

CE welcomes passage of Improving Electoral System (Consolidated Amendments) Bill 2021

The Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, welcomed the passage of the Improving Electoral System (Consolidated Amendments) Bill 2021 by the Legislative Council (LegCo) today (May 27), hailing it as a landmark occasion for ensuring "patriots administering Hong Kong" in accordance with the principle of "One Country, Two Systems".

"With a view to plugging the loopholes in Hong Kong's electoral system that seriously jeopardised Hong Kong's constitutional order, endangered national security and obstructed governance as reflected in the political chaos in recent years, the National People's Congress (NPC) passed a Decision on March 11 to improve the electoral system of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) and, with the NPC's authorisation, the NPC Standing Committee approved amendments to Annex I and Annex II to the Basic Law on March 30. I am pleased that we have expeditiously completed the task to amend the local electoral legislation within two months," Mrs Lam said.

"This would not have been possible without the guidance of the Central Government, the full co-operation of the LegCo, the support expressed by members of the community and the hard work of my colleagues, especially those in the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau and the Department of Justice. Together, we have ushered in a new era for Hong Kong's political system that will ensure the full and accurate implementation of 'One Country, Two Systems'.

"I am grateful to LegCo Members for intensively and tirelessly scrutinising the Bill since its introduction on April 14, and for their many constructive suggestions. We have taken on board many of those suggestions through Committee Stage Amendments, which have provided greater clarity to certain legal provisions and will enhance the electoral arrangements. The amended electoral legislation will provide us with a solid basis to conduct the coming elections in accordance with the amended Annex I and Annex II.

"In the past two years, Hong Kong has experienced the most severe political challenges since its return to the motherland. In my 2020 Policy Address, I made it clear that one of our urgent priorities is to put the HKSAR's constitutional order and political system back on the right track. The implementation of the Law of the People's Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (National Security Law) since June 30 last year has effectively restored stability; the passage of the Bill today, which ensures 'patriots administering Hong Kong' in Hong Kong's political structure, marks another milestone. These two key initiatives fully demonstrate the Central Government's unwavering determination in upholding 'One Country, Two

Systems', and they will go a long way towards ensuring the long-term prosperity and stability of Hong Kong."

Mrs Lam said, in the legislative process, the HKSAR Government steadfastly dismissed misleading claims by some foreign politicians and media concerning the improvement to the electoral system. Those misplaced comments and their ulterior motives were very much what had been seen in their unjustified criticisms against the National Security Law. She pointed out that the improvement to the electoral system of the HKSAR is both timely and necessary, as anti-China forces had created chaos in the LegCo, paralysed the operation of the HKSAR Government, and even colluded with external forces to undermine Hong Kong's safety and interests. No country or government could turn a blind eye to such dangers.

"It is natural and in line with international norm to require people vested with governing powers to be patriotic. Whoever meets the requirements and criteria of being a patriot, irrespective of their political stance, can participate in elections and be elected in accordance with the law to serve the HKSAR. The improved electoral system will help the LegCo restore its constitutional function as a platform for rational interaction between the executive authorities and the legislature, which will clearly enhance governance."

The Bill will be published in the Gazette and come into effect on May 31. The Government will then press ahead at full steam with the preparations for the three coming elections, namely the Election Committee Subsector Ordinary Elections to be held on September 19, 2021; the LegCo General Elections to be held on December 19, 2021; and the Chief Executive Election to be held on March 27, 2022. In particular, a special voter registration arrangement will be conducted from June 1 to July 5. The Chief Executive will appoint the Candidate Eligibility Review Committee, and make a report to the Central Government for the record in due course.

As the LegCo membership will be expanded from 70 to 90 in the next term, the Government will fully support the LegCo in the provision of accommodation and staffing resources. The LegCo has already accepted the scheme to expand the LegCo Complex and funding approval will be sought in due course to enable works to proceed as soon as possible.

The Government will work closely with the Electoral Affairs Commission and the Registration and Electoral Office to enhance public understanding of the improved electoral system, including voter registration, election rules and the improvement measures for voting. Above all, the Government is committed to ensuring elections are conducted in a fair, just and open manner.