

LCQ10: Stockpiles of emergency supplies

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Han-pan and a written reply by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Algernon Yau, in the Legislative Council today (November 29):

Question:

There are views that Hong Kong experienced several waves of panic buying of different supplies during the outbreak of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 epidemic and when it was affected by the news about unfavourable external factors, and that such a situation highlights Hong Kong's shortcoming of relying heavily on importation of supplies from outside the territory. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has tracked the monthly stocks of edible salt, frozen meat, medicine containing paracetamol, masks and disinfectant alcohol in Hong Kong in the past five years; if so, set out the relevant figures in a table;

(2) whether it will update the existing statutory list of reserved commodities to include other emergency supplies; if so, of the details and the timetable; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it will consider, when leasing out logistics sites, including a provision requiring the lessees to assist the Government in the storage of emergency supplies; if so, of the details and the timetable; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The COVID-19 epidemic lasted for over three years. With the full support from the Central Government and efforts by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government, the HKSAR has been striving to ensure a sufficient and stable supply of food and various major supplies. Having consulted the Development Bureau, the Environment and Ecology Bureau, the Health Bureau and the Transport and Logistics Bureau, the consolidated reply to the various parts of the question is as follows:

(1) Information on imports of the five products in question in the past five years is as follows:

Category	Unit	2018		2019		2020		2021		2022	
		Value (HK\$ million)	Quantity (million)	Value (HK\$ million)	Quantity (million)	Value (HK\$ million)	Quantity (million)	Value (HK\$ million)	Quantity (million)	Value (HK\$ million)	Quantity (million)
Edible salt	kg	65.3	49.7	67.1	51.2	67.0	45.4	74.5	48.7	81.7	47.8
Frozen meat	kg	26,027.2	923.9	21,518.0	760.2	21,676.1	725.9	19,201.5	635.7	12,178.1	381.0

Medicine containing paracetamol	–	352.5	–	359.0	–	391.7	–	403.6	–	466.6	–
Face mask (Note)	No.							411.5	438.3	1,099.2	652.4
Disinfectant alcohol	kg	125.2	4.9	143.6	6.2	1,295.9	46.5	335.9	14.0	368.7	17.1

Relevant government departments have been monitoring the supply situation in the market, and liaised with the trade closely to ensure a stable supply.

As an illustration, in the face of the shortage of supply around the world and in the local market at that time, the Government took the breakthrough step of establishing the Local Mask Production Subsidy Scheme in March 2020 to provide subsidy to facilitate the establishment of local mask production facilities and the building up of stock. The 20 subsidised production lines collectively delivered about 470 million masks to the Government within one year. The Government also provided technical support through the Hong Kong Productivity Council to another 35 production lines to increase local production.

(2) Hong Kong has all along been committed to free market economic principles and is also a free port. Unless otherwise prescribed by law with sufficient policy justifications, all commodities can be freely imported and exported. This is one of the important factors to attract foreign investment and businesses to Hong Kong and the international obligation that Hong Kong needs to adhere to.

Currently, only rice is scheduled as a reserved commodity under the Reserved Commodities Ordinance. Owing to then mounting concerns over the supply of certain foods, the Government has been operating the Rice Control Scheme since 1955, as well as imposing controls on frozen meat and frozen poultry later on. The Government formulated legislation to regulate the imports, exports and reserve stocks of the relevant foods to ensure a stable supply and maintenance of a reserve stock to cater for emergencies and momentary short supply.

Compared with the situation in previous decades, the supply and choices of food stock in Hong Kong have changed significantly. Coupled with the global trend of free trade, the Government has gradually opened up markets and minimised controls. That included the removal of frozen meat and frozen poultry from the Reserved Commodities Ordinance in 2000 and the liberalisation of the rice market and maintenance of minimum level of controls on rice trade since 2003.

When considering whether to impose control on certain commodities, we have to take into consideration the international obligations that Hong Kong needs to adhere to (e.g. World Trade Organization rules) and the impacts of controls on the free trade environment, market competition and market efficiency and flexibility, etc, of Hong Kong.

At the moment, the relevant bureaux have no plan to add any commodity under the Reserved Commodities Ordinance.

