

Government responds to January 1 procession

The Government fully respects the right of Hong Kong people to take part in public processions and their freedom to express their views, a Government spokesman said in response to a procession today (January 1). The current-term Government has adopted a new governance philosophy to care, listen and act since assuming office, the spokesman said, adding that it has also spared no effort in playing the roles of a facilitator and a promoter, and proactively implementing a series of policy initiatives to inject new impetus into Hong Kong's economy to bring about a better life for the community.

The spokesman said the rule of law is the foundation of Hong Kong's pluralistic society and free economy. It is the core value shared and treasured by everyone in Hong Kong. The Government will remain steadfast to protect and uphold the rule of law.

The Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China is the constitutional and legal basis for the successful implementation of "one country, two systems". The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government has the responsibility to fully implement the Basic Law, uphold the principle of "one country" and leverage the advantages of "two systems", with a view to ensuring the stability and prosperity of Hong Kong.

The maintenance of the rule of law in Hong Kong is well recognised internationally. In the Worldwide Governance Indicators project of the World Bank Group, Hong Kong's percentile rank in respect of the rule of law leapt from 69.9 in 1996 to 93.75 in 2017 and has been persistently over 90 since 2003.

The spokesman said that under Article 63 of the Basic Law, the Department of Justice (DoJ) of the HKSAR shall control criminal prosecutions, free from any interference. All prosecution decisions are made by the DoJ independently without fear or favour, free from any political consideration. They are made strictly in accordance with the applicable laws, evidence and the Prosecution Code.

To meet the public demand for land and housing, the Government has formulated new land and housing policies which are welcomed by the community. A series of initiatives in the short, medium and long terms will be implemented to increase land supply. The Lantau Tomorrow Vision announced in the 2018 Policy Address is a forward-looking blueprint to provide sizeable pieces of land for housing, transportation and commercial developments. The Government will continue to develop land resources in a resolute and persistent manner through a multi-pronged approach so that there will be adequate housing for the public to enjoy life and to call Hong Kong their home. The Government will also consider in detail the valuable recommendations submitted by the Task Force on Land Supply in its report.

Regarding election matters, the spokesman emphasised that the Government has always respected and safeguarded the rights enjoyed by Hong Kong residents according to law, including the rights to vote and to stand for election. At the same time, Article 1 of the Basic Law states that the HKSAR is an inalienable part of the People's Republic of China. The Government has a duty to implement and uphold the Basic Law and to ensure that all elections will be conducted in accordance with the Basic Law and relevant electoral laws.

On Article 23 of the Basic Law, the spokesman pointed out that the HKSAR Government has the constitutional responsibility to legislate for Article 23 in order to safeguard national security. The Chief Executive has stated a number of times that the Government will carefully consider all relevant factors, act prudently and continue its efforts to create a favourable social environment for the legislative work.

The spokesman also said that the Government understands the aspirations of the community for selecting the Chief Executive through "one person, one vote". However, the Government cannot ignore reality and rashly re-embark on political reform, making it difficult for the community to focus on development. The Government will act prudently in this respect.

The spokesman added that riding on the unprecedented opportunities brought about by the nation's Belt and Road Initiative and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area development, the Government will proactively work hand in hand with various sectors to participate in the developments. Taking part in these initiatives will boost traditional industries in which Hong Kong enjoys clear advantages, and help Hong Kong to develop new industries and explore new economic growth engines.