Hong Kong Customs publicises Dealers in Precious Metals and Stones Regulatory Regime at jewellery exhibition (with photo)

Hong Kong Customs will set up a booth at the Hong Kong International Jewellery Show, to be held at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre (HKCEC), from tomorrow (February 29) for five consecutive days, to publicise the Dealers in Precious Metals and Stones Regulatory Regime, and will provide on-site counter services to assist non-Hong Kong dealers in submitting a cash transaction report during their participation in the exhibition.

According to the Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorist Financing Ordinance (Cap. 615), the Regime has come into effect since April 1, 2023. Any person who is seeking to carry out a business of dealing in precious metals and stones and engage in any transaction(s) (whether making or receiving a payment) with a total value at or above HK$120,000 in Hong Kong is required to register with Hong Kong Customs and fulfil his/her anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing statutory obligations as appropriate.

In particular, with the expiry of the transitional period, all dealers who submit their applications for registration from January 1, 2024, onwards must successfully obtain relevant registration before they can carry out any cash or non-cash transaction(s) with a total value at or above HK$120,000.

For non-Hong Kong dealers fulfilling the prescribed conditions (including those who come to Hong Kong to participate in exhibitions), although they are exempt from registration, they are required to submit to Hong Kong Customs a cash transaction report for any cash transaction(s) (whether making or receiving a payment) with a total value at or above HK$120,000 carried out in Hong Kong within one day after the transaction, or before the dealer or the person acting on behalf of the dealer leaves Hong Kong, whichever is earlier.

Non-Hong Kong dealers can make an online submission of a cash transaction report via the Regime's webpage at www.drs.customs.gov.hk by accessing the Dealers in Precious Metals and Stones Registration System. They can also download the related form at www.drs.customs.gov.hk/download/drsform/CED418_Form%208_Cash%20transaction%20report.pdf and then submit the report in person at Hong Kong Customs' booth in the exhibition.

Hong Kong Customs' booth (Booth 1C-C18) is located at HKCEC Hall 1C and will be open from 10.30am to 6.30pm on February 29, from 10am to 6.30pm between March 1 and 3, and from 10am to 5.30pm on March 4.

Dealers can visit the website (www.customs.gov.hk/en/service-enforcement-information/anti-money-laundering/supervision-of-dealers-in-precious-metals-and-ston/index.html) for more information about the Regime.

LCQ2: General outpatient clinic services

â€‹Following is a question by the Hon Stanley Li and a written reply by the Secretary for Health, Professor Lo Chung-mau, in the Legislative Council today (February 28):

Question:

Many members of the public have relayed that the general outpatient clinic (GOPC) services under the Hospital Authority have long been in short supply, and the facilities of the clinics are obsolete. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the following information on the GOPCs in Shatin and Sai Kung (i.e. (a) Shatin (Tai Wai) GOPC, (b) Lek Yuen GOPC, (c) Yuen Chau Kok GOPC, (d) Ma On Shan Family Medicine Centre, (e) Mona Fong GOPC, (f) Tseung Kwan O (Po Ning Road) GOPC, and (g) Tseung Kwan O Jockey Club GOPC) (set out in the table below):

(i) the year of commencing service;

(ii) the intended service capacity (in terms of the daily attendance) at the time of construction, together with a breakdown by (A) chronic disease patients and (B) episodic disease patients;

(iii) the average daily attendance in the past year, together with a breakdown by (A) chronic disease patients and (B) episodic disease patients;

(iv) the ratio of healthcare personnel to patients;

(v) the medical services provided;

(vi) whether refurbishment or conversion works have been carried out (and the years concerned);

(vii) the services enhanced after refurbishment or conversion of the clinic; and

(viii) whether the building in which the clinic is located has a sufficient plot ratio which allows expansion of the clinic to enhance its services;

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(2) of the respective populations of Shatin, Ma On Shan, Sai Kung and Tseung Kwan O according to the latest population census conducted by the Census and Statistics Department; the respective numbers of GOPCs that should be provided in the two District Council districts of Sha Tin and Sai Kung based on their existing populations according to the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines;

(3) as many Ma On Shan residents have relayed that the Ma On Shan Family Medicine Centre does not provide holiday outpatient clinic services, whether the Government will consider introducing holiday outpatient clinic services at the Centre to meet the demand of Ma On Shan residents for medical services during holidays; and

(4) whether the Government has plans to enhance GOPC services; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Hospital Authority (HA), the consolidated reply to various parts of the question raised by the Hon Stanley Li is as follows:

The General Out-patient Clinics (GOPC) of the HA, which have an annual attendance of over five million, are mainly positioned to serve low-income persons and socially disadvantaged groups in priority, as well as chronic disease patients with stable conditions and those with relatively mild episodic illnesses. The primary healthcare needs of the vast majority of the public are currently taken care of by the private medical sector with about 20 million outpatient visits annually. The services provided by the GOPCs include medical consultations, general nursing services and a range of basic multi-disciplinary medical care, chronic disease management, as well as patient education and support services.

The Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines (HKPSG) recommends the provision of one general clinic/health centre for every 100 000 persons. The HKPSG sets out basic planning standards. When it comes to application, not only would bureaux/departments make reference to the Guidelines, but they would also take specific circumstances of the community into full consideration to cater for the actual needs of the public. For instance, in planning and developing public primary healthcare services, the Government also needs to consider a series of factors including the delivery model of primary healthcare services, changes in the population structure and distribution of target service recipients, supply of primary healthcare services in the district, and the need for public primary healthcare services. According to the 2021 Population Census conducted by the Census and Statistics Department, the population of Sha Tin District (including Ma On Shan) was about 692 800, whereas the population of Sai Kung District (including Tseung Kwan O) was about 489 000. Having regard to the districts' demographics and demand for primary healthcare, four and three GOPCs are provided by the HA in Sha Tin District and Sai Kung District respectively, providing more than 380 000 and 250 000 consultation quotas respectively in 2022-23. Over the same period, among the patients who visited the GOPCs in these two districts, about 70 per cent were of the target service group, which is on par with the territorial average.

The GOPCs in Sha Tin District and Sai Kung District reserve about 50 per cent of the total consultation quota for chronic disease patients and those with episodic illnesses respectively. The usage rate of the GOPCs in the two districts are set out in the Annex.

In accordance with the Primary Healthcare Blueprint (Blueprint), the Government has been reserving sites in different districts for the long-term development of primary healthcare services, studying how to plan and develop healthcare service facilities more effectively, as well as enhancing co-ordination of development and redevelopment of government buildings and premises of healthcare facilities in the community, including re-provisioning, expanding or consolidating the existing healthcare facilities under the principle of optimising land use, and would examine increasing plot ratio when necessary. The Government will also consider various measures to promote the inclusion of private or non-government organsiation healthcare service providers in the district-based community health system.

In addition, the HA has implemented a series of measures to augment the service capacity of the existing GOPCs. These measures include actively recruiting additional staff, carrying out clinic renovation and renewing its facilities so as to streamline patient flow, improve the clinic environment and increase consultation rooms.

As regards Sha Tin District, the HA has completed interior renovation works and facility enhancement in Ma On Shan Family Medicine Centre, Yuen Chau Kok GOPC and Lek Yuen GOPC in 2013, 2021 and 2023 respectively. Through these renovation works, the consultation quotas of relevant clinics in Sha Tin District has increased by a total of about 60 000 since 2013-14. The HA is planning to set up a new GOPC in the proposed joint-user complex at Tsuen Nam Road in Tai Wai for re-provisioning the Sha Tin (Tai Wai) GOPC. Space has also been reserved in Phase II of the Prince of Wales Hospital Redevelopment and Ma On Shan respectively for the provision of a Community Health Centre and long-term development of primary healthcare services. Among the GOPCs in Sha Tin District, Lek Yuen GOPC provides outpatient services on Sundays and public holidays. In view of the current stringent manpower of doctors, extending service hours (such as providing outpatient services during holidays in more clinics) will put further pressure on the current manpower. At this stage, there is no plan to introduce holiday outpatient services at Ma On Shan Family Medicine Centre.

As regards Sai Kung District, the three GOPCs in the district (i.e. Mona Fong GOPC, Tseung Kwan O (Po Ning Road) GOPC and Tseung Kwan O Jockey Club GOPC) had improvement works and facility enhancement completed in 2013, 2015 and 2020 respectively. Through these renovation works, the consultation quotas of relevant clinics in Sai Kung District has increased by a total of about 50 000 since 2013-14. The HA will set up a GOPC in the new government building in Area 67, Tseung Kwan O, which will be completed by early 2025 the earliest.

In face of the rapidly ageing population, rising prevalence of chronic diseases and increasing healthcare services demand, the public healthcare system, as the cornerstone and safety net of the Hong Kong's healthcare system, has to concentrate resources and accord priority to accident and emergency and specialist services, as well as secondary and tertiary healthcare which require complicated technologies. The Government has put forward a proposal for reform in the Blueprint, focusing on strengthening primary healthcare services and alleviating the pressure of the public medical system, especially the Specialist Out-patient Clinics under public hospitals. The Government will continue to advocate the concept of “Family Doctor for All” and has launched the Chronic Disease Co-care Pilot Scheme in November last year. Through the establishment of a family doctor system and screening, people with more economic capability can be diverted to the private healthcare sector for health management through a co-payment model. At the same time, the Government has to consider concentrating the limited resources for public general outpatient services by giving priority to those who may not be able to afford private healthcare services. The Government will gradually reposition the GOPCs to focus on taking care of low-income persons and the socially disadvantaged groups.

Progressive rates for domestic tenements proposed in 2024-25 Budget

According to the Budget delivered today (February 28), the Government will implement the progressive rating system for domestic tenements proposed in the 2022-23 Budget in accordance with the "affordable users pay" principle, which shall take effect from the fourth quarter of 2024-25 (i.e. January – March 2025 quarter). The Government will introduce legislative amendments into the Legislative Council (LegCo) in the first half of this year. The proposal is estimated to contribute to an increase of about $840 million in government revenue annually after implementation.

