

CS responds to Budget

Following is the response of the Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr John Lee, today (February 23) to the 2022-23 Budget:

The Financial Secretary delivered the 2022-23 Budget today. Hong Kong's economy was on the path of revival last year, but the recent outbreak of the fifth wave of the epidemic has put pressure on normal economic activities and the job market. The Budget this year was prepared under these very special circumstances.

Stabilising the epidemic situation early is the overriding mission at present for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government. The Budget has reserved necessary financial resources for anti-epidemic measures on various fronts with a view to safeguarding the lives and health of Hong Kong people, including the continued implementation of the vaccination programme, continued strengthening of testing work, procurement of rapid antigen test kits, provision of additional resources to the Hospital Authority, and further injection of \$12 billion into the Anti-epidemic Fund for the construction of anti-epidemic facilities.

To support enterprises and individuals hard hit by the fifth wave of the epidemic, the Government has swiftly launched the fifth and sixth rounds of the Anti-epidemic Fund, with the total funding of the two rounds standing at \$30.6 billion. The Budget further proposed short-term relief measures, such as the extension of the application period of the SME Financing Guarantee Scheme to end-June next year to ease the cash flow pressure on small and medium-sized enterprises; enhancement of the 100% Personal Loan Guarantee Scheme for Individuals to assist those with income substantially reduced under the epidemic; provision of an equivalent of a half month's extra allowance to eligible recipients of social security payments; and reduction, waiver or subsidy in specified taxes, rates, electricity charges, and water and sewage charges.

The Budget once again introduces the Consumption Voucher Scheme to issue electronic consumption vouchers in instalments with a total value of \$10,000 to each eligible Hong Kong permanent resident and new arrival aged 18 or above. The value of the vouchers is double that of last year, and the vouchers are expected to further boost the local consumption market.

The Budget creates favourable conditions for economic recovery and emphasises investment in the future, especially in facilitating Hong Kong's full integration into the country's overall development, fully displaying Hong Kong's potential in the four traditional centres and four emerging centres under the National 14th Five-Year Plan and continuing to consolidate Hong Kong's position as an international city under the unique advantages of "one country, two systems", with a view to opening a new chapter of development in the new era.

At present, the community of Hong Kong has to remain confident and

united in the fight against the epidemic. As the enterprises maintain their strength and the people continue to fight the virus together to bring the epidemic under early control, we will certainly tide over the difficult times and the economy will surely recover.

I support the Budget this year, and hope that the Legislative Council can scrutinise and approve the appropriation bill as soon as possible, so that various measures can be implemented, relief measures can benefit individuals and enterprises as early as practicable, and the economy can revive soon.