

Speech by CE at reception in celebration of 27th anniversary of establishment of HKSAR

Following is the translation of the speech by the Chief Executive, Mr John Lee, at the reception in celebration of the 27th anniversary of the establishment of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre this morning (July 1):

Distinguished guests, fellow citizens,

Today marks the 27th anniversary of the establishment of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People's Republic of China and the second anniversary of the current-term Government. This year is particularly significant, in marking the 75th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China.

On this day two years ago, President Xi Jinping delivered an important speech here in Hong Kong. In it, he put forward "four musts" and "four proposals" for Hong Kong. These have become the basis of my governance blueprint. Over the past two years, we acted in line with the spirit of President Xi's series of important speeches for Hong Kong. With concerted and collective efforts of all concerned, many policies launched by the current term of the Government are delivering results.

Over the past two years, I have formed a pragmatic and result-oriented team. And it has been working hard to unite the community and build a better Hong Kong. We have ridden out the storm of the epidemic and fully resumed normal travel. We have completed the local legislation for Article 23 of the Basic Law, fulfilling the constitutional responsibility and historic mission that Hong Kong had waited 26 years, 8 months and 19 days to accomplish.

We have improved district governance and fully implemented the principle of "patriots administering Hong Kong". We have established Care Teams in all 18 districts to help citizens in need at different levels. This Government has been working assiduously to develop the economy and improve people's livelihood. We have abolished all demand-side management measures for residential properties. That has resulted in a substantial rise in the registered number of property transactions and a stable property market.

I attach great importance to housing issues. The waiting time for public rental housing has been capped at six years. With the smooth implementation of Light Public Housing projects, the Advance Allocation Scheme and more, waiting time will be shortened to about 4.5 years by 2026-27. The establishment of the Task Force on Tackling the Issue of Subdivided Units squarely addresses our very real concerns of subdivided units. Our strategy of targeted poverty alleviation directs resources to help sectors most in

need.

We took note of opinions on Hong Kong's dwindling fertility and requests for government action, and changed the past non-interventionist approach and took a combination of measures to promote childbirth. These include giving families with newborns priority in purchasing subsidised sale flats and in the allocation of public rental housing units, providing tax allowances and deductions, strengthening child care services, enhancing support for assisted reproductive services and dispersing the Newborn Baby Bonus.

We are also concerned about labour welfare. The minimum wage will now be reviewed annually rather than every two years. We have worked to attract enterprises, investment and talent on an extensive scale. As a result, about 120 000 talent have already come to Hong Kong.

We are committed to fueling the city's hustle and bustle, attracting people and generating economic momentum. We are staging more than 200 events throughout this year and organised activities under the "Day x Night Vibes" initiative across 18 districts. We have adopted an "industry-driven" approach to promoting economic and social development. My Principal Officials and I have travelled the world exploring business opportunities and promoting our city.

I am grateful for the Central Government's support and care in launching a variety of further measures benefitting Hong Kong. These include extending the Individual Visit Scheme to cover 10 more Mainland cities, implementing new initiatives to deepen financial co-operation between the Mainland and Hong Kong, especially in promoting the listing of leading Mainland enterprises here, the recent announcement of increasing the duty-free allowance for luggage articles brought into the Mainland from Hong Kong by visitors who are Mainland residents and more.

Over the past two years, the Government has worked to further improve governance, continued to create strong impetus for growth, earnestly addressed the concerns of the people of Hong Kong, and united efforts in safeguarding harmony and stability. We have been innovative and proactive in addressing issues and solving problems. I often emphasise that good can always be better – this is our attitude towards work. I lead my team in the spirit of manoeuvring a ship. We head in the right direction, share the same beliefs, act with increasing speed, braving the wind and waves, moving towards our goal.

Looking ahead, the HKSAR Government will focus its efforts in three main areas:

First, developing the economy and improving people's livelihood. In the past two years, we have turned Hong Kong's economy around from negative to positive growth. Our GDP, which recorded negative growth of 3.7 per cent when this Government took office in 2022, grew 3.3 per cent last year. And we expect positive growth of 2.5 per cent to 3.5 per cent this year.