(3) The Government does not see a need for additional space for storage of statutory reserved commodity at the moment. In general, if the Government sees a need for space or floor area for certain specified purposes, we will consider different options, including imposing requirement through conditions of grant.

Note: Separate figures for face masks prior to 2021 are unavailable as they were classified as textile articles before 2021.

[Inspection of aquatic products imported from Japan](#)

In response to the Japanese Government's plan to discharge nuclear-contaminated water at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Station, the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene issued a Food Safety Order which prohibits all aquatic products, sea salt and seaweeds originating from the 10 metropolis/prefectures, namely Tokyo, Fukushima, Ibaraki, Miyagi, Chiba, Gunma, Tochigi, Niigata, Nagano and Saitama, from being imported into and supplied in Hong Kong.

For other Japanese aquatic products, sea salt, and seaweeds that are not prohibited from being imported into Hong Kong, the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department will conduct comprehensive radiological tests to verify that the radiation levels of these products do not exceed the guideline levels before they are allowed to be supplied in the market.

As the discharge of nuclear-contaminated water is unprecedented and will continue for 30 years or more, the Government will closely monitor and step up the testing arrangements. Should anomalies be detected, the Government does not preclude further tightening the scope of the import ban.

From noon on November 28 to noon today (November 29), the CFS conducted tests on the radiological levels of 172 food samples imported from Japan, which were of the "aquatic and related products, seaweeds and sea salt" category. No sample was found to have exceeded the safety limit. Details can be found on the CFS's thematic website titled "Control Measures on Foods Imported from Japan" (www.cfs.gov.hk/english/programme/programme_rafs/programme_rafs_fc_01_30_Nuclear_Event_and_Food_Safety.html).

In parallel, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) has also tested 50 samples of local catch for radiological levels. All the samples passed the tests. Details can be found on the AFCD's website (www.afcd.gov.hk/english/fisheries/Radiological_testing/Radiological_Test.htm).

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The Hong Kong Observatory (HKO) has also enhanced the environmental monitoring of the local waters. No anomaly has been detected so far. For details, please refer to the HKO's website (www.hko.gov.hk/en/radiation/monitoring/seawater.html).

From August 24 to noon today, the CFS and the AFCD have conducted tests on the radiological levels of 17 042 samples of food imported from Japan (including 11 320 samples of aquatic and related products, seaweeds and sea salt) and 4 812 samples of local catch respectively. All the samples passed the tests.

LCQ5: Funding for bachelor's degree programmes in Chinese medicine

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Wing-kwong and a reply by the Secretary for Education, Dr Choi Yuk-lin, in the Legislative Council today (November 29):

Question:

Regarding the funding of the University Grants Committee (UGC) for the full-time bachelor's degree programmes in Chinese medicine offered by the Hong Kong Baptist University, The Chinese University of Hong Kong and the University of Hong Kong, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it knows the numbers of UGC-funded first-year intake places for the aforesaid programmes in the 2019-2022 triennium and the 2022-2025 triennium, and the total amount of UGC recurrent grants allocated to the aforesaid three universities for such programmes since 2020, with a breakdown of the respective amounts of funding by portion of teaching ("T-portion"), research and professional activity;

(2) given that UGC, in allocating funding for the T-portion, groups the relative cost weightings into three price groups (i.e. Medicine and Dentistry, Engineering and Laboratory Based Studies, and Others) by broad academic programme category, and it is learnt that Chinese medicine does not fall under Medicine and Dentistry, or Studies Allied to Medicine and Health under Engineering and Laboratory Based Studies, whether the Government knows the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it knows if UGC will categorise Chinese medicine under Medicine and Dentistry or Studies Allied to Medicine and Health, so that bachelor's degree programmes in Chinese medicine can receive appropriate funding for the

T-portion; if UGC will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Government and the University Grants Committee (UGC) have been proactively nurturing talents for various sectors in Hong Kong and attach great importance to the manpower needs of Chinese Medicine. Under the existing mechanism, education and healthcare are specific manpower-planned disciplines, which now covers Chinese Medicine. The number of student places offered by the eight UGC-funded universities in the manpower-planned disciplines are determined by the Chief Executive-in-Council (CE-in-C) every triennium, taking into account the recommendations of relevant bureaux, and the universities will admit the specified number of students during the triennium. If there is an increase in the demand for specific manpower-planned programmes, the relevant bureaux will seek additional resources within the Government in accordance with the established procedures, which will then be disbursed to the universities in the form of a block grant through the UGC. On the premise that the student number targets have been met, the universities may flexibly deploy their resources to meet the needs of different disciplines.

