

LCQ8: Enhancing publicity of mega events

Following is a question by the Hon Sunny Tan and a written reply by the Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism, Miss Rosanna Law, in the Legislative Council today (December 18):

Question:

There are views that as the staging of mega events in Hong Kong faces challenges in terms of inadequate local publicity and insufficient public awareness, the Government needs to optimise the use of existing infrastructure facilities for promotional purposes, so as to create a city-wide vibe. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has studied ways to make good use of local publicity experience of the Information Services Department in its "work with organisers of high-profile local sporting, cultural and entertainment events to raise Hong Kong's profile globally", so as to step up promotion of mega events in Hong Kong through online and offline channels of the Government; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether it has plans to, by drawing reference from the current practice of letting out advertising spaces available in government premises for commercial advertising purposes, open up more government premises with advertising spaces, such as the curtain walls of venues under the management of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, for launching publicity of mega events in Hong Kong; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) whether it will, by drawing on the experience of departments such as the Registration and Electoral Office and the Hong Kong Police Force in renting advertising spaces along major trunk roads and of public transport systems (for example, the MTR and Hong Kong International Airport) for promotional purposes, look into specific measures to encourage operators to let out idle advertising spaces at a concession rate for launching publicity of mega events in Hong Kong, such as the offer of tax deductions; and

(4) as it has been reported that M+ and Art Basel have co-commissioned works for the M+ Facade to celebrate mega events of the Hong Kong Arts Month, whether the authorities will consider discussing the extension of such practice to other mega events in Hong Kong with the West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD) Authority, so as to jointly promote good vibes for mega events and encourage both artists as well as members of the public to explore the relationship between visual arts and city space, while creating an additional income source for the WKCD; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Government has stepped up promoting the development of mega events since early this year. On top of proactively reaching out and attracting more world-class mega events to be staged in Hong Kong, strengthening the publicity of mega events is also one of the key priorities. The Mega Events Coordination Group (the Group) led by the Deputy Financial Secretary provides steer on the promotion of mega events, including the launching or consolidation of publicity campaigns. The Group will also offer advice for different policy bureaux and departments on strengthening publicity for mega events, with a view to enhancing the atmosphere of mega events and encouraging citywide participation. In consultation with the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau, the Transport and Logistics Bureau, the Information Services Department (ISD) and the Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK), my reply to the question raised by the Hon Sunny Tan is as follows:

(1), (2) and (3) The ISD has been stepping up publicity and promotion of mega events through both online and offline means. A dedicated webpage has been set up on Brand Hong Kong (BrandHK)'s website by the ISD, featuring the mega events calendars, event highlights and press releases to provide relevant information of mega events to the public. The ISD issues posts on a regular basis across various social media platforms and produces a series of videos on mega events for further promotion across the city. Moreover, Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) and Key Opinion Consumers (KOCs) from the Mainland are invited to attend mega events for publicity on platforms such as Xiaohongshu, WeChat and Weibo. BrandHK also co-brands with individual mega event organisers to further promote Hong Kong as Asia's Events Capital through outdoor advertising, banner displays and print advertisements, etc.

The RTHK has launched a new multimedia magazine-style programme, "Mega Events Mega Hong Kong", to promote the latest updates and information about major events in Hong Kong through TV, radio, and online platforms every day. It helps the public stay informed about upcoming events, such as October's Hong Kong Performing Arts Expo, Hong Kong Wine & Dine Festival, the 4th Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Culture and Arts Festival, and Prudential Hong Kong Tennis Open 2024; November's Global Financial Leaders' Investment Summit, Link Hong Kong Open, and Clockenflap Music & Arts Festival; and December's Business of Design Week, Business of IP Asia Forum, Legends Assemble: Real Madrid Legends vs Barcelona Heroes, and Hong Kong WinterFest. Apart from the TV programme airing daily on RTHK TV 31 and TV 32, promotional messages are broadcast daily in different programmes on Channels 1, 2, 3, 5, and the Putonghua Channel on the radio. Hosts also introduce event details to create excitement across the city, and bring joy and lively vibes of mega events to the public.

The Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) has been publicising major international mega events held in Hong Kong through various channels. The HKTB has leveraged the global network to carry out publicity in the Mainland and overseas. The HKTB widely shares information about mega events on social

media platforms, including YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and the Mainland social media accounts, such as Xiaohongshu, Douyin and other official channels. The HKTB also invites the trade and KOLs to experience Hong Kong's mega events in person to help establish the reputation and further enhance publicity through their networks. For example, riding on Art Basel Hong Kong and other mega arts events held in March this year, the HKTB stepped up global publicity through its year-round promotional platform, "Arts in Hong Kong", boosting the city's arts atmosphere and fervour.