Earnings over the past two years have also gone up. Median monthly earnings of full-time employees have risen from about \$21,000 two years ago to \$23,500 in the first quarter of this year, an increase of \$2,500, or 11 per cent.

Going forward, the Government will make every endeavour to pursue economic growth, advance development and improve the livelihood of the people of Hong Kong. For example, the first phase of Light Public Housing is now open for applications, providing about 4 400 units for intake in the first quarter of next year. My goal is to make Hong Kong a better place for all – for everyone to enjoy a better living environment, for young people to realise their potential, for our elderly to be well taken care of. I am determined to create a caring, cohesive and flourishing community for all.

Second, reinforcing Hong Kong's competitive edge and exploring new areas of growth. I have been working to better integrate a "capable government" with an "efficient market", introducing measures to compete for talents, strategic enterprises and capital to Hong Kong. Going forward, we will continue to sharpen our edge and grasp the opportunities to develop new areas of economic growth. Apart from reinforcing such traditional sectors as finance, trading, shipping, logistics and professional services, we must also tap into the immense opportunities brought about by national and international dual circulation. We must develop "headquarters economy", unleashing the city's advantages in financial services, while deepening mutual access with the Mainland's financial market.

We must, as well, continue to pursue innovation and technology, developing new quality productive forces, adopting an industry-oriented approach to promote new industrialisation and such emerging strategic areas as pharmaceutical research and development and new energy transport.

Encouraging our cultural and creative industries is also a priority. The Kai Tak Sports Park will be completed by year's end. More than sports, it will also drive our progress in culture, entertainment, tourism and related industries, boosting Hong Kong's competitiveness as an East-meets-West centre for international cultural exchange.

Third, seizing both national and international opportunities, and boarding the "fast train" of our country's development. Hong Kong now faces an opportune moment to advance from stability to prosperity. And we have boarded our country's "fast train" for the development of new quality productive forces and comprehensive deepening of reforms. Hong Kong has the distinctive advantages of enjoying our country's strong support while being closely connected to the world. We will continue to realise those advantages, upholding our institutional strengths and sharpening our competitiveness. While doing so, we will also integrate into our country's development, and consolidate and enhance Hong Kong's "eight centres" of development.

With the Northern Metropolis as the new engine for growth and adopting an industry-oriented approach, we will align with national development strategies, seizing, in particular, the opportunities brought about by the

development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and the Belt and Road Initiative.

No less important, Hong Kong will reinforce its advantages as a global city, maintaining its high degree of internationalisation. We will strengthen regional collaboration, targeting such markets as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Middle East. We will, as well, strive for accession to the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and increase our links with Europe and other western markets, thereby serving well as an important node of the national and international dual circulation, creating new opportunities and fresh impetus.

Distinguished guests, fellow citizens, there is a Chinese saying that things are born out of planning and completed in practice. While there are both opportunities and challenges for Hong Kong today, our opportunities decidedly outnumber the challenges. The Government will bravely shoulder its responsibilities and deliver good results. During this economic transition, we will unite and lead society in seeking innovation. We will strive for excellence and succeed. We should have the big picture in mind, seeing the forest as well as the trees. We must stand up high and look far ahead, dealing with issues from the perspective of the overall development of the country and the world. We must continue to adopt innovative thinking, bottom-line thinking and a result-oriented approach, enhancing speed and efficiency, proactively seizing opportunities and capitalising on our strengths for the benefit of our community.

Distinguished guests, fellow citizens, good news for Hong Kong comes one after another. On this festive day, I have more good news. Hong Kong will soon welcome two new family members: a pair of giant pandas.

I am deeply grateful to the Central Government for its care and support for Hong Kong, and for considering my proposal of sending us a pair of giant pandas. We will start the preparation work immediately to receive the giant pandas. They will arrive in Hong Kong in a few months and bring us amusement and happiness.

Fellow citizens, we are all part of the Hong Kong family. Let's stand united and scale new heights for Hong Kong together!

Thank you.