

Speech by CE at Opening Ceremony of Hong Kong Maritime Week 2023 cum 3rd World Maritime Merchants Forum (English only) (with photo/video)

Following is the speech by the Chief Executive, Mr John Lee, at the Opening Ceremony of Hong Kong Maritime Week 2023 cum 3rd World Maritime Merchants Forum today (November 20):

Honourable Vice-Chairman C Y Leung (Vice-Chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference), Honourable Director Zheng Yanxiong (Director of the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region), Honourable Vice Minister Fu Xuyin (Vice Minister of Transport), Chairman Miao Jianmin (Chairman of the China Merchants Group), distinguished guests, friends of the global maritime community, ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon. Welcome to the opening ceremony of the Hong Kong Maritime Week 2023. This ceremony kicks off the third World Maritime Merchants Forum. I would like to extend a very warm welcome to the 900 maritime experts and professionals joining us from around the world. Your presence here is a testament to your trust and confidence in Hong Kong as an international maritime centre.

I find the theme of this year's Hong Kong Maritime Week, "Recharging the Maritime Industry", most timely. Hong Kong – and the world – have emerged from the pandemic. But the virus did leave its mark.

From the disruptions of global supply chains, to the change in the spending pattern of customers, the world of maritime is in need of a solution to give the industry a boost. A recharge.

Hong Kong is glad and eager to contribute. The Hong Kong Maritime Week this year showcases around 50 activities across seven days, ranging from conferences and seminars, to tours and competitions. It will be an exciting week filled with valuable experiences and networking opportunities.

This year, the Transport and Logistics Bureau of the Hong Kong SAR Government is joining hands with the China Merchants Group, in launching the Maritime Week together with the World Maritime Merchants Forum, for the first time.

If a recharge is what the maritime industry needs, then "Riding the Wave", which is the theme of the World Maritime Merchants Forum this year, aptly represents the resilience and adaptability that define our shipping industry.

At this Forum, you will engage in productive discussions, and strategise on ways to navigate the challenges ahead amid the rapidly evolving global landscape.

The convergence of these two influential maritime events signifies Hong Kong's unique role, as a "super-connector", as well as a "super value-adder" in the global and regional maritime industry, where we can capitalise on new opportunities together to ensure a prosperous future for the shipping industry.

That unique role is bestowed upon Hong Kong by the "one country, two systems" principle. It entrusts us the steadfast support from the Central Government, and unparalleled connectivity with the world.

The National 14th Five-Year Plan supports Hong Kong's role in the global maritime sector, with a focus on the development of high value-added maritime services.

In his keynote address for the Third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation a month ago, President Xi Jinping announced eight major actions China will take to support the joint pursuit of high-quality Belt and Road co-operation. The first of the eight steps is the building of a multidimensional Belt and Road connectivity network. Being a long-established maritime and aviation hub with extensive road and rail networks, Hong Kong is well-positioned to actively contribute to building such a network.

Hong Kong is a free port characterised by strong international connectivity, speedy customs clearance and high workflow efficiency. Known for its robustness and efficiency, our port ranks among the top ten busiest container ports globally, and serves as a key transshipment hub in the region.

With over 240 weekly international container vessel sailings, we provide extensive connections to over 460 destinations worldwide.

The maritime and port industry is important to Hong Kong's economy. It directly contributes 4.1 per cent, or over 110 billion Hong Kong Dollars, to our GDP (Gross Domestic Product). It also contributes to 2.1 per cent of total employment, creating over 78 000 jobs. Over 90 per cent of total freight volume entering or leaving Hong Kong relies on water transport.

Thanks to our long-standing maritime heritage, Hong Kong boasts a quality ship registry, that ranks fourth globally in terms of gross tonnage, and a vibrant maritime cluster.

We are home to over 1 100 port and maritime companies offering a wide range of comprehensive maritime services.

Hong Kong is the only common law jurisdiction in China. We have a long and established tradition of the rule of law. Coupled with our strategic

geographical location, world-class infrastructure and business-friendly environment, Hong Kong provides a diverse ecosystem for a thriving maritime industry.

Thanks to our prowess in legal and dispute resolution services, Hong Kong has become one of the designated arbitration venues in the Baltic and International Maritime Council's global standard maritime contracts.

Legal services are of course just one of the many streams of world-class professional services that Hong Kong has to offer. Accountants, architects, engineers, investment advisors, IT specialists, lawyers, supply chain managers, surveyors, the list just goes on and on. You name it, we've got it!

Our professionals are here to contribute to adding important value to the prosperous development in Hong Kong, along the Belt and Road, and beyond.

Indeed, the Hong Kong SAR Government has implemented a host of measures to drive maritime development. They range from tax concessions targeting maritime business services, to collaborations with international maritime organisations and port cities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, or the GBA.

The GBA comprises Hong Kong, Macao and nine cities of Guangdong Province, sharing a long shoreline in the southern part of China. It has a population of 86 million and a combined GDP equivalent to that of the world's tenth largest economy.

As I announced in my second Policy Address last month, we will continue to develop the city as a leading international maritime centre.

In the coming weeks, the Transport and Logistics Bureau will publish a detailed action plan on maritime and port development strategy. The plan will enhance high-end maritime services, facilitate transformation towards zero emission, promote smart and digital initiatives in the industry, and promote global exchanges.

We are actively working towards organising the Greater Bay International Maritime Conference. It will further amplify the collective capabilities of our "9+2" cities.

To strengthen multidimensional connectivity, we will enhance logistics co-operation with other GBA cities and strengthen ties with cities on the west bank of the Pearl River, leveraging key infrastructure such as the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge to facilitate efficient cargo transshipment via Hong Kong.

Hong Kong is fully dedicated to leading the way in driving the green transformation of the maritime industry.

We will actively advocate the use and supply of new energy in sea, land, and air transport. In this regard, we will soon kick start a feasibility

study of providing green methanol bunkering, for both local and ocean-going vessels, so as to develop Hong Kong into a green maritime fuel bunkering centre.

In the coming year, we will set out an action plan for the construction of bunkering facilities and development of supply chains.

Ladies and gentlemen, I encourage all of you to actively exchange views with your counterparts here, and forge partnerships that will shape the future of our maritime industry.

On that note, I wish you all a fruitful and successful maritime week and a productive World Maritime Merchants Forum. Together, let us recharge the maritime industry and ride the wave to navigate towards a brighter future. Thank you.

