

[CE meets President of Panama \(with photos/video\)](#)

The Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, accompanied by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, and the Acting Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Dr Bernard Chan, met with the President of Panama, Mr Juan Carlos Varela Rodriguez, at Government House this afternoon (April 2). Panama's Minister of Commerce and Industry, Mr Nestor Gonzalez, and Minister for Canal Affairs, Mr Roberto Roy, also attended the meeting.

Mrs Lam welcomed Mr Varela Rodriguez's visit to Hong Kong this year, shortly after China and Panama established diplomatic relations in 2017, to officiate at the opening ceremony of the Consulate General of Panama in Hong Kong. Mrs Lam expressed her gratitude for the importance he attaches to the relations between the two places. She said that Hong Kong, an international financial, logistics and business centre, has all along been the ideal gateway for overseas enterprises to get access to the markets in the Mainland and Asia; while Panama, a vital global hub for trade connecting the Pacific and the Atlantic, has been serving as a transshipment and logistics hub in Latin America and the Caribbean. Pointing out that both places possess excellent ports and are dedicated to developing the maritime industry, she said that Hong Kong is striving to develop high-end maritime services and co-operation between the two places is set to create synergy. She noted that Panama is one of the fastest-growing economies in Latin America and has great development potential, with bilateral merchandise trade between Hong Kong and Panama increasing by nearly 30 per cent year-on-year in 2018. Mrs Lam said she believed that the establishment of Panama's Consulate General in Hong Kong will add impetus to the advancement of bilateral trade and economic relations between the two places, and boost co-operation and exchanges in more areas.

Mrs Lam said that with the commissioning of two major cross-boundary infrastructure projects last year, namely the Hong Kong section of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link and the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, the travelling times between Hong Kong and Mainland cities have been shortened further, which will help promote the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. Pointing out that Hong Kong is able to play a key role in the growing trade flows and bilateral ties between China and Panama, she encouraged Panamanian enterprises to leverage Hong Kong's status as an international financial, maritime and trading centre to explore markets in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, the Mainland and elsewhere in Asia.

