

SCED co-chairs video conference with ASEAN economic ministers to further co-operation (with photos)

The Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau, co-chaired via video conference the Fourth Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Economic Ministers – Hong Kong, China Consultations with the Minister of Industry and Trade of Vietnam, Mr Tran Tuan Anh, today (August 28).

At the meeting, economic ministers from the 10 ASEAN Member States (AMS) and Hong Kong exchanged views on a response to the economic impact of the pandemic, discussed possible areas for co-operation and collaboration, and took stock of the implementation of the ASEAN-HKC Free Trade Agreement (AHKFTA) and the ASEAN-HKC Investment Agreement (AHKIA).

Noting the unprecedented challenges brought about by the pandemic and the uncertainty posed by the rapidly changing global and regional economic environment, Mr Yau called for greater regional co-operation and collaborations in mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and supporting post-pandemic recovery efforts. He also stressed the importance of keeping boundaries open and refraining from unjustified trade barriers or irrationality in trade policies.

He said that the AHKFTA and the AHKIA serve as solid platforms for closer economic co-operation and collaboration between AMS and Hong Kong, noting that parts of the Agreements relating to eight out of 10 AMS have come into force. He looked forward to the full implementation of both Agreements early so as to take the co-operation to the next level.

Citing the two high-level webinars held in June and August on Hong Kong's partnerships with Thailand and Indonesia, which attracted a wide audience from business sectors to government officials in the region, Mr Yau said that Hong Kong is committed to deepening mutual understanding and stepping up co-operation with AMS.

At the meeting, the ministers also recognised the critical role of the multilateral trading system (MTS) and the importance of free and open trade and investment in sustaining efforts for a post-COVID 19 environment.

Mr Yau echoed that a well-functioning and effective MTS, with the World Trade Organization (WTO) as its core, is instrumental to mitigating the enormous economic challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and is paving the way for a speedy and sustainable economic recovery. Intensified efforts are required in strengthening the rules-based MTS by exploring pragmatic solutions to restore a fully functioning dispute settlement system, expediting the process for WTO reform and driving substantive outcomes in WTO

negotiations.

During the meeting, Mr Yau also reiterated Hong Kong's eagerness to pursue deeper regional economic integration in the region through joining the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, and he called on all AMS to continue to render their full support for Hong Kong's early accession.

ASEAN is an important trading partner of Hong Kong. In 2019, the total bilateral merchandise trade between Hong Kong and ASEAN reached HK\$1,018 billion, accounting for 12.1 per cent of Hong Kong's total merchandise trade, making ASEAN the second largest trading partner of Hong Kong. As at end 2018, the total outward direct investment (ODI) from Hong Kong to ASEAN amounted to HK\$480 billion, making ASEAN the fourth largest recipient of Hong Kong's ODI.

