LCQ18: Measures to cope with discharge of nuclear wastewater by Japanese Government

Following is a question by the Hon Martin Liao and a written reply by the Secretary for Environment and Ecology, Mr Tse Chin-wan, in the Legislative Council today (October 18):

Question:

On July 4 this year, the International Atomic Energy Agency released its final report on Japan's nuclear wastewater discharge plan (the discharge plan). In its response to the report on the same day, the Government indicated that it was reviewing the content of the report and would make further risk assessment regarding the discharge plan. On the other hand, in the light of the discharge plan, the Hong Kong Observatory, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department and the Centre for Food Safety regularly publish on their websites the test results of radiological levels on seawater in Hong Kong waters, fishery products and food imported from Japan respectively. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether the Government's risk assessment has made comprehensive consideration from a scientific perspective, including the impact of the discharge plan on public health and safety, as well as environmental conservation; if so, of the details, and whether it will collaborate with the Mainland Government and experts to jointly assess the risks of the discharge plan;

(2) given that the discharge plan will last for 30 years, arousing concern among some members of the public about the cumulative risk posed by the discharged nuclear wastewater, whether the Government will draw up a response plan in the event of abnormal results detected in the radiation monitoring of seawater samples collected in local waters in the future; if so, of the details; and

(3) in addition to the regular publication of monitoring results by the aforesaid government departments, of the measures put in place by the Government to step up public education, so as to avoid undue worries in society?

Reply:

President,

The Japanese Government insisted on commencing, from August 24, 2023, the discharge of the nuclear-contaminated water which had been in contact with the nuclear fuel inside the Fukushima Nuclear Power Station (FNPS). The

decision of conducting such an unprecedented and large scale discharge of nuclear-contaminated water into the ocean, which would last for 30 years, has blatantly ignored the inevitable risk on food safety and the irreversible contamination and damages to the marine environment. It is an irresponsible act which shifts the issue from oneself to another. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government strongly opposes such move.

The reply to various parts of the question raised by the Hon Martin Liao is as follows:

(1) The HKSAR Government's inter-departmental taskforce has reviewed the final report of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and relevant information provided by the Japanese authorities from a scientific perspective. Having considered the final report of the IAEA, information provided by the Japanese authorities, opinions of the experts in the Mainland and risk assessments, the HKSAR Government has come to the view that there is currently no guarantee from the Japanese authorities that their purification and dilution system can operate continuously and effectively in the long term after the commencement of the discharge plan, and that the plan will not pose any potential risks to food safety and marine ecology.

In more specific terms, the nuclear-contaminated water in the FNPS had direct contact with active nuclear fuel and thus contains a high concentration of radioactive substances, involving at least 30 radionuclides. The total discharge volume is over 1.3 million cubic metres. During such a long period of over 30 years, purification would primarily be relied on for reducing radioactive substances in the nuclear-contaminated water. If the relevant system fails to operate effectively, food safety and marine ecology would be at significant risk.

Safeguarding food safety and public health in Hong Kong is the responsibility of the HKSAR Government. In view of the potential serious risk, the HKSAR Government must take corresponding precautionary measures to safeguard food safety and ensure citizens' health. The Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene issued a Food Safety Order (FSO) on August 23, 2023 to prohibit the import of aquatic products originating from 10 Japanese metropolis/prefectures with higher risks. For other aquatic products from Japan that are not prohibited from being imported, the Centre for Food Safety of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department performs its gatekeeping role at the import level by conducting 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 Hong Kong. Tests on relevant processed food are also enhanced.

The HKSAR Government will observe for some time after the commencement of the discharge to obtain more monitoring and scientific data in order to further examine the impact of the Fukushima nuclear-contaminated water discharge plan on food safety, and keep under review relevant counter measures. Should anomalies be detected, the HKSAR Government does not preclude further tightening the scope of the import ban. The HKSAR Government will continue to maintain close communication with the Japanese authorities,

closely monitor the latest situation regarding the import of food from Japan and the discharge plan of the FNPS, and perform risk assessments to safeguard food safety and citizens' health in Hong Kong.

(2) In response to Japan's discharge of nuclear-contaminated water, the Hong Kong Observatory (HKO) has enhanced its radiation monitoring of seawater samples collected in local waters. So far no anomaly has been detected. Should any anomaly be detected, the HKO will analyse its cause and assess its impact, and then notify relevant departments for follow-up action, including stepping up the radiation monitoring of seawater, local catch and imported food, expanding the scope of FSO's applicability and disseminating information on food safety and public health to members of the public.

