug the fire safety loopholes in such buildings; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) as the authorities indicated in the reply to a question raised by a Member of this Council on the 24th of last month that the Fire Safety (Buildings) (Amendment) Bill would be submitted to this Council for scrutiny as soon as possible, and that the proposed legislative amendments include increasing the penalties for non-compliance with the relevant directions or orders, whether the authorities will, in response to the aspirations of society, undertake that the Bill will be submitted to this Council expeditiously within the current legislative session, and further increase the relevant penalties; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) as it is learnt that the number of old buildings in Hong Kong has been on the rise, with some of them even being plagued with problems, whether the authorities will advocate public-private partnership to step up efforts in redeveloping old districts, so as to eradicate the potential fire safety hazards of old buildings in the urban areas at root; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Fire safety of buildings is a matter of great concern to the Government. A multi-pronged approach has been taken to improve the fire safety standards of buildings.

With regard to law enforcement, the Fire Services Department (FSD) handles fire hazards in buildings in accordance with the Fire Services Ordinance. It includes conducting inspections of buildings in respect of fire safety, on a regular basis or upon receiving complaints. If fire hazards are

identified, including means of escape being obstructed or locked, smoke stop doors being left open or defective, or fire service installations or equipment (FSIs) are not in efficient working order or have not undergone annual inspection, etc, the FSD will follow up and take appropriate enforcement actions in accordance with the relevant regulations.

Moreover, in respect of legislation, to enhance the fire safety standard of old buildings, the Government enacted the Fire Safety (Buildings) Ordinance (Ordinance) which stipulates that composite and domestic buildings constructed in or before 1987 must be enhanced to meet modern fire safety standards. Being the enforcement authorities, the FSD and the Buildings Department (BD) have been conducting joint inspections of relevant buildings across the territory in a systematic manner, and in light of the actual condition of the buildings and in accordance with the requirements of the Ordinance, issue Fire Safety Directions (Directions) to the owners or occupiers, specifying the required fire safety improvement works. There are about 14 000 relevant buildings regulated under the Ordinance. To date, about 10 940 buildings have been inspected and over 370 000 Directions have been issued. About 40 per cent of them have been complied with or discharged, with the remaining some 60 per cent being followed-up on. I would like to stress that while the objective of the Ordinance is to enhance the fire safety standards of relevant buildings, it does not mean that these buildings are subject to imminent fire risks. In fact, these buildings were constructed in accordance with applicable fire safety and construction standards prevailing at the time when they were built.

With regard to the enforcement of the Ordinance, a relevant owner or occupier who fails to comply with the requirements of the Ordinance without a reasonable excuse is guilty of an offence, the FSD and the BD will take enforcement actions accordingly. Since the Ordinance has come into force, about 3 600 cases that failed to comply with the requirements of the Ordinance without reasonable excuse have been successfully prosecuted.

As for raising public awareness of fire safety, the FSD has been promoting fire safety to members of the public through public education and community engagement programmes. The FSD also co-ordinates with other government departments and District Fire Safety Committees, and organises various fire safety promotional activities, fire drills and fire safety talks, etc, to enhance the public's knowledge of fire safety in a holistic manner.

With regard to the part on inspection and other aspects of the question raised by the Member, having consulted the Development Bureau (DEVB), my consolidated reply is as follows:

(1) With regard to fire safety inspections, apart from carrying out inspections and enforcement actions in response to public complaints against fire hazards, in order to reduce potential fire hazards in old buildings in a more effective and comprehensive manner, the FSD has implemented the Risk-based Building Fire Safety Visit Programme with priority given to buildings with relatively higher fire risk, such as those of a higher building age, lack of FSIs, with single-staircase design, as well as "three-nil" buildings,

etc. Buildings with higher risk are subject to inspection once or twice a year. The purposes of the inspections are to identify potential fire hazards in the public areas inside buildings and to enable frontline FSD personnel to become more familiar with the features of these buildings so as to better prepare for firefighting and rescue work in future.

In response to the fire that broke out in New Lucky House earlier, the FSD has further strengthened its efforts and redeployed manpower to proactively conduct inspections and take appropriate enforcement actions against irregularities, such as means of escape being obstructed and defective FSIs, in accordance with relevant legislations. We will review the effectiveness of the relevant enforcement actions in a timely manner and, having regard to actual needs and circumstances as well as manpower arrangements, consider regularising relevant inspection work.