As for Cathay/HSBC Hong Kong Sevens 2024 held in March this year, the HKTB supported the organiser to introduce new elements and make the event a star-studded mega party with entertainment, food and beverage, and sports game all rolled into one. The HKTB and Hong Kong China Rugby jointly invited Oliver Phelps and James Phelps, who played the twins in the "Harry Potter" films, to enjoy the rugby game in Hong Kong and promote the city. Representatives of seven top-tier sports media firms from Korea were also invited to watch the game, experience outdoor events like horse racing in Hong Kong, and immerse in Hong Kong's charm as the Events Capital.

In addition, the HKTB has set up the Mega Event Development and Advancement Division (MEDA) since March 1 this year to serve as the first point of contact for mega events. The MEDA also works closely with stakeholders such as the event organisers to render all-round support, including assisting in publicity, to ensure smooth organisation of mega events in Hong Kong smoothly.

The Government has been utilising suitable locations in government premises for promoting mega events held in Hong Kong. In response to requests from departments hosting the events, the Government Property Agency has been making use of suitable government properties under its management (including joint-user government offices and boundary control points) for displaying large-scale advertisements at rooftop advertising spaces, external walls and/or prominent locations to publicise the relevant events as appropriate. Recent examples include the 15th National Games, Hong Kong Wine & Dine Festival, and Hong Kong WinterFest. The Government has provided advertising areas on suitable footbridges or pedestrian subways (such as the advertising areas at the Tsim Sha Tsui Interchange Subways and the Middle Road Subway) for use by government departments to promote and publicise their events. Government departments and organisations are also welcome to apply to the Highways Department (HyD) for hanging flags, buntings or decorative lights on the HyD's lampposts for event promotion.

Venues of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department also provide banner areas on external walls for promoting mega events organised in Hong Kong. For example, Chinese Culture Festival 2024 and Pokemon GO City Safari were advertised at Hong Kong Cultural Centre, which is a major performing venue, in Tsim Sha Tsui; A Path to Glory – Jin Yong's Centennial Memorial • Sculpted by Ren Zhe and Hong Kong Performing Arts Expo were publicised at Hong Kong City Hall in Central; Hong Kong Pop Culture Festival 2024 and 2024 Milwaukee Hong Kong Squash Open were promoted at Hong Kong Squash Centre which is a sports venue; and 2024 Hong Kong Snooker All-Star Challenge and

the 4th Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Culture and Arts Festival were promoted at Queen Elizabeth Stadium in Wan Chai.

Apart from the Government's publicity of different mega events, organisers of mega events have their responsibility to promote their events in locations and with means appropriate to the nature and target audience of the events. In fact, organisers of mega events are welcome to approach public transport operators to discuss advertising or other forms of commercial co-operation. The Airport Authority Hong Kong provides discounts for organisers of mega events on renting advertising spaces at Hong Kong International Airport to promote the mega events. The advertising panels installed at government tunnels and control areas are also available for rent for the purpose of mega events publicity. Examples of advertisements displayed include the Chinese New Year Cup, the 15th National Games, the 12th National Games for Persons with Disabilities and the 9th National Special Olympic Games.

We strongly encourage event organisers to allocate resources for promoting their events, such as through advertising and promotional campaigns. According to the prevailing tax arrangements, expenses on advertisement and promotional activities for promoting mega events are treated as marketing expenses and deductions can be claimed.

(4) Asia's first global museum of contemporary visual culture, M+ is dedicated to collecting, exhibiting, and interpreting visual art, design and architecture, moving image and Hong Kong visual culture of the twentieth and twenty first centuries. The M+ Facade is an important outdoor display space of the museum. Its functions align with the museum's galleries and showcase content related to arts and culture. All content displayed must be works commissioned by M+, moving image works from the museum's collections, the museum's artwork highlight videos, museum messages and brand videos. Since its launch, the M+ Facade has become a significant platform for presenting contemporary visual culture, offering the public and visitors innovative and engaging content that inspires intellectual reflection and moments of meditative contemplation. Since 2022, M+ has collaborated with Art Basel for four consecutive years and commissioned artists to present internationally representative visual culture programmes on the M+ Facade.

[Hong Kong Public Libraries launches “Journey with Words” online reading activities](#)

Hong Kong Public Libraries (HKPL) of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department and Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) Radio 5 are jointly

organising the online reading activity titled "Journey with Words" from December 2024 to June 2025. With the theme "journey", the activity aims to encourage members of the public to explore new perspectives and gain insights through the power of words, and utilise the e-book collections of the HKPL and various media to travel around different places.

The HKPL has a number of rich electronic collections, allowing readers to enjoy books anytime and anywhere. To encourage more members of the public to enjoy the convenience of e-reading, the HKPL has selected pieces of engaging articles from 100 books in the SUEP Chinese e-book collection and invited programme hosts of RTHK and HKPL Story Ambassadors to narrate the articles. The articles cover eight topics, namely culture, history, intangible cultural heritage, food and dining, cities, children, world and art.

