

Speech by CE at Greater Bay Maritime Forum (English only) (with photos)

Following is the speech by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, at the Greater Bay Maritime Forum today (November 1):

Captain Hojgaard (Chairman of Hong Kong Shipowners Association, Mr Bjorn Hojgaard), ladies and gentlemen,

Good evening. It really gives me great pleasure to join you today for the inaugural Greater Bay Maritime Forum. Let me first congratulate the Hong Kong Shipowners Association for hosting this Forum which brings together our important partners in the maritime sector, not only in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) but also globally. I am also glad to witness the signing ceremony of two Memoranda of Understanding by maritime associations and arbitration bodies of Hong Kong and other parts of the GBA.

It is fitting that this inaugural forum is hosted in Hong Kong, an international maritime centre with over one and a half century of maritime heritage. Shipping has long been one of our core businesses, with over 90 per cent of our cargo volume carried by water. Given our strategic position as the springboard to the Mainland of China and the rest of the world, Hong Kong has become a major regional transshipment hub serving the global maritime communities, with some 280 weekly container vessel sailings connecting to over 600 destinations worldwide.

Our role as the transshipment hub in the region has been tested and proven amid the challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. With the joint efforts of the Government and the industry, including of course the Hong Kong Shipowners Association, I am pleased to say that our maritime sector has lived up to the challenges and has been able to ensure the smooth and stable flow of goods to meet the needs of our community. We have made great efforts to allow sea crew change, which is in fact a compassionate arrangement for crew members who have been stranded onboard vessels for an excessively long period owing to the closure of other ports. Qualified ships without cargo operation are also allowed to enter Hong Kong for pure bunkering and other ship services, which is of particular importance to the smooth operation of the international shipping industry. My Government has announced today some tightening of the exemptions but I can assure you that this sector is not affected. We have done all these, while at the same time never dropping our guard against the importation of the virus.

Today's forum provides an ideal platform for us to share thoughts and insight on the development of the maritime sector, particularly how we may fully grasp the immense opportunities arising from the GBA development. With a population of some 86 million and a combined GDP of about US\$1.7 trillion, the GBA development is accorded key strategic importance in our country's development blueprint. It puts the emphasis on complementarity, and the nine

Mainland cities in the GBA, Hong Kong and Macao are expected to leverage their comparative advantages to drive the overall development of the Area.

The Outline Development Plan for the GBA promulgated by the Central Authorities in 2019 recognises Hong Kong's role as an international maritime centre. The same recognition can also be found in the National 14th Five-Year Plan published earlier this year. In particular, the Central Authorities support Hong Kong's development of high value-added, professional maritime services and the provision of such services to Mainland enterprises.

We already have a vibrant maritime cluster here in Hong Kong, with some 900 shipping-related companies providing a broad range of maritime services, including ship finance, marine insurance, maritime legal and arbitration services, ship management, shipbroking, etc. Over the years, my Government has implemented various measures to support further growth of this maritime cluster. They include, first, offering profits-tax exemption and half-rate tax concessions to ship leasing and marine-insurance businesses. These were made available through legislative amendments last year. And tax measures aiming at attracting more ship managers, agents and shipbrokers to Hong Kong are in the pipeline.

Secondly, enhancing the services of the Hong Kong Shipping Registry by expanding its overseas network. Regional desks have hitherto been set up in London, Shanghai, Singapore and Sydney, and additional ones will be established in San Francisco, Tokyo and Toronto. We want to ensure that ships flying the Hong Kong flag will receive all the support they need so that more ships will register with us.

Thirdly, providing port back-up sites as well as subsidies to encourage third party logistics service providers to adopt technology.

Fourthly, nurturing local maritime talents through dedicated post-secondary programmes as well as training programmes supported by the Maritime and Aviation Training Fund.

Fifthly, more lately in my 2021 Policy Address delivered last month, promoting the application of technology and driving the development of "Smart Port" and a sustainable shipping industry by providing LNG bunkering for ocean-going vessels.

With our strength in maritime services, I am confident that Hong Kong can make important contribution to the development of the GBA into a world-class port cluster. We will work closely with ports in Guangdong, which mainly handle direct shipment, to ensure mutually beneficial development. In this connection, the Agreement on Maritime Cooperation in the GBA signed by the authorities of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao in August last year has already laid a solid foundation for the implementation of joint maritime projects for the benefit of the whole GBA.

I would like to take today's opportunity to thank the Hong Kong Shipowners Association and our other partners in the industry, for working

with the Government over the years in promoting Hong Kong's strengths, in promoting the application of technology, in tackling climate change and more. We have made Hong Kong an international maritime centre fully recognised by our friends worldwide. The International Chamber of Shipping established its first-ever overseas office in Hong Kong in 2019, while the BIMCO Law and Arbitration Clause 2020 has included Hong Kong as the fourth named arbitration venue. All these were achieved with the concerted efforts of the industry and the Government. The two Memoranda of Understanding to be signed today also demonstrate our shared commitment to making the most out of each and every opportunity to strengthen cooperation with our partners around the world. I am sure I can continue to count on the industry's support as Hong Kong seeks to seize the massive opportunities ahead, including those arising from the GBA, the 14th Five-Year Plan and the dual-circulation development strategy of our country.

My thanks to the organisers for staging such a meaningful event here in Hong Kong and I understand you have already had a very fruitful Forum. Thank you very much.