Over 9 000 enforcement actions were taken by the FSD in 2023, among which over 3 600 Fire Hazard Abatement Notices were issued and more than 300 prosecutions were instigated.

(2) To improve the existing legislative framework, the Government is expediting the work on amending the Fire Safety (Buildings) Ordinance to empower the FSD and the BD to carry out fire safety improvement works for the buildings for owners who have failed to comply with the requirements of the Ordinance (defaulted works), and to recover the relevant fees upon completion of the defaulted works. I would like to reiterate that timely and proper maintenance of private buildings is the responsibility of owners. We propose to amend the Ordinance and to arrange for defaulted works because we understand that some owners are facing genuine difficulties, and that empowering the Government to carry out defaulted works by way of amending the Ordinance can assist those owners with genuine difficulties in enhancing the fire safety standards of those relevant buildings, providing better protection to them.

There are views in the community that the deterrent effect of penalty should be kept abreast with the times. With reference to penalties for offences of a similar nature or gravity, we incline to raise the penalties for non-compliance with the Directions and Fire Safety Compliance Orders for four times, to \$100,000 and \$200,000 as maximum respectively, and to raise the corresponding fine for each day during which the offence continues, in the hope of increasing the deterrent effect.

The amendments to the Ordinance also include other different elements, such as introducing provisions against un-co-operative owners to prevent any person from intentionally obstructing an owners' corporation in complying with the requirements of the Ordinance, empowering the Government to register relevant instructions of the Ordinance issued against the involved buildings or their relevant parts (which are yet to be complied with) in the Land Registry. It is envisaged that the aforementioned measures will effectively strengthen the deterrent effect and encourage owners to comply with the requirement of the Ordinance, with a view to enhancing the compliance rate.

The Government is stepping up its efforts in taking forward the relevant

legislative amendment work and will strive to submit the proposed amendment bill to the Legislative Council for scrutiny in July.

(3) According to the DEVB, a sustainable urban renewal strategy is to adopt a dual-track approach of redevelopment and rehabilitation. On building rehabilitation, the Government adopts a multi-pronged approach. Apart from providing subsidies and technical assistance for owners to carry out building inspection and maintenance, the Government will also proactively intervene by carrying out emergency works on behalf of owners where necessary and step up its enforcement efforts.

For some old and dilapidated buildings, rehabilitation may not be cost-effective, and redevelopment is relatively practical and effective. The Government is facilitating and expediting redevelopment projects by the public and private sectors on various fronts. On the one hand, the Government supports the URA (Urban Renewal Authority) in taking forward redevelopment projects that will bring greater benefits to the residents. On the other hand, in order to encourage private developers to participate in redevelopment, the Government has introduced a number of policies and measures in recent years to enhance the financial viability of redevelopment projects, including the pilot scheme on transfer of plot ratio and the gradual permission of interchangeability between domestic and non-domestic plot ratios, etc, in Yau Ma Tei and Mong Kok. The URA is also conducting planning studies in Tsuen Wan and Sham Shui Po, and is expected to put forward urban renewal master plans and restructuring proposals for these two districts by phases from the second half of this year. In addition, the DEVB has introduced the Land (Compulsory Sale for Redevelopment) (Amendment) Bill 2023 into the Legislative Council to step up efforts to encourage larger-scale private redevelopment projects by lowering the compulsory sale thresholds and facilitating the redevelopment of adjoining lots, and will endeavour to co-operate with the scrutiny work of the relevant Bills Committee. The DEVB also commenced a study at the end of last year to explore specific measures to make use of new development land to help promote large-scale redevelopment projects in old districts by the public and private sectors, with the aim of making proposals in the first half of 2025.

It is the responsibility of owners to timely repair, properly maintain and effectively manage private buildings, including carrying out fire safety improvement works. Eliminating fire hazards, for example, by ensuring that means of escape are free from obstruction and by keeping smoke stop doors closed, should be everyone's shared responsibility. While the Government adopts a multi-pronged approach to deal with fire safety of old buildings, we hope that all people will take an extra step and join hands to create a safe living environment.

Thank you, President.

