

Opening remarks by Permanent Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury (Financial Services) at Asian Financial Forum Thematic Workshop on Hong Kong – Financing Asia's Real Economy Net-Zero Transition (English only) (with photos)

Following are the opening remarks by the Permanent Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury (Financial Services), Ms Salina Yan, at the Asian Financial Forum Thematic Workshop on Hong Kong – Financing Asia's Real Economy Net-Zero Transition today (January 25):

Dr Ma (Chairman and President of the Hong Kong Green Finance Association, Dr Ma Jun), distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon. This Thematic Workshop on Financing Asia's Real Economy Net-Zero Transition has been an integral part of the Asian Financial Forum (AFF) since 2020. I thank the Hong Kong Green Finance Association for its foresight in initiating this important dialogue leveraging the magnetic AFF platform.

The ability to foresee future challenges and probable eventualities faced by human societal development and our natural world is indeed the force driving the global collective search for climate change and sustainability solutions. This has been a rather long journey. Following intensive discussions in COP 28 (the 28th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) held in Dubai last December, we have been presented with an interim report card of how the world has been doing, or not doing enough, in managing climate change.

If you don't have the time yet to go through the 20-page long document, let me take just a minute to share a few points in the Global Stocktake Outcome Statement that came out on December 13 in Dubai. I would like to do so here not least because I, like Dr Ma, have the privilege of being there on the ground in Dubai when COP 28 took place but it would also serve to provide some contextual relevance to our discussions today.

Notably, the Statement reaffirms the goal of pursuing efforts to limit temperature increase to 1.5 degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels, recognising that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change. It indicates serious concern that emissions of greenhouse gases have unequivocally caused global warming and that responses are

observed to be fragmented and incremental. It notes that both adaptation and mitigation financing would need to increase manyfold and that there is sufficient global capital to close the global investment gap but there are barriers to redirecting capital to climate change. It underlines the fundamental role of technology development and innovation facilitating urgent adaptation and mitigation actions. Lastly, it reaffirms commitment to multilateralisation and international co-operation to achieve the common purpose and goals.

This very last point echoes well this year's AFF theme Multilateral Cooperation for a Shared Tomorrow. The fight against climate change requires collective international actions and collaboration of both public and private sectors.

Hong Kong has set itself the target to achieve carbon neutrality before 2050 and reduce Hong Kong's carbon emission by 50 per cent before 2035. We are in agreement with the call to direct capital towards climate-resilient projects and green transition development through different channels and means to achieve local and global goals. Hong Kong's role as an international financial centre places us in a very unique position to contribute to the mission. According to the Asia Securities Industry and Financial Markets Association, in the next 30 years, the Asian region will require US\$66 trillion in climate investment. Hong Kong's financial services with global influence can be part of the solutions by mobilising marketing capital to fulfil the funding need.

We are making good progress in enabling green financing by taking concrete actions. Let me cite some examples to illustrate. First, on enriching the financing channels, since 2019, Hong Kong has issued around US\$24 billion of green bonds under the Government Green Bond Programme denominated in multiple currencies including notably Renminbi, and of various tenors from the shortest one year to the longest 30 years. Of these, some HK\$20 billion belong to our inaugural retail green bond issuance, the largest across the globe at the time. Taken together, the volume of green and sustainable bonds arranged in Hong Kong accounted for one-third of the Asian green and sustainable bond market. There are above 200 ESG (environmental, social and governance) funds authorised by the Securities and Futures Commission (SFC), with a total AUM (assets under management) of above US\$160 billion. I think the trend is that they are going to grow even further this year.

As you know, the Hong Kong Exchanges and Clearing Limited (HKEX) launched an international carbon marketplace, Core Climate, in October 2022, which is currently the only carbon marketplace that offers HKD and Renminbi settlement for the trading of international voluntary carbon credits. Taking a forward looking approach, the HKEX has recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the China Emissions Exchange Shenzhen to jointly explore opportunities in cross-boundary carbon market connectivity and climate finance, especially the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. In fact, with our country's strong commitment to net-zero and the recent development in voluntary carbon trading, we see a lot of potential for Hong Kong to be

the competent middleman in this space.

Second, we work to provide a conducive environment for technology adoption. A good example is our pilot issuance of the world's first government tokenised green bond in February last year. This applied the Distributed Ledger Technology (DLT) to primary issuance, settlement of secondary trading, coupon payment as well as maturity redemption. This issuance has demonstrated the feasibility of deploying DLT to real capital market transactions under our existing legal and technological framework, with enhanced efficiency and reduced cost. With this very successful first attempt, we are now in discussion with market participants on expanding the DLT use cases, including a second tokenised government green bond issuance.

