

# Speech by FS at King's Day of Kingdom of the Netherlands (English only) (with photo)

Following is the speech by the Financial Secretary, Mr Paul Chan, at the King's Day of the Kingdom of the Netherlands today (April 25):

Consul-General van den Berg (Consul-General of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Hong Kong, Mr Arjen van den Berg), Commissioner Li Yongsheng (Deputy Commissioner of the Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region), ladies and gentlemen,

Good evening.

I am delighted to join you, tonight, here to mark King's Day, the annual celebration honouring His Majesty King Willem-Alexander. I've seen pictures of the festive holiday, and all I can say is that the Dutch know how to throw a birthday party. The revelry is nationwide, packed with street and canal parties, flea markets full of "treasures" and everyone with a glass or two of orange bitters in their hands. King's Day is a happy time here in Hong Kong as well.

I'm told that the Consul-General will host a "King's Games" event here, in the garden of his official residence, this Saturday for schoolchildren. And I guess many of the thousands of Dutch nationals residing in Hong Kong will be dressed in orange deep into the weekend.

Hong Kong and the Netherlands have much to celebrate. And not only on King's Day.

Just five months ago, Barbera Wolfensberger, Director-General of Culture and Media in the Netherland's Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, led a Dutch delegation of some 50 members to visit Hong Kong. They included design and business leaders, as well as government officials, to help open the Business of Design Week, BODW, here. And much more: the Netherlands was BODW's partner country last year, after taking on the role as a strategic partner since 2022.

We are working together to boost trade, as well. Over the past four years, our bilateral trade had grown despite the pandemic.

We would like to invest in each other's opportunities, too. Hong Kong's stock of direct investment to the Netherlands reached some US\$45 billion in 2022; ranking fifth among Hong Kong's major investment destinations.

Not surprisingly, the Dutch business community maintains a significant presence here, with some 190 Dutch companies operating in Hong Kong, ranking third among European nations. I know that a good many Dutch companies are

with us this good evening.

And I'm confident you will be with us for the long haul, for the rewarding future here for all of us. Thanks to our "one country, two systems" framework, Hong Kong is blessed with opportunity.

Looking to the future, for Hong Kong and the Netherlands, there is much we can work together on.

Sustainability and circularity, the theme of this year's King's Day celebrations, hold tremendous promise.

The green transition process in Hong Kong and the broader region requires expertise and specialised technologies, and we know that many Dutch companies offer advanced green technology solutions. I invite Dutch companies to join us, to capture the opportunities in this region.

We are a rising hub for innovation and technology, too. Dutch companies will find enormous opportunities in a number of new star industries: artificial intelligence, biomedicine, fintech, new energy and new materials.

We are systematically building to realise a flourishing future. Since the end of 2022, OASES, our Office for Attracting Strategic Enterprises has helped about 50 such high-tech companies set up or expand their presence here in Hong Kong, with total investments exceeding \$40 billion.

Our vision also includes the Northern Metropolis, which will host a cluster of high-tech industries that will take full advantage of the synergy with Shenzhen, our fast-moving neighbour.

Just last week, the Hong Kong-Shenzhen Innovation and Technology Park held a Partnership Launching Ceremony, with some 60 innovative companies from all over the world taking part.

They will add their strategic expertise to the Park and to Hong Kong's I&T (innovation and technology) future. The Park, by the way, is rapidly taking shape. Two laboratories and an accommodation building will be completed, progressively, from the end of this year.

For all these and other opportunities, we welcome Dutch businesses, entrepreneurs and innovators.

Consul-General, you and your colleagues have long taken an active role in forging closer economic ties and cultural exchanges with Hong Kong. For that, I am grateful.

I know you will complete your assignment here in Hong Kong in June. My congratulations on your new posting – as Ambassador for Central America. You will be missed.

Ladies and gentlemen, I wish you a very happy King's Day. Thank you.



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## [OFCA calls for participation in SMS Sender Registration Scheme by all sectors to help combat SMS scams](#)

The Office of the Communications Authority (OFCA) today (April 25) announced the latest implementation status of the SMS Sender Registration Scheme (the Scheme), and encouraged more industries to actively participate in the Scheme.

The Scheme has been launched since the end of last year, and has been opened up to all industries for participation since February this year. To date, nearly 170 organisations have joined the Scheme (see Annex for details), including telecommunications service providers, banks and 31 government departments and statutory bodies which need to communicate with members of the public via SMS messages (including the Immigration Department, the Department of Health, the Hong Kong Police Force, the Customs and Excise Department, the Transport Department, the Consumer Council and the Mandatory Provident Fund Schemes Authority). The Director-General of Communications had previously sent letters to all other government departments and the Legislative Council Secretariat inviting their participation in the Scheme. OFCA has also allocated additional resources and manpower to process relevant applications.