(3) With a view to enabling members of the public to have a better grasp of the latest safety information on imported Japanese food products, the Environment and Ecology Bureau (EEB) has been making public announcements every working day regarding the radiological testing results of imported Japanese food samples, the radiological levels of samples of local catch, and the radiation measurement results of seawater samples in Hong Kong waters since the commencement of the discharge. The HKO and the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department will also announce the relevant testing results on their websites. At the same time, the Government will closely monitor the latest developments, explain the matter to the public via different social media platforms, and make clarifications on possible public misconceptions on the nuclear-contaminated water discharge. In addition, the EEB has liaised with the Education Bureau to arrange for the distribution of materials to primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong to explain Japan's nuclear-contaminated water discharge plan, thereby helping students to have a more comprehensive, accurate and in-depth understanding of the issue.

LCQ 20: Alleviating congestion problem at road harbour crossings

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Han-pan and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Lam Sai-hung, in the Legislative Council today (October 18):

Question:

In order to alleviate the congestion problem at and in the vicinity of the various road harbour crossings (RHCs) in Hong Kong, the authorities have been implementing in phases large-scale improvement measures including HKeToll (i.e. a free-flow tolling service), the "633" fixed toll plan and the

time-varying toll plan. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as there are views that the time-varying toll plan planned to be implemented within this year is relatively complicated, and the implementation time of the plan is only several months away from now, whether the authorities have put in place specific publicity measures to enable members of the public to gain a clear understanding of the details of the plan; if so, of the details and timetable; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) as there are views pointing out that after the implementation of the "633" fixed toll plan, congestion often occurs at the Hong Kong Island exit of the Western Harbour Crossing in the direction of Central and Sheung Wan, and it is expected that the vehicular flow will further increase after the implementation of the time-varying toll plan, whether the authorities will consider constructing an additional lane leading to Central and Sheung Wan, so as to divert traffic in the vicinity; if so, of the details and timetable; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) of the respective areas of land to be released as well as the plot ratios and gross floor areas for development after the demolition of toll booths at the portals of the various RHCs as estimated by the authorities; whether there are development plans for such lots, including whether "park-and-ride" (PnR) facilities that help alleviate congestion at tunnels or on urban roads will be built; if so, of the details and the timetable; if not, the details and progress of the development of PnR schemes across the territory at present?

Reply:

President,

Cross-harbour traffic congestion during peak hours is a problem that needs to be tackled effectively. The Government has been adopting a multi-pronged strategy to alleviate traffic congestion, including through upgrading the transport infrastructure, expanding and improving public transport services, and managing the use of roads.

In consultation with the Transport Department (TD), my reply to the question raised by the Hon Chan Han-pan is as follows:

(1) The coming implementation of time-varying tolls at the three road harbour crossings (RHCs), namely the Cross-Harbour Tunnel (CHT), the Eastern Harbour Crossing (EHC) and the Western Harbour Crossing (WHC), is a new measure to suppress and divert cross-harbour traffic during peak hours. The Government attaches great importance to publicity and education so that motorists can grasp the details of the toll plans and make early preparations, thereby maximising the effect of time-varying tolls on traffic management.

To this end, since the announcement of the toll plans of the three RHCs in March this year, the Government has been actively launching a series of

publicity and education efforts, including press conferences, press releases, TV/radio interviews, social media/online promotions, information packs, mobile application messages, tunnel broadcasts and variable message displays, etc., with a view to enabling motorists to have a deeper understanding of the policy intent, as well as the arrangements for the "633" toll plan during the first stage.

To tie in with the coming implementation of time-varying tolls, we are making a series of preparations to ensure that members of the public and motorists are able to obtain information on the tolls of the RHCs through different channels. Upon completion of the legislative procedures when the commencement date of time-varying tolls is fixed, the Government will further step up publicity so that the public would be fully aware of the specific charging arrangements, which include the following:

(i) to conduct press conference timely, together with Announcements in the Public Interest on TV and radio, the above-mentioned multi-media publicity, etc.;

(ii) to launch a new toll enquiry function on HKeMobility mobile application and website to enable motorists to obtain real-time and forecasted cross-harbour toll information before going on their journey;

(iii) to set up new "toll information displays" at the RHCs, which will come into operation upon the implementation of time-varying tolls and will show the prevailing tolls and locations of the toll points to motorists on a journey; and

(iv) to allow motorists to check the toll payable/paid via the HKeToll mobile application or website after passing through the tunnel.

(2) The construction of an additional lane at the Hong Kong Island exit of the WHC in the direction of Central and Sheung Wan will increase the capacity of the road section and facilitate smoother traffic flow at the tunnel exit. The TD is liaising with the relevant government departments to examine the matter. If it is proven to be technically feasible, the Government will proceed with the detailed design and draw up a timetable for taking it forward.