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## Transcript of remarks by FS and Acting SCED after LegCo Ante Chamber exchange session (with photos/video)

The Financial Secretary, Mr Paul Chan, together with the Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury, Mr Christopher Hui; the Acting Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Dr Bernard Chan; and the Acting Secretary for Innovation, Technology and Industry, Ms Lillian Cheong, met the media after attending the Ante Chamber exchange session at the Legislative Council this morning (May 22). Following is the transcript of remarks:

Reporter: Mr Chan, can you recap in English how do you see the ETO officers get charged in London and the death of one of the defendants? And also other questions, like, is there any latest arrangement on stock trading under extreme weather?

Acting Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development: The task of the Economic and Trade Offices (ETOs) is to liaise with the local government, think tanks, different sectors and all walks of life to improve, facilitate or foster collaboration on trade and investment, and also in the areas of arts and culture. My ETO colleagues will continue to liaise with the local government to tell the good stories of Hong Kong.

Financial Secretary: On your second question about trading under severe weather conditions, we have concluded the consultation and are reviewing the views and submissions received during the process. We are going to announce the consultation outcomes towards the middle of this year. That is our timetable. Thank you.

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



# Government to introduce resolution to adjust fees payable by banks and other financial institutions to Government prescribed in Second Schedule to Banking Ordinance

The Government served a notice to the Legislative Council (LegCo) today (May 22) to introduce a resolution under the Banking Ordinance to adjust various fees relating to banking licences, establishment of branches and local representative offices (LROs) and registration of approved money brokers (AMBs).

The Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury, Mr Christopher Hui, said, "As announced in the 2024-25 Budget, the Government will review the different fees and charges in a timely manner. The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) has recently completed a review on the fees prescribed in the Second Schedule to the Ordinance, and proposes to raise the related fees."

"In making the proposal, the HKMA has taken into consideration relevant factors, including the 'user pays' and cost recovery principles, general price inflation, and the operating cost of the financial institutions, etc. The impact on Hong Kong's competitiveness as an international financial centre has also been assessed and taken into account. As the total licence fees account for an insignificant portion of the total operating expenses of authorised institutions (AIs) and AMBs, we expect that the impact on the affected financial institutions will be minimal after the implementation of the proposal. The financial competitiveness of Hong Kong will also not be affected," Mr Hui added.

Under the Ordinance, AIs (including licensed banks, restricted licence banks and deposit-taking companies), LROs and AMBs are required to pay to the Director of Accounting Services the licence fees, the registration fees, the establishment fees of local and overseas branches or overseas representative offices, upon authorisation or approval by the Monetary Authority, and the relevant renewal fees upon the anniversary in each year of the date on which an AI was authorised (including the fees of the relevant local and overseas branches and overseas representative offices), or the LRO or AMB was approved. The levels of the fees are specified in the Second Schedule to the Ordinance.

Subject to the legislative process, the Government will move the resolution in LegCo on June 12.

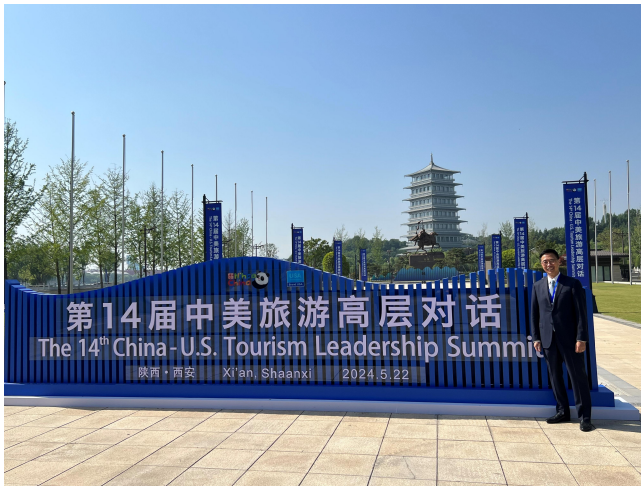
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## [SCST attends high-level meeting on tourism in Xi'an \(with photos\)](#)

The Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism, Mr Kevin Yeung, attended the 14th China-US Tourism Leadership Summit held in Xi'an today (May 22) and spoke in the thematic seminar session at the invitation of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