According to the Scheme, only those companies or organisations being Registered Senders under the Scheme are able to send SMS messages to local subscribers of mobile services using their Registered SMS Sender IDs with the prefix "#". Any SMS messages with sender IDs containing "#" but not sent by Registered Senders will be blocked by the telecommunications networks.

"Under the Scheme, members of the public can easily identify whether an SMS message is from a Registered Sender by looking for the prefix '#' in the SMS Sender ID, thereby reducing the risk of SMS fraud. We are encouraged by

the widespread support for the Scheme, and call for more companies or organisations to join the Scheme and become Registered Senders, with a view to enhancing the security and credibility of SMS messages and providing better protection to members of the public," a spokesman for OFCA said.

"We will continue to review the various measures from the telecommunications perspectives to curb telephone and SMS scams by interception at source, including blocking or suspending services of telephone numbers and websites suspected of committing fraud based on fraud records provided by Police, fully implementing the real-name registration programme for SIM cards, sending voice or text alerts to users for calls originating from places outside Hong Kong prefixed with '+852', so as to combat fraudulent calls and messages in a comprehensive manner," the spokesman added.

For details of the Scheme, please visit the dedicated webpage ([www.ofca.gov.hk/en/consumer\\_focus/guide/hot\\_topics/ssrs/](http://www.ofca.gov.hk/en/consumer_focus/guide/hot_topics/ssrs/)) or call OFCA's hotline (2961 6333).

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## [Speech by CE at South African National Day Cocktail \(English only\) \(with photo/video\)](#)

Following is the speech by the Chief Executive, Mr John Lee, at South African National Day Cocktail today (April 25):

Honourable Consul-General Mojalefa Mogono (Consul-General of South Africa in Hong Kong), Deputy Commissioner Pan Yundong (Deputy Commissioner of Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region), distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good evening to you all. I am pleased to have this welcome opportunity to speak to you tonight, as we celebrate the 30th Freedom Day of the Republic of South Africa.

Thirty years ago, when President Nelson Mandela addressed his country in an inaugural speech, he passionately said, and I quote, "We enter into a covenant that we shall build the society in which all South Africans, both black and white, will be able to walk tall, without any fear in their hearts, assured of their inalienable right to human dignity – a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world."

And walked tall you have. The rainbow nation now has the biggest securities exchange, busiest airports and longest road network in Africa.

Your vibrant mix of cultures, abundance of thrilling landscapes and majestic wildlife fascinates millions of visitors every year. Please join me in a round of applause to congratulate the people of South Africa, for the great strides you have made in the past three decades!

Last year marked the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and South Africa. During his state visit to South Africa last year, President Xi Jinping met with His Excellency President Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa. President Xi remarked that China is ready to work with South Africa to carry forward the friendship, deepen co-operation, and strengthen coordination, in an effort to take the China-South Africa comprehensive strategic partnership to new heights, and build a high-quality China-South Africa community with a shared future.

The Hong Kong SAR maintains a strong and committed partnership with South Africa. With South Africa as our largest trading partner in Africa, Hong Kong's success is closely intertwined with the country, particularly as we look to further strengthen our relations with new markets such as those in Africa.

Last year, the total merchandise trade between Hong Kong and South Africa amounted to 1.9 billion US Dollars, with about 6.6 per cent of the total trade in goods between Mainland China and South Africa routing through Hong Kong.

This year also marks the 10th anniversary of the signing of the Comprehensive Avoidance of Double Taxation Agreement between the Hong Kong SAR and South Africa, an important agreement that has strengthened our economic ties, and facilitated trade and investments between the two places.

As the relations between our two countries continue to grow, Hong Kong SAR is eager to contribute, as it always has, as a key gateway for South Africa's entry to the vast Chinese market.

Under "one country, two systems" principle, Hong Kong is the only city in the world that enjoys both the China advantage and the global advantage. Hong Kong is well-known to be a "super connector", connecting the international market with the Mainland market. Hong Kong is, also, a "super value-adder". Our multi-lingual and multi-talented workforce provides world-class professional services, to global investors. Accountants, lawyers, bankers, engineers, architects, surveyors, IT specialists, the list just keeps going on.

Hong Kong is determined to serve as a "super connector" and "super value-adder" between the Mainland and Belt and Road countries. South Africa, I am pleased to note, was the first country in Africa to sign a co-operation agreement with our country on the Belt and Road Initiative. We welcome our friends from South Africa to join us in this journey of opportunities.