(3) As a result of the removal of all manual toll booths upon the implementation of HKeToll, we estimate that about 12 700, 4 500 and 5 800 square meters plot of land will be released at the WHC, CHT and EHC respectively. In the short run, those spaces will be used for improving the traffic at the tunnel entrances and exits, including widening the existing space for loading/unloading of buses and access to bus stops, increasing the number of lane-side buffer zones to ensure the safe operation of the tunnels, as well as rationalising traffic lane arrangements, etc. In the long run, the development of such released spaces can tie in with that of the neighbouring areas, and the Government will take this into account when carrying out the relevant planning work.

The Government has been adopting a public transport-oriented policy,

encouraging the public to make good use of public transport services for their journeys as far as possible and minimise their reliance on private car use. The Government is committed to providing park-and-ride (PnR) facilities at or near suitable railway stations to encourage motorists to take the train after parking their vehicles, hence reducing the road traffic entering relatively busy areas. At present, there are 24 car parks providing PnR concessions in Hong Kong, offering a total of about 9 700 parking spaces. To further increase the provision of PnR facilities, the TD is exploring the inclusion of terms offering PnR concessions for suitable short-term tenancy car parks, the targeted locations of which are Tsuen Wan, Tsing Yi and Ma On Shan, etc., as well as public vehicle parks newly developed under the principle of "single site, multiple use". Looking ahead, the Government is considering the development of a new generation of transport interchange hubs under the Traffic and Transport Strategy Study based on the principle of "single site, multiple use", and will explore the provision of PnR facilities at suitable transport interchange hubs.

LCQ12: Handling waste medicines

Following is a question by Dr the Hon David Lam and a written reply by the Secretary for Environment and Ecology, Mr Tse Chin-wan, in the Legislative Council today (October 18):

Question:

In reply to my question on November 2 last year, the Government indicated that according to the findings of a scientific study on environmental waters, the environmental pollution caused by residual medicines (including antibiotics) was insignificant. However, it has been reported that a study conducted by the Hong Kong Baptist University in 2018 uncovered that leachates collected from the West New Territories Landfill as well as the closed Pillar Point Valley Landfill and Shuen Wan Landfill had been tested and found to contain human antibiotics, and their quantities in some leachates even reached a level that might result in the development of antibiotics-resistant microorganisms, posing public health risks. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has studied the types of antibiotics disposed of at landfills in the past year; if so, of the respective types and quantities of the antibiotics concerned;

(2) of the time and details of the Government's latest assessment of (i) the impact of the disposal of medicines at landfills on the environment and (ii) the impact of the disposal of human antibiotics on antibiotics resistance; whether it can provide the report of the aforesaid scientific study; and

(3) whether it will consider afresh establishing a centralised recovery system for medicine from households/residential care homes to mitigate the threat of human antibiotics to the environment and the ecology; if so, of the details?

Reply:

President,

The consolidated reply to the question raised by Dr the Hon Lam is set out below:

In Hong Kong, antibiotics is a type of prescribed medicines and should be used under close supervision by healthcare professionals. The public must obtain a doctor's prescription for dispensary of antibiotics at pharmacies. In general, doctors/medical practitioners only prescribe antibiotics to patients when necessary after clinical diagnoses, and should provide instructions to patients on the proper use of antibiotics, including the dosage of antibiotics, and the need to take all the dispensed antibiotics to complete the entire course of treatment.

According to the Waste Disposal Ordinance (Cap. 354) (the Ordinance), expired or ineffective antibiotics generated by pharmaceutical suppliers or medical institutions are classified as chemical waste. Their storage, collection, delivery and disposal must comply with the stringent requirements of the Waste Disposal (Chemical Waste) (General) Regulation (Cap. 354C). According to the Ordinance, the relevant organisations are required to engage licensed chemical waste collectors to collect and deliver the chemical wastes to the licensed chemical waste disposal facilities for incineration or proper disposal. The Environmental Protection Department (EPD) also issues letters to remind hospitals, clinics and other organisations to properly dispose of waste medicine generated (including antibiotics and other medicines that are expired, ineffective or returned from patients) in accordance with the legislative requirements.

On the other hand, the landfills in operation in Hong Kong were designed and constructed as fully contained facilities with a multi-layer composite impermeable liner system covering the entire base area of the landfills. Waste undergoes anaerobic digestion in the landfill and the leachate arising from decomposition will be fully collected and treated at the leachate treatment facility set up at the landfill, including the use of sequential batch reactors for aerobic digestion. The treated leachate will be discharged into public sewers in accordance with statutory standards. If the leachate contains antibiotics from waste medicine, the majority of which will be decomposed through the anaerobic and aerobic digestion processes mentioned above.

