

London ETO greets Year of Dragon in Norway (with photos)

The Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office, London (London ETO) and the Norway-Hong Kong Chamber of Commerce (NHKCC) cohosted a Year of the Dragon reception in Oslo, Norway, on February 27 (Oslo time).

In his welcome speech, the Director-General of the London ETO, Mr Gilford Law, shared with the Norwegian community the latest updates of Hong Kong, and emphasised Hong Kong's commitment in becoming an international transportation centre as supported by the National 14th Five-Year Plan.

"2024 marks the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Norway. Looking ahead, Hong Kong's aspirations align closely with Norway's expertise in the global shipping industry, presenting an invaluable opportunity for mutual learning and collaboration. We are confident that Hong Kong provides a favourable environment for businesses to thrive and tap into the Mainland and Asia-Pacific markets," he said.

The reception also featured speeches and presentations by the State Secretary of the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries in Norway, Mr Tore O Sandvik, along with representatives from the local business community. Additionally, a toasting session was hosted by the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary and Head of Mission of the People's Republic of China to the Kingdom of Norway, Ms Hou Yue.

The reception was well attended by over 80 guests in Norway from the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the business, academic and cultural sectors. The London ETO will continue to celebrate the Year of the Dragon among the countries under its purview.





Tax measures proposed in 2024-25 Budget

In his Budget delivered today (February 28), the Financial Secretary proposed the following tax measures.

The Financial Secretary proposed a one-off reduction of profits tax, salaries tax and tax under personal assessment for the year of assessment 2023/24 by 100 per cent, subject to a ceiling of \$3,000 per case. This measure will cost the Government \$5.5 billion, benefitting 2.06 million taxpayers liable to salaries tax and tax under personal assessment and 160 000 businesses.

The tax reduction will reduce the amount of tax payable by taxpayers for the year of assessment 2023/24. Taxpayers should file their profits tax returns and tax returns for individuals for the year of assessment 2023/24 as usual. Upon enactment of the relevant legislation, the Inland Revenue Department will effect the reduction in the final assessment.

The proposed tax reduction will only be applicable to the final tax for the year of assessment 2023/24, but not to the provisional tax of the same year. Therefore, taxpayers are still required to pay the provisional tax on time as stipulated in the demand notes that have been issued to them. The provisional tax paid will, in accordance with the Inland Revenue Ordinance, be applied in payment of the final tax for the year of assessment 2023/24 and provisional tax for the year of assessment 2024/25. The excess balance, if any, will be refunded.

The proposed tax reduction is not applicable to property tax. Nevertheless, individuals with rental income, if eligible for personal assessment, may be able to enjoy such a reduction under personal assessment.

A taxpayer who is separately chargeable to salaries tax and profits tax can enjoy a tax reduction under each of the tax types. For a taxpayer having business profits or rental income and electing for personal assessment, the reduction will be based on the tax payable under personal assessment. It might be different from the amount of tax reduction he or she would get if he or she was not assessed under personal assessment. The exact amount will need to be evaluated case by case. Individuals having business profits or rental income may elect for personal assessment in their tax returns for the year of assessment 2023/24.

In addition, the Financial Secretary proposed to implement a two-tiered standard rates regime for salaries tax and tax under personal assessment starting from the year of assessment 2024/25. In calculating the amount of tax for taxpayers whose net income (before deduction of allowances) exceeds \$5 million and whose salaries tax or tax under personal assessment is to be charged at a standard rate, the first \$5 million of their net income will continue to be subject to the standard rate of 15 per cent while the portion of their net income exceeding \$5 million will be subject to the standard rate of 16 per cent. After enactment of the relevant legislation, the Inland Revenue Department will apply the two-tiered standard rates in calculating the provisional salaries tax for the year of assessment 2024/25.

On profits tax, the Financial Secretary proposed to provide tax deduction for expenses incurred in reinstating the condition of the leased premises to their original condition and to remove the time limit for claiming industrial and commercial building allowances commencing from the year of assessment 2024/25.

On other duties and charges, the Financial Secretary proposed to increase business registration fees by \$200 to \$2,200 per annum with effect from April 1, 2024. To relieve the relevant impact, it is proposed to waive the business registration levy of \$150 for two years. Besides, the Financial Secretary proposed to resume the collection of the hotel accommodation tax at a rate of 3 per cent with effect from January 1, 2025.