Arts and culture is another area of collaboration between Hong Kong and South Africa. In February this year, the Hong Kong Arts Development Council

entered into a global strategic partnership with the National Arts Council of South Africa. This partnership facilitates international market access for Hong Kong and South African artists, and lays a solid foundation for their future collaboration.

This October, the inaugural Hong Kong Performing Arts Expo will be launched. I'm pleased to note that one of the Expo's programmes, "Journey of Discovery", will showcase a collaboration of young musicians from Hong Kong and South Africa, bringing our cultural ties to a new and higher level.

The Hong Kong SAR Government looks forward to continue working closely with the South African Consulate-General in Hong Kong, and promote stronger connections in business and trade, culture and education, and many more areas with South Africa in the years ahead.

Ladies and gentlemen, may I wish the people of the Republic of South Africa the best of health and harmony. A happy Freedom Day! Thank you!



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## [DH appeals for continued vigilance against influenza and respiratory tract infection](#)

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (April 25) announced that, according to the latest surveillance data, local seasonal influenza activity persists at a high level and it is believed that the current influenza season would persist for a period of time. The CHP appealed again to members of the public to heighten their vigilance, and

people belonging to high risk priority groups should receive seasonal influenza vaccination (SIV) as soon as possible for prevention of severe disease and death.

Hong Kong has [entered the current influenza season](#) since early January this year. According to the latest surveillance data (as at the week ending April 20), the majority of positive detections in that period were influenza A(H1) (around 83 per cent), showing a shift from influenza A(H3) which was the dominating virus during January to March this year. The influenza admission rate in public hospitals has remained at a high level (0.69 cases per 10 000 population) and the latest percentage of respiratory specimens testing positive for seasonal influenza viruses received by the Public Health Laboratory Services Branch of the CHP and Hospital Authority (HA) was also at a high level of 9.76 per cent. Meanwhile, as at the week ending April 20, 29 influenza-like illness outbreaks occurring in schools/institutions were recorded, representing a significant increase as compared to about 10 outbreaks recorded per week in the first half of April. In addition, a total of 20 paediatric cases of influenza-associated complication/death were recorded in this influenza season (including two fatal cases). Three quarters of the cases (15 cases) were known to have not yet received the 2023/24 SIV.

"Seasonal influenza virus strains detected in Hong Kong include influenza A(H1), influenza A(H3) and influenza B viruses, and they are typically more active during influenza seasons. The influenza season in Hong Kong usually lasts for eight to 12 weeks while the duration would be prolonged when there is a transition of the dominating virus strain. For example, in the 2015/16 winter influenza season, influenza A (H1) predominated initially and was then overtaken by influenza B as the predominant strain, resulting in a prolonged season that lasted for about 16 weeks with more severe cases. The CHP observed a gradual change of the predominant strain from influenza A(H3) to influenza A(H1) this season. It is believed that the current influenza season would persist for a period of time and more outbreaks and severe cases might be recorded in the upcoming weeks," a spokesman for the CHP elaborated.

Separately, the CHP has also been continuing its monitoring against other respiratory pathogens. For children, surveillance data as of April 20 revealed that the rhinovirus/enterovirus continued to have the highest activity level among the respiratory pathogens, accounting for 22 per cent of the children respiratory specimens received by the HA. The next active pathogen is adenovirus, with the positive percentage of 8.6 per cent. Meanwhile, according to the figures from the HA, the percentage of positive specimens for *Mycoplasma pneumoniae* infection in children has increased from about 5 per cent two months ago to 8 per cent currently. The proportion of other respiratory pathogens including respiratory syncytial virus, human metapneumovirus and parainfluenza viruses are at 6.7 per cent, 5.5 per cent and 3.5 per cent respectively.

The spokesman reiterated that many respiratory pathogens including influenza virus may have transmission simultaneously, while vaccination is safe and effective for preventing seasonal influenza. The Scientific Committee on Vaccine Preventable Diseases under the CHP opined that SIV are

effective against influenza A (including H1 and H3) and B. Members of the public who have not received SIV, in particular high risk groups such as young children, the elderly and chronic disease patients, should get vaccinated as soon as possible.