We have also set up a high-level Green Technology and Finance Development Committee, chaired by the Financial Secretary, to foster the development of a vibrant green ecosystem in Hong Kong. Areas being looked at include development of green certification and alignment with international standards, promotion of commercialisation of R&D (research and development) outcomes, green finance application and innovation and talent development, etc.

Thirdly, we attach importance to capacity building and support to the industry. We are providing funding support to green bond issuers and loan borrowers under our well received Green and Sustainable Finance Grant Scheme. As of mid-January this year, we have granted some HK\$210 million to some 340 green and sustainable debt instruments issued in Hong Kong, involving a total underlying debt issuance of around US\$100 billion.

We also launched in December 2022 a three-year Pilot Green and Sustainable Finance Capacity Building Support Scheme for application by market practitioners and related professionals as well as students and graduates of relevant disciplines. After completing eligible programmes or accomplishing relevant qualifications, applicants can apply for a subsidy of up to HK\$10,000. As of early January 2024, there were 47 eligible programmes and qualifications as provided by the professional and continuing education schools of local universities, professional institutions, international training providers, etc, and the list will continue to be updated and expanded. Around 570 reimbursement applications have been approved so far, involving a total reimbursement amount of some HK\$3.6 million. We will certainly continue to review the operation of these schemes in light of the experience gained and feedback collected from the industry and the participants.

Now I have given you some idea of what we have done so far. Let me take a step forward and look at the priorities that we are going to embark on this year. Building on the above solid foundation, we are set to strengthen our ecosystem as a green finance hub in the region and beyond. We have set ourselves three priorities for this year.

First, on sustainability disclosures, we recognise investors' interest in obtaining more information to understand how climate change affects the

business operations, assets and financial conditions of their investments. Our Stock Exchange was one of the first exchanges to mandate ESG disclosures, and will enhance climate-related disclosures under its Listing Rules from the start of 2025 taking into account the Sustainability Disclosure Standards published by the International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB).

The Government has made a top-level announcement in the Chief Executive's 2023 Policy Address that a roadmap will be developed on the appropriate adoption of the ISSB Standards. The Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau and the SFC are preparing this roadmap, which will comprise four key pillars, namely sustainability reporting, assurance, data and technology, and capacity building. A working group has been set up and will soon start the engagement with stakeholders to identify the specific circumstances that should be considered when implementing the ISSB Standards in Hong Kong.

The second area of our priorities is on green fintech. Efficiency and efficacy of sustainability reporting can be enhanced with the use of technology. We are developing new greenhouse gas emissions calculation and estimation tools with professional assistance from our renowned universities. These free and publicly accessible tools will be useful as alternative sources of information for climate risk management and related analysis and research, particularly to small and medium enterprises which need better support in the net-zero journey.

We are also working to combine our advantages in fintech with green finance, aiming at building Hong Kong as a green fintech hub. The figures are encouraging, as there are currently around 1 000 fintech companies in Hong Kong with many specialising in the arena of green fintech, which provide technological solutions on ESG data analytics, ESG reporting preparation, and related subjects. To practically support these budding companies and drawing on the successful experience in the implementation of the Fintech Proof-of-Concept Subsidy Scheme over the past two years, we will launch a proof-of-concept subsidy scheme for green fintech companies in the first half of this year, with the objective of providing early-stage funding for pre-commercialised green fintech companies, hence expanding the green fintech ecosystem in Hong Kong.

Third, on transition finance, we are going to make strides in incorporating transition finance facilitation into our various initiatives. Although Hong Kong has a rather light carbon footprint because we are not a big player in carbon intensive industries, we could leverage on our role as an international financial centre to support the transition of the region to net-zero. A well-defined taxonomy that incorporates transition definitions can assist our investors to identify and invest in such activities by offering much-needed clarity and guidance. We are in the process of putting in place a local green classification framework for use across financial sectors, so as to facilitate easy navigation among mainstream taxonomies. Building on the views collected during the consultation, the Hong Kong Monetary Authority will publish the Hong Kong Taxonomy for Sustainable Finance probably in the first quarter of this year. Looking forward, we will

broaden the development of our local taxonomy to encompass transition activities. This will allow us to effectively collaborate with regional and international partners, with a view to reducing potential fragmentation challenges across markets and having the set of common standards for us all.