"Hong Kong is Asia's world city and an international aviation hub. It has been one of the important gateways for visitors from the United States to travel to Mainland China and Asia for years. Hong Kong is a cultural melting pot of East and West, where we have a rich Chinese heritage while being heavily influenced by the Western culture. The attractive scenery and the diverse culinary offerings that blend Eastern and Western flavours hold great appeal for international visitors. In addition, with our country's staunch support, Hong Kong has been actively developing into an East-meets-West centre for international cultural exchange, staging more and more international cultural, arts and trending events, among which Art Basel has become an annual mega event in Hong Kong, while the United States' largest pop-culture carnival, ComplexCon, also landed in Asia and Hong Kong for the first time this year. Traditional cultural and festive events, including the Dragon Boat Festival races and Christmas celebrations, have also transformed into appealing tourism experiences for both Chinese and foreign visitors. Such developments have provided Hong Kong with mature conditions to combine cultural and artistic activities, sports competitions, and other mega events, thus enhancing Hong Kong's attractiveness to international visitors, including visitors from the United States. Since Hong Kong resumed cross-boundary tourism in February 2023, we have attracted around 800 000 visitors from the United States. We are confident that more visitors from the United States will come to visit Hong Kong this year," Mr Yeung said at the thematic seminar session.

Mr Yeung will return to Hong Kong tonight.



## LCQ4: The Hong Kong Museum of the War of Resistance and Coastal Defence

Following is a question by the Hon Maggie Chan Man-ki and a reply by the Acting Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism, Mr Raistlin Lau, in the Legislative Council today (May 22):

Question:

The Hong Kong Museum of Coastal Defence (MCD) will be converted into the Hong Kong Museum of the War of Resistance and Coastal Defence (MWRCD) in September this year, with more efforts put in promoting the history of the War of Resistance (the War) and the significant contributions made by the Hong Kong Independent Battalion of the Dongjiang Column (the Battalion) during the War. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as some members of the public opine that the exhibits relating to the Battalion in the MCD are displayed in a scattered and inconspicuous manner, whether the Government will set up a thematic gallery or a thematic exhibition on the Battalion at the MWRCD to serve as a highlight exhibition



of the museum, and whether related exhibits will be consolidated for display in a prominent place, e.g. displaying the Certificate of Commendation issued to the Battalion together with the Roll of Honour listing the names of 115 martyrs belonging to the Battalion;

(2) as there are views that as an important venue for promoting the spirit of resistance and introducing the history of the War, the MCD should seek to create more interactive multi-media presentations, whether the Government has considered increasing the audience seating capacity at the Narrative of the War of Resistance gallery of the MWRCD, so as to allow more visitors to watch the documentary films on the War; and

(3) as there are views that the facilities and services for guided tours at the MCD are inadequately arranged, whether the Government has considered allowing visitors and more organizations to apply for the MWRCD's free guided tour service and enhancing the guided tour system of the MWRCD, e.g. placing guided tour QR codes for the exhibits to provide real-time textual and audio narration, so that the relevant information can be obtained without the need to download the relevant mobile application inside the museum?

Reply:

President,

Since the reopening of the Hong Kong Museum of Coastal Defence (HKMCD) in November 2022 after the completion of revamping its exhibition and repairing its canopy, the HKMCD has seen an attendance of over 270 000, including some 475 school groups visits. In order to let more students learn about the history of the War of Resistance, and to promote patriotic spirit, the HKMCD co-operated with the Education Bureau to invite dozens of school principals to visit the HKMCD in March 2024 and organise guided tours and thematic lectures for teachers in order to encourage the schools to arrange more students to visit the museum. Apart from facing the Hong Kong communities, the museum also received many relevant Mainland authorities, including the National Cultural Heritage Administration, the Museum of the Communist Party of China, Henan Provincial Administration of Cultural Heritage, Shenzhen Municipal Cultural Relics Bureau, and Nanjing Museum, and received positive comments and affirmation from them. Among these authorities, the HKMCD had reached an agreement with Shenzhen Municipal Cultural Relics Bureau to co-organise thematic exhibitions about the War of Resistance in the future. The HKMCD has always valued the opinion received from various groups and individuals, and responded positively in order to keep enriching visitors' experience. Our reply to various parts of the question raised by the Hon Maggie Chan Man-ki is as follows:

(1) The HKMCD will be converted into the Hong Kong Museum of the War of Resistance and Coastal Defence in the coming September. To highlight the theme of the War of Resistance, the museum will group together four galleries related to the history of the War of Resistance, namely "Narrative of the War of Resistance" gallery, "Join Hands to Resist Japanese Invasion" gallery, "Japanese Invasion of Hong Kong" gallery and "Anti-Japanese Guerrillas behind

Enemy Lines" gallery, and name them collectively as "The War of Resistance Galleries". Plaques will be mounted at the upper part of the galleries for easy identification and to facilitate visitors' planning of their routes for a focused exploration of the history of the War of Resistance. Two of the galleries, namely "Narrative of the War of Resistance" gallery and "Anti-Japanese Guerrillas behind Enemy Lines" gallery, will give a detailed elaboration on the Hong Kong and Kowloon Independent Brigade of the East River Column.

The existing "Narrative of the War of Resistance" gallery of the HKMCD includes an area with the theme of "Commemoration of Martyrs", where the names of the 115 members of the Hong Kong and Kowloon Independent Brigade of the East River Column on the Roll of Honour 1941-1945 who died during the period of Japanese occupation are set out in recognition of their contribution to the War of Resistance. Besides the name list, there is an interactive installation entitled "Tribute to Martyrs". With some simple steps of operation, visitors can lay virtual bouquets on the installation to pay tribute to the heroes who sacrificed their lives in the war and during Japanese occupation, recognise their contribution to the War of Resistance, and show respect to them. The aforesaid gallery is also supplemented by a film introducing 16 heroes who have been placed on the List of Anti-Japanese Martyrs and Heroic Groups. As regards the Certificate of Commendation to the Hong Kong and Kowloon Independent Brigade of the East River Column, it is currently on display in the "Anti-Japanese Guerrillas behind Enemy Lines" gallery. In light of the conversion of the HKMCD into the Hong Kong Museum of the War of Resistance and Coastal Defence in the coming September, the HKMCD is actively exploring to enhance the presentation of the certificate together with the name list of the aforesaid 115 members in a prominent manner to allow citizens to show respect more conveniently.

Additionally, the HKMCD will use its special exhibition gallery to hold thematic exhibitions relating to the War of Resistance on a regular basis, and to collaborate more with the relevant Mainland authorities. The first key collaboration project will be an exhibition on the War of Resistance activities of the East River Column in Hong Kong and Shenzhen areas jointly organised with the Shenzhen Municipal Cultural Relics Bureau in September this year.

(2) The "Narrative of the War of Resistance" gallery of the HKMCD gives an account of the history of Japan's aggression against China and Hong Kong's participation in the War of Resistance. It also narrates the missions and contributions of anti-Japanese guerrillas after the fall of Hong Kong. Apart from using exhibition panels, historical photos and exhibits, the HKMCD also complements the exhibition with interactive installations and videos to introduce this period of history to visitors through different media and enrich their museum-going experience. The number of seats currently provided by the HKMCD has already taken into account the pleasant viewing experience for visitors and the available space in the gallery. In order to enrich the visual content, the HKMCD will arrange excerpts from three films by Hong Kong directors about the War of Resistance, namely The Battle of Shanghai, Hong Kong 1941 and Our Time Will Come, to be shown in the multi-media room of the

"Discovery Zone" on the Upper Redoubt to accommodate a larger audience for the screenings.

(3) At present, guided tour service for the public is available at the HKMCD three days per week and on public holidays for public participation. Registered schools and charitable or non-profit-making organisations are also welcome to apply for free guided tour service for groups in other time slots. The 55 docents currently working for the HKMCD have led over 1 700 guided tours in total since the museum's re-opening. In the future, the HKMCD will discuss with the Tourism Commission the feasibility of providing docent training for serving tourist guides.

In addition, an audio guide to the HKMCD's highlight exhibits is already available on the museum website. The HKMCD thanked and has taken on board the Hon Chan Yung's earlier suggestions so that the QR codes of the webpages of those exhibits have been displayed in the museum. Apart from using the iMGuide mobile app for the audio guide to the exhibits, visitors can also scan the QR codes directly to access the information on the exhibits on their webpages. Later, the HKMCD will also add textual guide to cater to the habits and needs of different visitors.

In summary, the HKMCD will continue to listen with an open mind the opinions from the visitors, constantly enhance and enrich the viewing experience, persistently promote the history of War of Resistance and patriotic education. Thank you President.