Since the questions raised by the Hon Chan Wing-kwong involve different bureaux/departments, having consulted the Health Bureau, our reply is as follows:

(1) During the planning exercise for the 2019-22 and 2022-25 triennia, the CE-in-C approved the provision of 79 and 70 first-year-first-degree (FYFD) intake places respectively for the Chinese Medicine programmes on the recommendation of the relevant bureau. The relevant programmes are offered by the Hong Kong Baptist University, the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the University of Hong Kong. The numbers of FYFD intake places provided by the above universities in the 2019-22 triennium were 30, 25 and 24 respectively, while the numbers of FYFD places to be provided in the 2022-25 triennium are 30, 20 and 20 respectively. As aforementioned, recurrent grants are disbursed to the universities by the Government through the UGC in the form of a block grant. As such, we do not have the relevant figures on the portion of recurrent grants allocated to the Faculty of Chinese Medicine or School of Chinese Medicine within the universities.

(2) and (3) During the triennial planning exercise, the UGC assumes an advisory role in assessing the public funding requirements of the universities in accordance with the established formula. On such basis, the UGC recommends the amount of recurrent grants to be allocated to the universities within the triennium for the Government's consideration. Subject to the decision of the CE-in-C, the UGC Secretariat will disburse the funding in accordance with the Government's decision.

The methodology adopted by the UGC in determining the funding recommendations for the allocation of recurrent grants to the UGC-funded

universities is made public in the Government's Legislative Council Brief on Recurrent Funding for the UGC-funded Universities for each triennium. Among others, the funding for the Teaching Portion is determined on the basis of student numbers, their study levels, i.e. sub-degree, undergraduate, taught postgraduate and research postgraduate programmes, modes of study, i.e. part-time and full-time, and disciplines of study, etc. Some subjects are more expensive than the others because they require special equipment, laboratory, or more staff time, which will be reflected in the determination of the proposed allocation for each university. In accordance with the above principle, the UGC currently places 17 academic programme categories into three price groups, with Price Group A being Medicine and Dentistry with a relative cost weighting (RCW) of 3.6, Price Group B being Engineering and Laboratory-Based Studies, including Chinese Medicine programmes under Studies Allied to Medicine and Health disciplines, with a RCW of 1.4, and Price Group C being Others with a RCW of 1.0. For research postgraduate programmes, the RCW values are 1.8, 1.4 and 1.0 respectively. The UGC will continue to make reference to different data, such as the average teaching expenditure per student, in reviewing and refining the mechanism from time to time.

I must stress that the funding allocated by the Government to the universities is in the form of block grants, and the underlying philosophy is that the universities have to assume the primary responsibility for optimising the use of limited public resources, and to properly manage and balance the allocation of resources among different disciplines on their own. The RCW adopted by the UGC is only one of the many basic parameters for devising funding recommendations. It is entirely different from the internal mechanisms of the universities for allocating resources to different disciplines; hence, the two should not be casually pegged. Under the principle of institutional autonomy, the Government and the UGC will not intervene in the internal resources allocation by the universities, and the universities have to be responsible for their own internal decisions. In fact, the number of student places for Chinese Medicine undergraduate programmes only accounts for 1 per cent to 3 per cent of the total number of student places allocated to the aforementioned three universities. With the Government's annual recurrent grants to the three universities amounting to more than \$10 billion in total, we believe that the universities have sufficient room for ensuring the proper allocation of resources.

The existing mechanism allows the universities to apply for extra-formulaic adjustments if there is a special need for additional resources for individual programmes which the universities have genuine difficulties in meeting such a need. In the past, there were cases where disciplines in Studies Allied to Medicine and Health being supported by the relevant bureaux in terms of policies and resources, and provided with extra-formulaic additional funding to subsidise the fees for Clinical Practice. Should there be any such requests on the special needs of resources relating to the Chinese Medicine programmes, the UGC Secretariat will refer them to the relevant bureau for consideration.