The Financial Secretary also proposed to waive stamp duties payable on the transfer of real estate investment trust units and the jobbing business of option market-makers.

The above measures will be implemented upon completion of the relevant legislative procedures.

In respect of stamp duty on property transactions, the Financial Secretary proposed to cancel all demand-side management measures for residential properties with immediate effect, that is, no Special Stamp Duty (SSD), Buyer's Stamp Duty (BSD) or Ad Valorem Stamp Duty (AVD) at 7.5 per cent under Part 1 of Scale 1 needs to be paid for any residential property transactions starting from today. The Government will introduce the Stamp Duty (Amendment) Bill 2024 (the Bill) into the Legislative Council to take forward the initiative. To enable property purchasers to benefit from the measures as soon as possible, the Chief Executive has also made the Public Revenue Protection (Stamp Duty) Order 2024 under the Public Revenue

Protection Ordinance (Cap. 120) to give full force and effect of law to the Bill before its enactment. Subject to the eventual enactment of the Bill, any instrument executed on or after February 28, 2024 for the sale and purchase or transfer of residential properties are no longer subject to SSD and BSD. The AVD rate of 7.5 per cent under Part 1 of Scale 1 is to be amended to the same as those of AVD at Scale 2.

Details of the above proposed tax measures and examples of tax calculations are available on the website of the Inland Revenue Department (www.ird.gov.hk) for the public's reference. They can also be obtained through the fax hotline 2598 6001.

Hospital Authority welcomes 2024-25 Budget

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

The Hospital Authority (HA) Chairman, Mr Henry Fan, welcomed the 2024-25 Budget announced by the Financial Secretary, Mr Paul Chan, at the Legislative Council today (February 28). The 2024-25 annual subvention for the HA will be \$95.4 billion (including \$93.5 billion recurrent), having increased by 2 per cent compared to the 2023-24 revised provision.

Mr Fan was particularly grateful for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government's increased subvention to the HA to enhance public healthcare services despite facing pressure on public finances. "With the immense support from our country and the HKSAR Government, the HA continues to strengthen its services, and provides suitable treatment and care to patients. Last year, the HA has launched a number of new services and programmes. For example, the Ambulatory Diagnostic Radiology Service Pilot Programme and other healthcare services at the Central Government Aided Emergency Hospital, which shortened the waiting time of patients significantly. Also, the HA also rolled out the Greater Bay Area Healthcare Talents Visiting Programmes and the Global Healthcare Talent Scheme, which attracted healthcare talents to serve in Hong Kong. The HA will continue to provide healthcare services that suit citizens' convenience and needs."

The HA will step up its efforts in promoting the sustainable development of public healthcare, including introducing smart hospitals initiatives in different clusters, enhancing tele-health and drug delivery services in specialist out-patient clinics (SOPCs), and improving patients' experience and operational flow with advanced technology. At the same time, the HA will enhance SOPCs service, including nurse and pharmacist led clinic service, thereby providing more treatment choices to patients.

Mr Fan also thanked the Government for supporting the HA in coping with manpower attrition. The HA will continue to adopt multi-pronged measures to attract local healthcare talents and those from different places to join and serve in public hospitals. Besides, the HA will actively develop and retain talents through various measures. The HA had already established the HA Academy last year, in order to provide systematic training to its staff, striving to enhance multidisciplinary care, support the need of service expansion, and fostering staff's professional development.

The HA Chief Executive, Dr Tony Ko, also expressed his gratitude to the HKSAR Government for the support on service enhancement of public hospitals. "The HA will continue to actively press ahead with different hospital redevelopment and expansion projects, and various minor works projects in hospitals, so as to enhance the service capacity of public hospitals in tandem with the continuous growth in service demand for public healthcare services."

"Besides, public hospitals will open around 150 additional hospital beds in the next financial year, provide additional operating theatre sessions, Computer Tomography Scans and endoscopy sessions, and increase general out-patient clinic attendances. The HA is also grateful that the Government promotes the development of Chinese Medicine (CM), including by increasing the quota of government-subsidised CM out-patient services and extending integrated Chinese-Western medicine services."