Ladies and gentlemen, looking ahead, with our country's strong commitment to net-zero and the recent development in transition finance and voluntary carbon trading, we see a lot of room for Hong Kong to play an active role in this area. My sincere appreciation again to the Hong Kong Green Finance Association for its engagement and dedication to this important task. I look forward to the very fruitful discussion by the panelists and wish you all a rewarding event and the best of business and health. Thank you.



[CHP investigates case of severe paediatric influenza A infection](#)

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health is today (January 25) investigating a case of severe paediatric influenza A infection and reminded the community to heighten vigilance against influenza. The 2023/24 seasonal influenza vaccination programmes [have started](#) and the CHP appealed to members of the public to receive free seasonal influenza vaccination (SIV) to better protect themselves in the coming influenza season.

The case involves a 15-year-old girl with good past health. She developed fever, runny nose, cough and sore throat since January 18 and consulted a private doctor on January 19. She sought medical attention at a private hospital due to worsened symptoms on January 23 and was admitted on the same day. She was transferred to the paediatric intensive care unit of Queen Mary Hospital for management yesterday (January 24). Her respiratory specimen was positive for influenza A (H1) virus upon laboratory testing. The clinical diagnosis was influenza A infection complicated with pneumonia. She is now in critical condition.

Initial enquiries by the CHP revealed that the patient had not received SIV for this season and had visited Thailand during the incubation period. One of her home contacts is currently symptomatic. The CHP's investigations are ongoing.

A spokesman for the CHP said, "Influenza can cause serious illnesses in high-risk individuals and even healthy persons. SIV is one of the most effective means to prevent seasonal influenza and its complications, as well as reducing influenza-related hospitalisation and death. SIV is recommended for all persons aged 6 months or above except those with known contraindications. Persons at higher risk of getting influenza and its complications, including the elderly and children, should receive SIV early. As it takes about two weeks to develop antibodies, members of the public are advised to receive SIV early for protection against seasonal influenza. Please see details of the vaccination schemes on the [CHP's website](#)."

A person who gets influenza and COVID-19 at the same time may be more seriously ill and would have a higher risk of death. It is important to receive both SIV and COVID-19 vaccination as soon as possible, in particular for children and elderly persons residing in the community or residential care homes. The public should also maintain good personal and environmental hygiene against influenza and other respiratory illnesses and note the following:

- Surgical masks can prevent transmission of respiratory viruses from ill persons. It is essential for persons who are symptomatic (even if having mild symptoms) to wear a surgical mask;
- For high-risk persons (e.g. persons with underlying medical conditions or persons who are immunocompromised), wear a surgical mask when visiting public places. The public should also wear a surgical mask when taking public transport or staying in crowded places. It is important to wear a mask properly, including performing hand hygiene before wearing and after removing a mask;
- Avoid touching one's eyes, mouth and nose;
- Wash hands with liquid soap and water properly whenever possibly contaminated;
- When hands are not visibly soiled, clean them with 70 to 80 per cent alcohol-based handrub;
- Cover the mouth and nose with tissue paper when sneezing or coughing. Dispose of soiled tissue paper properly into a lidded rubbish bin, and wash hands thoroughly afterwards;
- Maintain good indoor ventilation;
- When having respiratory symptoms, wear a surgical mask, refrain from work or attending classes at school, avoid going to crowded places and seek medical advice promptly; and
- Maintain a balanced diet, perform physical activity regularly, take adequate rest, do not smoke and avoid overstress.

The public may visit the CHP's [influenza page](#) and weekly [COVID-19 & Flu Express](#) for more information.

Strengthening sales control of codeine-containing medicines effective on January 26

With a view to strengthening the sales control of codeine-containing medicines, the Government will publish the Pharmacy and Poisons (Amendment) Regulation 2024 in the Gazette tomorrow (January 26) to regulate all medicines containing less than 0.2 per cent of codeine as Part 1 Schedule 1 poisons under the Pharmacy and Poisons Regulations (the Regulations). The relevant requirements will come into effect on the same day as publication in the Gazette.

A spokesman for the Department of Health (DH) today (January 25) said that the Government has always been concerned about the abuse of codeine-containing medicines (including cough preparations) in Hong Kong. Currently, medicines containing 0.2 per cent or above codeine are Part 1 Schedule 1 Schedule 3 poisons under the Regulations (i.e. prescription drugs) that can only be purchased from Authorized Sellers of Poisons (commonly known as pharmacies) under the supervision of the registered pharmacist upon a doctor's prescription. Medicines containing more than 0.1 per cent codeine (but less than 0.2 per cent) are Part 1 Schedule 1 poisons under the Regulations which should be sold by pharmacies and under the supervision of the registered pharmacist, and the pharmacies should register the personal information of the purchaser (including the name, identity card number, address and signature) etc, in the Poisons Book before the completion of sale. Medicines containing not more than 0.1 per cent codeine are Part 1 poisons under the Regulations which should be sold by pharmacies and under the supervision of a registered pharmacist.