Thank you, President.

China Manned Space delegation shares experiences with secondary and primary students in dialogue sessions

The China Manned Space delegation this morning (November 29) attended dialogue sessions in groups with secondary and primary students organised by the Education Bureau at Pui Kiu Middle School, Ma Tau Chung Government Primary School (Hung Hom Bay), and Hong Kong Baptist University Affiliated School Wong Kam Fai Secondary and Primary School respectively.

Deputy Director of the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Ms Lu Xinning; the Secretary for Education, Dr Choi Yuk-lin; and the Permanent Secretary for Education, Ms Michelle Li, also attended the events.

Addressing the session at Pui Kiu Middle School, Dr Choi expressed her warm welcome and respect to the delegation, and her gratitude to the Central People's Government for the arrangements. She said that the country's aerospace development is advancing rapidly, and it has made historic and exciting breakthroughs one after another in recent years. The country has now embarked on a moon landing mission of the manned lunar exploration programme, with the goal of landing Chinese on the moon for the first time by 2030 to carry out lunar scientific investigations and related technological experiments, and deepening humanity's understanding of the origin and evolution of the moon and the solar system. These would not only represent glorious achievements of Chinese people, but also provide significant contributions to the global development of aerospace technologies.

Speaking at the session at Hong Kong Baptist University Affiliated School Wong Kam Fai Secondary and Primary School, Ms Li said that the delegation's visit demonstrated the great importance and care that the country attaches to Hong Kong's young people. In recent years, the country's aerospace technologies have entered a fast lane of innovative development, making contributions to building a community with a shared future for mankind in space. The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region has also stepped up the promotion of STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts and Mathematics) education through the introduction of Science subject in primary schools enhanced with space science knowledge, dovetailing with the nation's strategy of "invigorating the country through science and education" to nurture innovation and technology talent. Ms Li also encouraged Hong Kong students to establish a foothold in Hong Kong, have the motherland at heart, set a global vision, gaze up at the sky and pursue their dreams bravely to contribute to the country, Hong Kong and human civilisation in the future.

During the events, members of the delegation interacted with more than 550 students from 20 primary schools and more than 690 students from 21 secondary schools respectively. They talked about the national developments and achievements in aerospace technologies as well as their lives and valuable experiences in space.

Students proactively raised questions, covering subjects such as the outlook of future space exploration, the possibility for humans to live in space and the application and development of artificial intelligence in the area of aerospace. The delegation members answered them all in detail.

LCQ14: Youth development work

Following is a question by Reverend Canon the Hon Peter Douglas Koon and a written reply by the Secretary for Home and Youth Affairs, Miss Alice Mak, in the Legislative Council today (November 29):

Question:

The Government promulgated the Youth Development Blueprint in December last year, outlining the overall vision and guiding principles for its long-term youth development work in future, while putting forward more than 160 specific actions and measures conducive to youth development at the initial stage. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that the Government will launch a one-stop information mobile app for youth to disseminate diversified information on various youth development programmes, whether such an app will be equipped with a function for users to provide feedback, so as to enable the Government to receive the views of young people more effectively, instead of simply disseminating information unilaterally; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) as the Government will re-launch the Starter Homes for Hong Kong Residents projects in the Land Sale Programme in the current financial year, whether it will set aside quotas for the youths in such projects to implement a tailor-made scheme for young people; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) given that the Government established the District Youth Community Building Committee and the District Youth Development and Civic Education Committee in 18 districts in April this year, whether it will, by drawing reference from the eligibility criteria for members of the District Services and Community Care Teams, require members of such committees to sign a declaration in relation to national security and to be persons having no criminal convictions; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(4) given the designation of the Deputy Secretary for Home and Youth Affairs (Youth Affairs) of the Home and Youth Affairs Bureau as the Commissioner for Youth (the Commissioner) to co-ordinate youth development work in various areas within the Government, whether the Government has assessed if the substantive rank of the Commissioner (i.e. Deputy Secretary) will render it difficult for him to co-ordinate various policy bureaux and rationalise the relevant work; how the Commissioner ensures that various policy bureaux are able to take forward the initiatives in relation to youth affairs effectively so that the relevant indicators will be met?

