

Speech by DCS at China Daily Hong Kong "21st Century Cup" National English Speaking Competition (Hong Kong Region) Awards Ceremony (English only)

Following is the speech by the Deputy Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Cheuk Wing-hing, at China Daily Hong Kong "21st Century Cup" National English Speaking Competition (Hong Kong Region) Awards Ceremony:

Deputy Director-General Lin (Deputy Director-General, Department of Publicity, Cultural and Sports Affairs, Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), Mr Lin Nan), Counselor Huang (Political Counselor, Office of the Commissioner, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China in the HKSAR, Mr Huang Jingrui), Secretary Mak (the Secretary for Home and Youth Affairs, Miss Alice Mak), Acting Secretary Sze (the Acting Secretary for Education, Mr Sze Chun-fai), Mr Zhou (Deputy Editor-in-Chief, China Daily Group and Publisher and Editor-in-Chief, China Daily Asia Pacific, Mr Zhou Li), teachers, students, parents, ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon. It is great pleasure to join you at the Awards Ceremony for this year's "21st Century Cup" National English Speaking Competition, which has been successfully held for 28 sessions since 1996, with millions of young participants nationwide to have joined. Hong Kong is very privileged to be included since 2017.

This year, more than 1 200 students from 200 Hong Kong schools have taken part in the competition which includes six categories, from kindergarten children all the way to university students. It is truly amazing to see our kids to be so diligent, disciplined and confident at such young ages. It also goes to show that it is never too early to start learning something, especially if it is something useful in opening up one's world.

I am glad to note that the university winner – to be announced later in today's ceremony – will move on to the National Grand Final competition, to be held in Suzhou this October, competing against about a hundred speakers from all over the country.

Meanwhile, the Hong Kong winners in the primary and secondary-school categories will also have the opportunity to attend the Finals – to see and hear, at first-hand, the wealth of talent there.

Knowing that Hong Kong students have won two national championships in the past years, I have hope in our representative doing well again! No pressure though.

Aspiration aside, being able to join such a national competition is a win in itself already. The exposure, the experience and the chance to be motivated by equal competitors are valuable. I truly congratulate our representative, who would also be cheered on by fellow younger winners.

The secondary school champion, let me add, will participate in overseas Model United Nations courses.

In short, this annual competition is a precious opportunity for our young awardees to develop their talent and to connect with other gifted students from across our country.

In doing so, they will gain more affection for, and a deeper understanding of our nation and its remarkable achievements – in science, innovation and technology, humanities and much more. No less important, they'll begin to gain an appreciation of how they can contribute to the development of our great nation, its economy, its culture and its future.

Our students could also gain a global perspective, a lifelong learning spirit and a positive mindset. If I could put the clock back, I really wish I were one of you to be able to join this fascinating and meaningful competition.

And while our bright young students are in the Mainland, I am sure that they will be telling the good stories of Hong Kong – good stories of the grand principle of "one country, two systems", our "eight centres" positioning, our determination to build a "vibrant economy for a caring community". We've certainly all learned how brilliantly well our students can do that.

My thanks to the organisers, China Daily Hong Kong and VDO English, together with 15 support organisations, including the Education Bureau and the Home and Youth Affairs Bureau, for making this all possible – for putting together such an extraordinary programme for our youth, in Hong Kong and throughout the nation.

My gratitude goes out, as well, to the competition's judges – some 80 supremely talented, community-minded adjudicators.

And to all the schools and teachers and many supporters, let me say that your involvement, your day-after-day dedication to our youth is at the very heart of this remarkable programme.

President Xi Jinping said, "As China strives to build itself into a strong country and achieve national rejuvenation through advancing Chinese modernisation, now it is the prime time for all young students." I think you would also agree that it is the prime time for youths living in Hong Kong too.

With exceptional creativity, eloquence and a strong sense of patriotism, our youths truly stand to benefit from the country's continued growth and development. In return, future pillars of our society would be able to best contribute to a great new chapter for Hong Kong and our country by being a

better version of themselves.

The HKSAR Government released the Youth Development Blueprint in 2022 with the same vision – to nurture a new generation of young people with an affection for our country and our city, global perspectives and positive thinking. Please be assured that we will continue to implement and enhance some 160 measures in the blueprint.

I would also like to take this opportunity to encourage you all to pay attention to and if possible, join the Youth Development Summit to be held on August 10, 2024 as the opening and highlight of the next Youth Festival. Be rest assured that we will also continue to implement various youth exchange and internship programmes in the Mainland and overseas.

Finally, ladies and gentlemen, my congratulations to our deserving winners and finalists. We'll hear from them in just a few minutes.

Thank you.