The Government presented details of the proposed system and the implementation timetable to the LegCo Panel on Financial Affairs in 2022, and received general support from the Members. According to the proposed progressive rating system for domestic tenements –

- For domestic tenements with rateable value of $550,000 or below, rates will continue to be charged at 5 per cent of the rateable value.
- For domestic tenements with rateable value over $550,000, rates will be charged at 5 per cent of the rateable value on the first $550,000 and at 8 per cent of the rateable value on the next $250,000, and then at 12 per cent on the portion of rateable value exceeding $800,000.

About 1.9 per cent of all private domestic tenements (including separately assessed domestic car parking tenements), or around 42 000 tenements, will be subject to progressive rates, whereas the remaining 98 per cent will not be affected. For a domestic tenement subject to progressive rates, the payer concerned will be notified in April accordingly. Starting from the January to March 2025 quarter, the Rates and/or Government Rent demand will also show the calculation of progressive rates payable applicable to that quarter.

For details of the progressive rating system, members of the public may visit the website of the Rating and Valuation Department (RVD) (www.rvd.gov.hk). The 2024-25 rateable value of a tenement will be shown on the Rates and/or Government Rent demand for the April to June 2024 quarter to be issued in early April, or be available for inspection free of charge on the RVD website or its Property Information Online website (www.rvdpi.gov.hk) from late March until May 31. Members of the public can also use the Rates and Government Rent Calculator on the RVD website to estimate the amount of rates (including progressive rates where applicable) and/or Government rent payable for the latest three years of assessment. Enquiries can be made on the department's 24-hour hotline 2152 0111 (handled by 1823).

Abolition of demand-side management measures for residential properties

As announced in the 2024-25 Budget, the Government will abolish all demand-side management measures (DSMMs) for residential properties with effect from February 28, 2024 (i.e. the 2024-25 Budget date). In other words, the Special Stamp Duty, the Buyer's Stamp Duty and the New Residential Stamp Duty will no longer be charged on all residential property transactions from February 28, 2024, onwards.

A Government spokesman said, "The Government has been adopting a pragmatic approach in continuously evaluating the residential property market situation. After prudent consideration of the latest overall situation, the Government has decided to abolish all DSMMs, since such measures are no longer necessary amid the current economic and market conditions."

The aforementioned abolition will be implemented through the Stamp Duty (Amendment) Bill 2024. The Chief Executive has made the Public Revenue Protection (Stamp Duty) Order 2024 by exercising his statutory powers to give full force and effect of law to the Bill so long as the Order remains in force. The Order and the Bill will be published in the Gazette today (February 28, 2024) and on March 1, 2024, respectively, and introduced into the Legislative Council on March 13, 2024.

Convenor of ExCo Non-official Members speaks on Budget

â€‹The following is issued on behalf of the Executive Council Secretariat:

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Convenor of the Non-official Members of the Executive Council (ExCo), Mrs Regina Ip, at a media session on the 2024-25 Budget in the Legislative Council Complex this afternoon (February 28):

Reporter: Mrs Ip, how do you see this year's Budget? Thank you.

Convenor of ExCo Non-official Members: The theme of this year’s Budget is to be confident about our future, to grasp the opportunities and to promote high-quality development. So, the Financial Secretary stressed the importance of promoting green economy and digital economy, and promoting the Hong Kong brand, and he will be providing more than $1 billion to organise mega events in Hong Kong to attract more visitors to Hong Kong and to promote the appeal of Hong Kong as a global city.

We were pleased to note that the Financial Secretary has announced scrapping all the demand management property transaction stamp duties and that he will be relaxing the measures to control provision of mortgages, while at the same time maintaining the stability of the banking sector.

We are also appreciative of the plan the Financial Secretary unveiled that he will put forward a plan to control government expenditure, especially items that are going at a super-fast level, and will implement certain tax reform to impose a higher tax rate for those earning more than $5 million per year and to impose a progressive rating system on properties.

On the whole, we consider this to be a highly comprehensive and prudent financial budget that will help Hong Kong return to growth and keep public expenditure under control.

Reporter: With the full removal of property curbs, are you perhaps concerned that this could not address the economic slump that the city is facing and perhaps would it lead to a revival of the rampant property speculation seen before? The second question, following up on Article 23, are you worried that the legislation of Article 23 will undo any potential benefits that this new Budget would bring to Hong Kong?

Convenor of ExCo Non-official Members: The stamp duties which have been in place since 2010 were introduced as demand management measures to curb speculation and excessive demand. Now the demand is much weaker whereas land and housing supply has increased substantially, as the Financial Secretary described, pointed out to us just a while ago. So, I think the removal of those stamp duties will provide a boost to the property market, will help property transactions. After all, Hong Kong people's saving level is high. I think there will be plenty of Hong Kong people ready to take advantage of the market downturn to buy, to purchase properties for their own use.

As for your second question, I don’t think implementing legislation to implement Article 23 of the Basic Law will have any adverse impact on the economic stimulus proposals outlined in the Budget. In fact, the sooner we get it done, the clearer will be the provisions in the national security legislation and it, in fact, will help our economic recovery.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the transcript.)