Reply:

President,

The Government all along attaches great importance to youth development. The Home and Youth Affairs Bureau (HYAB) released the Youth Development Blueprint (the Blueprint) late last year to outline the overall vision and guiding principles for the Government's long-term youth development work in future, with a vision to nurture a new generation of young people with an affection for our country and Hong Kong, and equipped with global perspective and positive thinking. The Blueprint put forward more than 160 measures, including some which assist young people in overcoming hurdles in education, employment, entrepreneurship and home ownership, providing all-round support for youth development.

In consultation with the Housing Bureau, the consolidated reply to the question raised by Reverend Canon the Hon Peter Douglas Koon is as follows:

(1) The HYAB plans to launch a youth-oriented mobile application (the App) in the first quarter of 2024. It will disseminate the latest information on youth development and a wide range of activities, so that young people can explore different areas and development opportunities based on their individual needs and interests. In designing the App, the HYAB collected opinions from more than 1 300 young people via survey and focus groups to better understand their expectations and suggestions on the App. We plan to incorporate a feedback function in the App so that we can keep tabs on contents that are more popular among young users. After the launch of the App, we will closely monitor its implementation and user feedback, and review and optimise its functions and contents continuously. We will launch updated versions and new features as and when appropriate to ensure that the App can cater for the needs of young people.

(2) Starter Homes for Hong Kong Residents (SH) projects could help address the home ownership aspirations of those who are not eligible for purchasing Home Ownership Scheme flats and yet cannot afford private housing. The Government is committed to developing SH projects with a view to enriching the housing ladder, and ensuring that the various housing rungs can meet the needs of different home purchasers. Apart from the first two SH projects of the Urban Renewal Authority (i.e. eResidence Towers 1 and 2, as well as eResidence Towers 3) launched for sale which provide a total of 753 SH units, the Government is taking forward four other SH projects, which will provide over 5 800 SH units.

The majority of the past applicants and purchasers for SH were young people aged 40 or below, illustrating that SH projects can help the youth realise their home ownership aspirations. Since SH units, being subsidised housing, are precious resources of the community, the allocation of such units has to balance the needs of different stakeholders. The Government thus does not have any plan at this stage to set aside special quotas for the youth under SH projects.

(3) The Chief Executive announced in his 2022 Policy Address the launch of the Youth Participation Initiative. One of the initiatives is for the Home Affairs Department (HAD) to open up certain seats of the District Youth Community Building Committee and the District Youth Development and Civic Education Committee (the Committees) set up in 18 districts for young people to nominate themselves as members. Each of the Committees consists of 20 to 30 members, one-third of whom are self-nominated youth members.

The HAD invited self-nominations to the Committees in January 2023 and attracted close to 1 100 applications. Assessment Panels were set up by all District Offices to recruit young people on merit basis, who have a strong commitment to serve the community, a good understanding of district and youth affairs, as well as good analytical and communication skills. About 330 young people in total have joined the Committees, which aim to provide forums for members to offer their views on district affairs such as district works projects, youth development and civic education. There is no requirement for members to sign any declaration, and the origin or background of the young people is not a factor for consideration in the recruitment process.

(4) Youth development work involves a wide range of issues and stakeholders which straddles various policy areas. One of the guiding principles set out in the Blueprint is to enhance central governance and co-ordination, with a view to facilitating cross-bureau and cross-sector collaboration (including the Government, business sector, academia and the community), as well as engaging and driving various sectors to participate in youth work. The Commissioner for Youth, a dedicated position with specific responsibilities, is an important component in the governance structure for the Government's youth work. It serves to strengthen internal co-ordination for youth development work within the Government and liaise with various sectors of the community to enhance their communication and collaboration with the Government. Besides, the Youth Development Commission, chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration, plays an effective and high-level leadership role in monitoring and assessing the implementation progress of the Blueprint, and in steering various bureaux to take forward youth work in an effective manner.