In life-threatening diseases management, the HA will continue to strengthen its support to cancer patients, including enhancing chemotherapy and radiation therapy services. Cardiovascular diseases and neuroscience services will be also strengthened in order to provide multidisciplinary professional support. Meanwhile, resources will be reserved for the development of robotic-arm assisted systems for joint replacement surgery and angiography. Also, support to psychiatric patients will be strengthened by reinforcing the psychiatric in-patients service and recruiting more case managers to take care of the patients in the community.

The HA will continue to develop personalised treatment service for patients in need, including the provision of faecal microbiota transplantation service for suitable patients with clostridium difficile infection. The HA will also enhance the genetic services, and continue to support the establishment of the Uncommon Disorders Registry, in order to better support the concerned patients.

Mr Fan and Dr Ko once again thanked the HKSAR Government's support to public healthcare services. The HA will utilise the subvention appropriately and strive to implement relevant policies and measures for the benefit of patients.

CHP announces investigation progress of suspected food poisoning clusters related to restaurant in Causeway Bay

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (February 28) reported an update on its investigations into suspected food poisoning clusters related to a restaurant in Causeway Bay [announced](#) yesterday (February 27). The CHP again reminded the public to maintain personal, food and environmental hygiene to prevent foodborne diseases.

The CHP today identified four additional clusters involving four males and seven females, aged between 21 and 55. They developed abdominal pain, diarrhoea, dizziness, generalised weakness, nausea and vomiting about 22 to 48 hours after having meals at the restaurant from February 24 to 26. Four of the affected persons have sought medical attention but none required hospitalisation. All affected persons are in stable condition.

Together with the two clusters announced yesterday, the CHP has recorded a total of six clusters affecting 22 persons dining in the same restaurant recently. Epidemiological investigations of the CHP revealed that the affected persons had consumed a variety of common food (including raw oysters and sashimi). According to the CHP's preliminary assessment, the clusters might have been caused by *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* and/or norovirus. The CHP has arranged the collection of stool specimen of the patients for testing in order to ascertain the source of infection.

Investigations by the Centre for Food Safety of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department and the CHP are ongoing.

To prevent foodborne diseases, members of the public are reminded to maintain personal, food and environmental hygiene at all times. When dining out:

- Patronise only reliable and licensed restaurants;
- Avoid eating raw seafood;
- Be a discerning consumer in choosing cold dishes, including sashimi, sushi and raw oysters, at a buffet;
- Pre-cooked or leftover foods should be stored and reheated properly before consumption;
- Ensure food is thoroughly cooked before eating during a hotpot or barbecue meal;
- Handle raw and cooked foods carefully and separate them completely during the cooking process;
- Use two sets of chopsticks and utensils to handle raw and cooked foods;
- Do not patronise illegal food hawkers;
- Drink boiled water;
- Do not try to use salt, vinegar, wine or wasabi to kill bacteria as they

- are not effective; and
- Always wash hands before eating and after going to the toilet.
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Director of Hong Kong and Macao Work Office of CPC Central Committee and Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of State Council Mr Xia Baolong concludes seven-day inspection visit to Hong Kong

The Director of the Hong Kong and Macao Work Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council, Mr Xia Baolong, continued his inspection visit to Hong Kong for the last day today (February 28).

Accompanied by the Chief Executive, Mr John Lee; the Commissioner of Customs and Excise, Ms Louise Ho; the Acting Director of Immigration, Mr Tai Chi-yuen; and the Under Secretary for Security, Mr Michael Cheuk, Mr Xia visited the Shenzhen Bay Control Point to inspect the operation and traveller clearance services at the control point, and learn about the situation during the Lunar New Year holidays when round-the-clock passenger clearance services were provided. Mr Xia was briefed by Ms Ho and Mr Tai on the immigration and customs clearance arrangements for travellers at the Passenger Terminal Building. Mr Xia also learned about the measures taken by relevant departments during peak hours, festive periods or holidays to divert passenger flows, in order to ensure a smooth operation at the control point so that travellers can cross the border in an orderly and safe manner.

After inspecting the operation of the control point, Mr Xia departed from Hong Kong, concluding his seven-day inspection visit.