The Pharmacy and Poisons Board of Hong Kong (the Board) reviews the regulatory control of codeine-containing medicines from time to time and has earlier decided to strengthen the sales control of codeine-containing medicines. According to the Board's decision, medicines containing not more than 0.1 per cent of codeine should also be regulated as a Part 1 Schedule 1 poison under the Regulations to strengthen control. Under the strengthened sales control, the pharmacies have to comply with additional requirements, i.e., register the personal information of the purchaser (including the name, identity card number, address and signature) etc, in the Poisons Book before the completion of sale, while other current control remains unchanged.

Members of the public may continue to legally buy the medicines concerned at pharmacies. With regard to the abovementioned sales control in the retail sectors, the DH has issued letters to notify the relevant stakeholders (including pharmacies) and has requested all pharmacies to display the notice on sales control of the medicines provided by the DH

inside their premises.

According to the Pharmacy and Poisons Ordinance, illegal sale of Part 1 poisons or prescription drugs is a criminal offence and the maximum penalty for each offence is a fine of HKD100,000 and two years' imprisonment. Furthermore, any pharmacy who fails to comply with the requirement to make an entry in the Poisons Book before completion of sale of Part 1 Schedule 1 poison under the Regulations shall be liable on conviction to a maximum fine of HKD5,000.

The spokesman emphasised that the DH will enhance its enforcement action against the illegal sale of codeine-containing medicines and failing to keep proper record of poisons. The spokesman also reminded members of the public to take note of the restriction of the retail sales of the medicines concerned.

For more information about the strengthening of the sales control of codeine-containing medicines, the public may visit the [webpage](#) of the DH's Drug Office. The public could also use the [Drug Database](#) of the Drug Office for further details of registered pharmaceutical products.

Police conduct on-site interview sessions at Education and Careers Expo for first time (with photos)

The Hong Kong Police Force has set up a booth at the Education and Careers Expo 2024 at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre for four consecutive days from today (January 25), to showcase the multi-faceted and professional nature of the Force, and to provide the public with the latest recruitment information. It is also the first time for the Police to conduct on-site interview sessions in the expo to facilitate application.

At the "Recruitment Emergency Unit Car" set up at the booth, visitors interested in joining the Force may attend on-site group interview sessions for Police Constable conducted by the Police. Participants who successfully pass the interview could be exempted from relevant assessment, if they apply to join the Force within three months. Moreover, officers from various Police units and secondary duty cadres will share with the visitors their equipment and daily work onsite. Officers of the Recruitment Division will also be present to answer recruitment-related enquiries and accept applications on spot.

The Commissioner of Police, Mr Siu Chak-ye, toured the booth this afternoon and invited visitors to join the Force.

Demonstration sessions of Police units are as follows:

January 25 (Thursday):

10am to 2.30pm – Force Escort Group , Counter Terrorism Response Unit, Police Dog Unit

2.30pm to 7pm – Emergency Unit, Cyber Security and Technology Crime Bureau, Weapon Training Division

January 26 (Friday):

10am to 2.30pm – Police Tactical Unit, Technical Services Division, Force Rope Access Cadre

2.30pm to 7pm – Airport Security Unit (Dog Unit), Weapon Training Division, Force Search Unit

January 27 (Saturday):

10am to 2.30pm – Force Escort Group, Airport Security Unit (Dog Unit), Quick Reaction Force

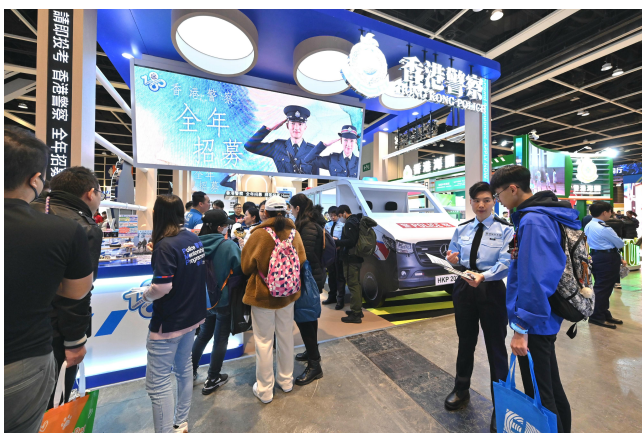
2.30pm to 7pm – Police Tactical Unit, Police Negotiation Cadre, Explosive Ordnance Disposal Bureau

