

Speech by CE at opening ceremony of Bangkok ETO (English only)

Following is the speech by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, at the opening ceremony of the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in Bangkok today (February 28):

Deputy Prime Minister Somkid (Deputy Prime Minister of Thailand, Dr Somkid Jatusripitak), distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon. It has been such a pleasure coming back to Thailand a third time since I took office some 20 months ago, and this time, welcoming you all to a Hong Kong home, the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office, here in this great global city of Bangkok.

Today's memorable occasion would not be possible without the staunch support of the Thai Government, particularly Prime Minister Mr Prayut who first raised the idea of a Hong Kong office in Thailand during my visit in August 2017. And I have to thank the Deputy Prime Minister Dr Somkid for his personal attention on this matter which is instrumental in enabling us to establish this office within just 17 months, from the day I announced our intention to do so in October 2017. I also have to put on record my deepest gratitude to our Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)– Minister Wang Yi, Commissioner Xie Feng of the Office of the MFA in Hong Kong and Ambassador Lyu and his predecessor for their support and encouragement. I must also thank my own colleagues – the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development Edward Yau and his team for their diligence in taking forward all the preparatory work.

Our Bangkok Economic and Trade Office (ETO) is Hong Kong's 13th overseas ETO and our third in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Indeed, our second ETO in the ASEAN, the Jakarta Office was only opened less than three years ago, while the Singapore Office had been Hong Kong Government's only official presence in the ASEAN until 2016. The establishment of the Bangkok Office is a clear and compelling statement of the importance of ASEAN to Hong Kong. Last year, trade between Hong Kong and ASEAN reached US\$136.5 billion, up more than 14 per cent over 2017. Indeed, ASEAN is our second largest trading partner – and has been occupying that position since 2010.

Thailand and Hong Kong have long been close partners. Thailand is Hong Kong's ninth-largest merchandise trading partner, third among ASEAN member states. Thailand was also among the first ASEAN member states to complete all procedures required to bring the ASEAN-Hong Kong Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and Investment Agreement into force. The agreements were signed in November 2017. Since then, Thailand has encouraged other ASEAN member states to expedite their FTA ratification process, for which I am very grateful.

Looking ahead, I expect the Bangkok ETO to play the role of facilitator,

connecting businesses and organisations between Hong Kong and Thailand, serving as a catalyst to take our cooperation to new heights and fresh directions. On our side, that means expanding our presence in Thailand, exploring, in particular, the 10 targeted industries under the Thailand 4.0 economic model. For Thai companies, Hong Kong is a global leader in financial and professional services. And I look forward to seeing more Thai businesses setting up branches in Hong Kong.

My Government will participate in the Techsauce Global Summit, here in June. Among other things, we'll promote Hong Kong's advantages as a tech start-up hub, especially within the context of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. We'll also organise a business seminar in Bangkok in the second half of this year. It will put a spotlight on Hong Kong opportunities, including those arising from our commitment to innovation and technology development, as well as to the promise of the Greater Bay Area and the Belt and Road Initiative.

Relationship between Hong Kong and Thailand is not confined to business. For the past two years, Hong Kong has been offering Belt and Road Scholarships to outstanding Thai students wishing to study in Hong Kong. The programme can only encourage more academic and youth exchanges between us. The people of Hong Kong are certainly enthusiastic about taking in the manifold delights of Thailand. Last year, more than one million Hong Kong tourists visited the Land of Smiles. It helps that there are over 24 direct passenger flights each day between Bangkok and Hong Kong.

With the new ETO now in place here, I am confident that connections between the people of Hong Kong and Thailand will continue to expand and excel – in business, in culture, travel, education and so much more.

Before I close, allow me to thank Deputy Prime Minister Somkid again and all the other officials involved for their unfailing commitment to the opening of the Hong Kong ETO here in Bangkok. Without counting today's events, Dr Somkid and I have already met four times in the past two years, twice in Hong Kong and twice in Bangkok, which is more than any other foreign senior officials. Without these fruitful meetings, and Dr Somkid's unfailing and enthusiastic support, this office would still be a work in progress. So thank you very much, Dr Somkid.

Ladies and gentlemen, please enjoy this very special afternoon. And, in this promising Chinese New Year of the Pig, I wish you all good health, happiness and plenty of prosperity. Thank you very much.