

LCQ3: Dissemination of information on the Northern Metropolis project

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Yuet-ming and a reply by the Secretary for Development, Ms Bernadette Linn, in the Legislative Council today (March 26):

Question:

Some residents in the North District have reflected that some unidentified persons have recently patrolled on the hills in the vicinity of the North District and put up flags labelled "Hong Kong Northern Metropolis New District Earthworks Project" on the hills, causing doubts and anxiety among local residents. In addition, it is reported that a large number of advertisements relating to the recruitment of Mainland construction workers for the Northern Metropolis project have appeared on Mainland's social media platforms, which involve illegal practices by "unlawful intermediaries" obtaining intermediary fees by deception from workers applying for the recruitment. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has put up flags on the hills in the New Territories for the Northern Metropolis project; if so, of the details; if not, whether it will conduct an investigation into the incident, and of the details of the investigation;

(2) whether it has recruited workers from the Mainland for the Northern Metropolis development project; if so, of the details; if not, whether it will conduct an investigation into the recruitment situation on Mainland's social media platforms and the problem of unlawful intermediaries; if it will, of the details of the investigation; and

(3) of the projects commenced by government departments in the Northern Metropolis and their addresses; whether it has disseminated information on the planning and development of the Northern Metropolis to the Mainland through official channels; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Northern Metropolis (NM) is a major land development project of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), and is the new engine for Hong Kong's future economic growth. As we are taking forward the works in a number of new development areas (NDAs) in full steam and are expediting the construction of the NM, we would not tolerate any act of individuals to use the name of the NM to mislead the public or even commit illegal activities. Should these situations occur, we will act decisively,

disseminate the correct information publicly and take appropriate follow-up actions, including law enforcement with other departments including the Police.

My reply to different parts of the question raised by Hon Chan Yuet-ming is as follows:

(1) Earlier, flags with words meaning "Site works project of new area in the Hong Kong Northern Metropolis" were erected on a hillside in the area around Muk Wu Nga Yiu Village in Ta Kwu Ling, North District. After inspection by relevant departments, the Development Bureau (DEVB) has clarified publicly that the flags and bamboo poles concerned were not placed by the works departments of the Government or their contractors. These flags and bamboo poles illegally erected on government land have already been removed so as to prevent the outlaws from using such signage to continue to disseminate false information. In fact, when carrying out works projects, government departments would display project signboards at prominent locations providing project details, such as the responsible department, project title, contact phone numbers, commencement and completion dates of the project. We appeal to the public to report any suspicious situation by calling 1823 at once or by notifying the Police and the DEVB. The government departments will carry out investigation immediately and take appropriate actions. At the same time, the offices concerned under the Lands Department, the Planning Department and the Civil Engineering and Development Department (CEDD) will watch out for any such suspicious cases during their routine inspections.

(2) To address the manpower shortage of the construction sector in Hong Kong, the Government has launched the Labour Importation Scheme for the Construction Sector (the Scheme). On the premise of safeguarding the employment priority for local workers, it allows qualified employers to apply for importing labour at an appropriate scale. Currently, approved applications include public works projects in the NM, some of which involve labour from the Mainland. The Scheme sets out stringent requirements for the principal contractors, subcontractors and their agents. If the employers are preparing to import labour from the Mainland, they must recruit such labour through Mainland labour service enterprises. Labour service enterprises refer to enterprises approved by the Ministry of Commerce and granted with the permission to operate business on labour service co-operation with the HKSAR. Labour from the Mainland who wish to work in Hong Kong have to pay attention that the recruitment organisation should be among the aforementioned approved labour service enterprises. These labour service enterprises will ensure that the employers conducting the recruitment exercise are the principal contractors or subcontractors who are granted with quotas under the Scheme. The list of such labour service enterprises has been published on the websites of the Ministry of Commerce and the Labour Department of the HKSAR Government. Details of the Scheme are available on the DEVB's website. Relevant information is also disseminated via different platforms such as the Representative Office of the Construction Industry Council on the Mainland. Meanwhile, the Construction Industry Council will, together with the Labour Department, the Independent Commission Against Corruption and labour unions, arrange monthly briefings for newly imported workers on their employment

rights. It is believed that these briefings will also enable the Mainland workers to share the correct information among their circle of friends on the Mainland.

(3) NDAs in the NM are under different construction and planning stages. For example, Kwu Tung North/Fanling North, Hung Shui Kiu/Ha Tsuen, Yuen Long South and San Tin Technopole have site formation and engineering infrastructure works being carried out. Other NDAs such as the Lau Fau Shan area, Ngau Tam Mei, New Territories North New Town and Ma Tso Lung are in the process of conducting public engagement activities and other preparatory work according to the development proposals.

The tender notices and information on contracts awarded in the past six months for public works in the territory have been uploaded onto the websites of the DEVB and the relevant works departments. Among them, works related to the NM are mainly those site formation and engineering infrastructure works being carried out by the CEDD. As of March 10 this year, ongoing works projects concerned are listed at Annex.

The Task Force for Collaboration on the Northern Metropolis Development Strategy jointly established by senior officials of the HKSAR and Shenzhen governments has operated since 2023 for exchanging views on the NM development regularly and strengthening collaboration. We have all along been providing up-to-date information of the NM development to the Mainland authorities through the Task Force and other collaboration platforms extended therefrom. Furthermore, for NDAs currently under the planning stage, we would not only arrange roving exhibitions in Hong Kong during public engagement, but also in Guangzhou and Shenzhen. Also, we will share information about the NM development via the social media platforms on the Mainland of the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in Guangdong of the HKSAR Government and the official Weibo account of the DEVB. We will continue to enhance promotional efforts in all aspects in the future.