According to the research conducted by the Drainage Services Department, the sewage treatment works in Hong Kong can effectively remove some of the pharmaceutical residues in the sewage (including antibiotics), for which the removal rate of some antibiotics in secondary sewage treatment works can

reach 90 per cent or above. These findings are on par with that of relevant overseas research. Therefore, the amount of the residual antibiotics that may be present in the effluent will have been greatly reduced after the aforementioned multiple biological decomposition processes.

The EPD has commissioned a local university to conduct an antibiotics environmental baseline survey study from 2020 to 2021. The findings of the study showed that the median levels of 26 types of antibiotics commonly used in Hong Kong in the aquatic environment were lower than the "Predicted No Effect Concentration (PNEC)", indicating that there was no material impact caused on our local aquatic environment. The link to the report of the aforementioned baseline survey study is as follows: www.epd.gov.hk/epd/sites/default/files/epd/english/environmentinhk/water/studyrpts/files/Antibiotic_report.pdf

Regarding the suggestion to establish a centralised households / residential care homes medicine recovery system, since the community generally does not discard a large quantity of antibiotics medicine, and the antibiotics commonly used in Hong Kong have no material impact on our local aquatic environment, the EPD currently has no plan to set up any relevant recovery system.

LCQ16: New Capital Investment Entrant Scheme

Following is a question by the Hon Carmen Kan and a written reply by the Acting Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury, Mr Joseph Chan, in the Legislative Council today (October 18):

Question:

With a view to further enriching the talent pool and attracting more new capital to Hong Kong, the Financial Secretary announced in the 2023-2024 Budget that the Government would introduce a new Capital Investment Entrant Scheme (the New Scheme). In reply to my question on April 19 this year, the authorities indicated that the Government was formulating details of the New Scheme, with the goal of launching the New Scheme within this year. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has finished formulating details of the New Scheme; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) given that the 2022 Policy Address proposed to establish the Hong Kong Investment Corporation Limited (HKIC), whether the authorities will consider encouraging the matching of new capital attracted under the New Scheme with

part of the capital under the Co-Investment Fund (CIF) managed by HKIC, so as to produce combined effects; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether the authorities will consider setting different thresholds for different categories of capital investors, for example, setting a higher investment threshold for more robust categories such as co-invested capital under CIF or government bonds, and a lower investment threshold for specialised categories such as innovation and technology, so as to encourage applicants to invest in those industries and areas which are conducive to the long-term development of Hong Kong?

Reply:

President,

A consolidated reply to the three parts of the question is provided as follows.

The Government announced in the 2023-24 Budget that a new Capital Investment Entrant Scheme (the New Scheme) will be introduced with a view to further enriching the talent pool and attracting more new capital to Hong Kong, which will generate increased demand for financial and related professional services to bolster the development of the asset and wealth management industry.

The Government has been actively formulating the specifics of the New Scheme. Generally, it will adopt the framework and application criteria of the original Capital Investment Entrant Scheme. Applicants shall make investment at a certain amount in the local asset market, excluding property. Upon approval, they may reside and pursue development in Hong Kong. Matters concerning applicants' investible areas in Hong Kong, investment threshold, conditions of stay, etc., are being examined for suitable adjustments. The investment threshold will be increased to a multiple of the original requirement. The investible areas will cover, apart from financial assets, new asset categories benefitting the long-term development of Hong Kong (including innovation and technology). The purpose is to attract more new capital and talents to Hong Kong, bring new impetus to the economy while fostering the development of relevant industries in Hong Kong.

The Government will make an announcement once the details and application arrangements of the New Scheme have been finalised.

LCQ7: Operation of West Kowloon

Station of Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Hoey Simon Lee and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Lam Sai-hung, in the Legislative Council today (October 18):

Question:

There are views pointing out that the West Kowloon Station (WKS) of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link (XRL) is plagued with problems such as excessively long clearance time, lack of shops and insufficient seats in the waiting hall for departing passengers, as well as holiday crowds causing passengers to miss their trains. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as it has been reported that at present, the shortest time for XRL passengers to complete immigration clearance at WKS is about 10 minutes, but the journey time from WKS to Futian Station is only 14 minutes, whether the Government will consider optimizing the layout of WKS, in particular shortening the distance between the boundary control points, so that passengers can complete immigration clearance more quickly; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether the Government will, by drawing reference from the design of the airport restricted area, examine afresh the design of the waiting hall for departing passengers at WKS, as well as introducing different types of shops and increasing the number of seats in the waiting hall; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether the Government will discuss with the MTR Corporation Limited the provision of additional manpower or adoption of other measures to facilitate crowd control at WKS during long holidays; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

â€‹The Hong Kong Section of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link (XRL) was commissioned on September 23, 2018, connecting with the over 40 000 kilometers long national high speed rail network. It is a key component of the highly accessible transport network and economic circle of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. The co-location arrangement at the XRL West Kowloon Station (WKS) enables passengers to complete clearance procedures of both Hong Kong and the Mainland in one go, bringing the strengths of the XRL in providing convenient, fast and efficient services into full play and further facilitating the flow of people between the two places.

