

Remarks by CE at media session before ExCo (with video)

Following are the remarks by the Chief Executive, Mr John Lee, at a media session before the Executive Council meeting today (January 14):

Reporter: Former Chief Executive Carrie Lam is moving into the Immigration Tower and will remain there for at least three years. Has the Government suspended the redevelopment project of the three government buildings in Wan Chai? And will that delay affect Hong Kong's competitiveness as a trade fair destination, and will there be other projects delayed or postponed or stalled because of the deficit problem the Government is facing? The second question is about the Security Bureau has sent a team to Thailand to liaise with the local authorities in a high profile move. What do you expect them to achieve with this meeting with government officials there? And will you seek support from Beijing, as demanded by the victims' families? And, do you think, is travelling to Thailand still safe for Hong Kongers? Thank you.

Chief Executive: The Wan Chai redevelopment plan will go ahead as planned, but it is important for the Government to make good use of resources. So while the redevelopment plan will go ahead, for the buildings that have been vacated, we should make good use of them. That is why we are now renovating the accommodation there, so as to allow the former Chief Executive to move in. I think that will save government money, and also that will ensure government resources are properly utilised. So I repeat, the Wan Chai redevelopment plan will go ahead as planned.

Regarding our competitiveness, despite the financial constraint, the Government has said many times that we will continue to have capital projects. In particular, government capital projects in the coming years will ensure that, on average, we will have capital projects amounting to \$90 billion each year. That will ensure, first of all, the infrastructure projects will go ahead, but priority will be given to the Northern Metropolis and also, making lands particularly for housing and industry development.

As regards the visit by the Security Bureau to Thailand, I thank the Security Bureau for trying all means to help the stranded, false-imprisoned somehow or freedom-restricted Hong Kong people in Southeast Asian countries. A lot of them have been deceived to work for high return, and repeatedly the Government has said that these are scams. So it is important that we tell everybody that we should be extra careful and should see to all these deception cases so that we don't fall into the trap. Since 2024 when this trend got escalated again, the Security Bureau has already escalated their action in the task force. The task force comprises not just SB (Security Bureau) officials but also police and immigration officials. The investigators have been making use of all possible means, including their INTERPOL network, and the investigation network that has been built in their action against organised crime and drug dealing. So it shows that the

Security Bureau's task force is attaching not just great importance to the cases, but also trying all their best to help those who are being kept in captivity in Southeast Asian countries, Myanmar in this case.

And the visit by the Security Bureau task force, I think, has achieved some positive results. They have been met by the Minister of Justice of Thailand, and Thailand officials have already indicated that they will attach great importance to the cases and try all their means to try to rescue those Hong Kong people who are in captivity. There have been positive results all along, because since this trend has gone up again, 16 Hong Kong citizens in captivity have already returned to Hong Kong safely. There are still 12 we want to help, but I feel positive to see the strong attention and commitment that has been given by our Thailand counterparts. They are all working at full steam and hard on this case. The Chinese Embassy in Thailand has already helped as well, and they have been helping in liaison, setting up a communication network for us, for the investigators to exchange intelligence and also to ensure that the best available and possible action can be taken. For operational matters, I think the investigators know best how to pursue, and you can see the full attention and the full commitment that have been devoted to this matter by both the Hong Kong authorities and the Thailand authorities. I want them to work really hard, and hopefully they will produce some positive results for us.

One last thing, we have also included a lot of information on the Security Bureau's web page in relation to travel information to Thailand. I have asked SB to update it regularly with the latest information and developments. One thing that I want to make clear to people is, so far the modus operandi is to deceive people to go to Thailand and then send them across the border. The indications are that this is a scam that happened with the people who have fallen into the trap to make such agreement to go. So far, there has not been indication that it happens indiscriminately against people in Thailand, but we have to keep alert to the development of the situation. The Security Bureau will be updating information on the website to inform members of the public.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the remarks.)