The Government has all along been committed in encouraging members of the public to receive SIV. Various SIV programmes and relevant subsidy schemes of the Government have included injectable inactivated influenza vaccines and nasal live attenuated influenza vaccine for citizens to choose. Since the launch of the 2023/24 season SIV programmes from September last year, a total of over 1.84 million doses of SIV have been administered so far, representing an increase of 20 per cent compared with the same period of last season. An obvious increase in SIV uptake this season for high-risk groups has been observed, especially among the elderly and children, when compared with previous years. Currently, about 534 100 doses of SIV have been administered for children aged between 6 months and below 18 years of age. The overall vaccine coverage rate has reached 52.5 per cent. Vaccination at residential care homes for the elderly has covered over 81 per cent of the residents by arranging visiting doctors' outreach vaccination service, while the SIV administered to elders increased by 15 per cent compared to last year, and the overall vaccine coverage rate of elders has reached 50.8 per cent. Members of the public who have not received SIV this current season should consult their family doctors about the vaccines available and receive vaccination as soon as possible for personal protection.

The spokesman reminded that wearing a surgical mask properly could effectively prevent respiratory diseases transmitted through respiratory droplets. High-risk persons should wear a surgical mask when visiting public places, and the public should also wear a surgical mask when taking public transportation or staying at crowded places. Persons who are symptomatic, even if having mild symptoms, should wear a surgical mask, refrain from work or attending classes at school, and seek medical advice promptly with a view to lowering the risk of spreading the virus.

The CHP will continue to closely monitor local and overseas situation of infectious diseases. For the latest information, please visit the CHP's [influenza page](#) and [COVID-19 & Flu Express](#). As for vaccination, the public may visit the CHP's [Vaccination Schemes page](#).

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## [Hong Kong and Shanghai hold meeting to enhance financial co-operation \(with photos\)](#)

Representatives of the governments, financial regulators and exchanges



of Hong Kong and Shanghai held the ninth Working Meeting of Hong Kong-Shanghai Financial Co-operation in Hong Kong today (April 25) to discuss how to further enhance financial co-operation between the two places.

The Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government, Mr Christopher Hui, and the Director-General of the Shanghai Office for Advancing International Financial Center Development, Mr Zhou Xiaoquan, provided an update of the latest market situation and developments of the financial services sectors in Hong Kong and Shanghai respectively. Representatives of the two places discussed issues of mutual concern, including the latest developments of financial services in the Mainland (Shanghai) Pilot Free Trade Zone (FTZ); co-operation in respect of cross-boundary Renminbi (RMB) business, securities, futures, insurance, financial technology (fintech) and green finance; and enhancing talent exchange.

Addressing the meeting, Mr Hui said that the Central Financial Work Conference highlighted strengthening Shanghai's competitiveness and influence as an international financial centre, as well as consolidating and enhancing Hong Kong's position as an international financial centre, fully underscoring the important and unique status of Hong Kong and Shanghai in building the strength in finance of the country. He said he looks forward to closer financial co-operation between Hong Kong and Shanghai on various fronts, and joint implementation of the series of measures for further expanding the mutual access between the capital markets of the Mainland and Hong Kong announced by the China Securities Regulatory Commission on April 19, which cover expanding the eligible product scope of equity exchange-traded funds (ETFs) under Stock Connect, including real estate investment trusts (REITs) under Stock Connect, supporting the inclusion of RMB stock trading counter under Southbound trading of Stock Connect, enhancing the arrangements for mutual recognition of funds, and encouraging leading enterprises of industries on the Mainland to list in Hong Kong, thereby jointly contributing to the high-quality financial development of the country.

The Shanghai side introduced the updated progress of promoting Shanghai as an international financial centre as well as the implementation of various financial initiatives. Mr Zhou said that under the new circumstances, Shanghai and Hong Kong must co-ordinate developments, with division of work as well as synergy and co-operation, and make concerted effort to build the financial core competitiveness of the country and to contribute to its development as a financial powerhouse and the national rejuvenation. As the country's two locomotives in the areas of finance, both sides should strengthen co-operation, and realise capital and resource connection to create joint forces in serving national strategies.

At the meeting, both sides agreed to work on the continuous enhancement of the mutual market access programmes, such as Shanghai-Hong Kong Stock Connect, Bond Connect and Swap Connect, collaborate closely to implement the newly announced measures and explore further deepening of co-operation between the securities markets of the two places. On insurance, both sides will facilitate exchange and co-operation in the industry on such development

issues as risk management of Belt and Road projects, captive insurance and insurance-linked securities.

Both sides supported the strengthening of co-operation on product development, services and innovation relating to green finance; encouraging enterprises of the two places to conduct green and sustainable financing, investment and certification, and develop diversified financial products; and enhancing exchange on carbon trading, carbon finance product research, development and supervision. Both sides also agreed to enhance exchange and co-operation among fintech enterprises of the two places.

The Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government and the Shanghai Office for Advancing International Financial Center Development agreed to take the lead in holding regular meetings to enhance exchanges and financial co-operation between the two places.