In consultation with the Security Bureau and the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL), my reply to the question raised by Dr the Hon Hoey Simon Lee is as follows:

(1) The WKS control point implements the co-location arrangement. Such idea has been incorporated in the design stage of the station, such that designated areas have been set aside for the establishment of the Hong Kong Port Area and the Mainland Port Area, where law enforcement personnel from both sides would conduct their respective clearance procedures for passengers. The existing customs and immigration facilities of the Hong Kong and Mainland Port Area at the WKS have been set up by the respective government based on the above co-location principle, and after deliberation having regard to various aspects such as practical operation of the station, immigration clearance procedures and travel facilitation.

The Immigration Department (ImmD) has been utilising innovative technologies to enhance the clearance capacity of various control points, including the WKS. In order to provide convenient and speedy automated immigration clearance services to Hong Kong residents, the ImmD introduced the Contactless e-Channel service in December 2021, which uses facial recognition technology to allow enrolled Hong Kong residents to perform self-service immigration clearance with encrypted QR codes. The whole process takes only around seven seconds. At the end of April this year, the ImmD also lowered the eligible age for holders of the Mainland's electronic Exit-Entry Permits for travelling to and from Hong Kong and Macao (e-EEP) for using the e-Channel service, from 16 years old or above to 11 years old or above, so that more inbound visitors from the Mainland can use the speedy e-Channel service. In July this year, the ImmD further extended the e-Channel service to cover persons aged 11 or above coming to Hong Kong to study, foreign domestic helpers and imported workers. This new initiative has further enhanced the clearance efficiency and overall handling capacity of various control points, thereby facilitating cross-boundary travel between Hong Kong and the Mainland while promoting the connectivity between the two places.

(2) The XRL Hong Kong Section has been operating smoothly since its service resumption on January 15, 2023. The average daily patronage exceeded 70 000 passenger trips during the 2023 summer holiday peak season. The single-day patronage hit a record high of over 100 000 passenger trips on September 30, 2023 during the National Day and Mid-Autumn Festival long holiday, the highest ever recorded since the commissioning of the XRL Hong Kong Section.

The MTRCL has been proactively monitoring the station operation and passenger demand, so as to enhance station facilities and the XRL services as necessary. In particular, the MTRCL will provide about 300 additional seats in the waiting hall by this year, bringing the total to approximately 1 200 seats for passengers' use. There are a variety of shops at the WKS to meet the needs of passengers, including a food court, fast food shops, coffee shop, money exchange, banks and convenience stores, while duty-free shops are available in both the departure and arrival concourses.

(3) The Government has all along been urging the MTRCL to provide safe, reliable and smooth railway services to passengers. To maintain smooth train operations and station order at the WKS at peak hours, especially during the festive holidays and other peak passenger traffic periods, the MTRCL has taken multi-pronged measures on station facilities and layout as well as passenger flow management to facilitate passengers and enhance their travelling experience.

On station facilities and layout, as paper tickets have been replaced by e-tickets following the service resumption of the XRL Hong Kong Section this year, gates at the WKS have been upgraded and the layout of the ticketing and baggage screening halls on the B1 departure level have also been reconfigured. Ten self-service gates and six staff assistance channels have been set up, and new screening machines for large baggage have been added. The new station layout enables more passengers to be served at the same time, facilitating a smoother boarding process. To achieve smart mobility, the MTRCL has introduced a self-service taxi ticket system in the Taxi Stand at the WKS. Passengers can access real-time queuing information by scanning the QR code on their tickets without having to wait at a particular location.

On passenger flow management, the MTRCL will, on the eve of festive holidays and peak passenger traffic periods, provide data on ticket pre-sale for reference by relevant authorities (including control point authorities of Hong Kong and the Mainland) in jointly discussing and formulating the passenger flow management measures on station operation and clearance at boundary control points. The MTRCL and relevant authorities will also strengthen manpower to assist passengers during the peak periods with a view to facilitating passengers' clearance and enjoyment of the fast and convenient XRL services in a safe and comfortable environment.