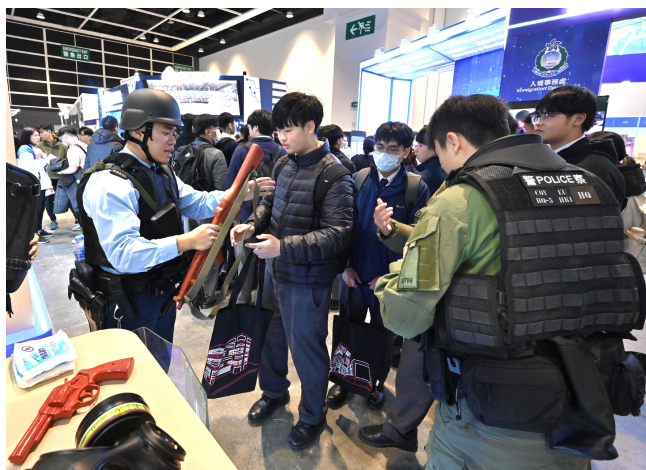
January 28 (Sunday):

10am to 2.30pm – Emergency Unit, Force Rope Access Cadre, Anti-Deception Coordination Centre

2.30pm to 6pm – Force Escort Group, Marine Region (Small Boat Division), Police Dog Unit

Members of the public who are interested in joining the Force as Probationary Inspector, Recruit Police Constable or Police Constable (Auxiliary) can submit applications on spot. University and post-secondary students can also apply to join the Police Mentorship Programme at the booth. For more details, please visit the Police recruitment website at www.police.gov.hk/recruitment.





[DH reminds public on proper use of Elderly Health Care Voucher](#)

With regard to the recent operation by the Police against illegal use of the Elderly Health Care Voucher (EHCV), the Department of Health (DH) today (January 25) reminded members of the public on the proper use of the EHCV, and reiterated that the DH conducts regular and sampling checks in accordance with the monitoring mechanism, and all suspected cases of violating the EHCV Scheme rules or making false declarations will be strictly dealt with. Appropriate follow-up action and measures will be taken, including referring relevant cases to law enforcement agencies for investigation.

A spokesman for the DH pointed out that, to ensure proper reimbursement of voucher claims to participating service providers and proper use of public money, the DH has put in place measures and procedures for checking and auditing voucher claims. These include conducting routine inspections of service providers, monitoring and surveillance to detect aberrant patterns of transactions, as well as conducting investigations into complaints received.

The spokesman stressed that even after registering for shared use of vouchers between spouses, the voucher account balance of the deceased will not be transferred to the voucher account of the surviving spouse. A person using the deceased's voucher account balance with Hong Kong identity cards or Certificates of Exemption, which are issued by the Immigration Department of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government, of the deceased may also be charged for offences such as fraud and be subject to criminal liability. Moreover, vouchers cannot be used solely for purchasing goods, medication, medical equipment and products, or redeemed for cash. Members of the public should abide by the relevant regulations and not defy the law. Making a false declaration is a criminal offence and offenders are liable to a fine or imprisonment upon conviction. The DH has again reminded enrolled health care providers (EHCPs) about the relevant regulations through the eHealth System (Subsidies).

Under the EHCV Scheme, voucher recipients shall produce their valid Hong Kong identity cards or Certificates of Exemption, to receive the healthcare services in person provided by the EHCPs in order to use the EHCV.

EHCPs should comply with the terms and conditions of the EHCV Scheme Agreement, and verify the voucher recipient's identity when providing healthcare services. If any service provider is suspected of fraud, the DH will refer the case to the Police and/or relevant law enforcement agencies for follow-up. The DH may also disqualify the service provider concerned from participating in the EHCV Scheme. If any service provider is suspected of professional misconduct, the DH will refer the case to the relevant professional regulatory board/council for follow-up. In addition, if any participating service provider is found to have violated the terms and conditions of the EHCV Scheme Agreement, the relevant voucher claims will not be reimbursed by the Government. In case the reimbursement has been made, the Government will recover the amount from the service provider concerned. The DH will also issue an advisory/warning letter to the service provider concerned as appropriate.

Members of the public may refer to the EHVS website (www.hcv.gov.hk) for more information, or call the EHVS hotline (2838 2311) for enquiries.