The first 20 articles and recordings are now available under "Explore the Ocean of Books" on RTHK's Journey with Words website. The remaining articles will be uploaded in phases until June 2025. Besides reading and listening to the articles, members of the public can also access the SUEP e-Book collection to borrow the e-books after logging on to their HKPL accounts. Participants will receive a souvenir after completing the reading tasks and registration as set out on the Journey with Words website on or before June 30, 2025, while stocks last.

In addition, members of the public can participate in the Matching Quotes with Snapshots Competition through the Journey with Words website from now until January 6, 2025. Participants can select one of the 10 designated quotes on the website, take a photo in the theme of the selected quote, and submit the entry from the website after completing the online application form. Winners will receive a certificate and book coupons. The competition is suitable for persons of all ages, particularly children who can express their creativity and imagination under the guidance of their parents.

There are also Cultural and Creative Workshops held as parts of the "Journey with Words", where participants will visit studios of cultural and arts workers to listen to their sharings and exchange reading experiences. Workshops covering various topics will be held between January and May in 2025, which include fun calligraphy, fluid art bookmarks and landscape fan paintings. Details and the enrolment method will be announced on the Journey with Words website.

To encourage the public to integrate reading into their lives, another activity titled "City Hunt" will be launched as part of the "Journey with Words" in 2025. Participants will receive a souvenir after finding designated check-in spots that are related to the reading activities in various districts and tagging relevant photos on their social media accounts within a specified period. Please stay tuned to the Journey with Words website for the announcement of details.

For more information about the "Journey with Words" activities, please visit the HKPL web page:

www.hkpl.gov.hk/en/extension-activities/event-category/267805/journey-with-wo

[Hong Kong Customs alerts public to unsafe Christmas squeeze toy \(with photos\)](#)

Hong Kong Customs today (December 18) reminded members of the public to stay alert to an unsafe Christmas squeeze toy. Test results indicated that the eye component of the toy may detach and pose suffocation risks to children. To avoid an accident, parents should immediately stop their children from playing with the Christmas squeeze toy. Traders should also remove the Christmas squeeze toy from their shelves.

Customs officers earlier test-purchased various models of Christmas toys from retailers in different districts for safety testing. Test results revealed that the eye component of the Christmas toy concerned detached easily and could pass through the base of a testing template, posing a danger of suffocation for children if accidentally swallowed.

Customs later conducted an operation and searched the retailer's premises in connection with the case. Three suspected unsafe Christmas squeeze toys of the same model were seized and a prohibition notice was served at the same time to prohibit the continued sale of the Christmas squeeze toy by the retailer and the related wholesaler.

An investigation is ongoing.

Customs reminds members of the public to observe the following safety tips when purchasing and playing with toys:

- Pay attention to age recommendations shown on labels;
- Pay attention to and follow the instructions associated with the toys;
- Beware of whether the small parts of toys are easily detachable. Detached small parts may block a child's throat and lead to suffocation if swallowed;
- Check the structure of the toys to see, for example, whether they have a fragile structure, hidden sharp points, rough surfaces, sharp edges or gaps that may pinch children's fingers;
- Throw away plastic packages of toys and children's products to avoid children being suffocated; and
- Stop children from playing with the toys immediately if any damage is observed.

Customs is committed to the protection of consumer safety, and regularly conducts spot checks and safety tests on toys and children's products to ensure that they are reasonably safe for use by consumers.

Under the Toys and Children's Products Safety Ordinance, it is an offence to supply, manufacture or import unsafe toys or children's products. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$100,000 and imprisonment for one year on first conviction, and a fine of \$500,000 and imprisonment for two years on a subsequent conviction.

Members of the public may report information relating to suspected unsafe toys or children's products via Customs' 24-hour hotline 182 8080 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk) or online form (eform.cefs.gov.hk/form/ced002).



[LCQ14: Promoting development of low-altitude economy](#)

Following is a question by the Hon Elizabeth Quat and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Ms Mable Chan, in the Legislative Council today (December 18):

Question:

The Working Group on Developing Low-altitude Economy led by the Deputy Financial Secretary convened the first meeting earlier on to discuss the

overall strategies and work plan for developing the low-altitude economy (LAE), and announced that Regulatory Sandbox pilot projects (pilot projects) would be taken forward progressively starting from early next year. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether the Government will make reference to the practice of Guangdong Province and study the proactive formulation of a demand list of application scenarios for LAE in Hong Kong in respect of Regulatory Sandbox, so as to showcase the opportunities for collaboration between the Government and enterprises in the application scenarios for various areas of demand, such as low-altitude infrastructure, industry operations as well as production and manufacturing, thereby facilitating the precise supply-demand matchup in the industry chain and promoting the realisation and application as well as generational upgrading of cutting-edge technologies and innovative products;

(2) as there are views pointing out that applicants for pilot projects have to bear the costs involved in preparing the applications and conducting trials on their own at the current stage and this may deter the participation of small and medium enterprises, whether the Government will study setting aside funding to offer project-based subsidies to such applicants, thereby promoting the trial run of LAE locally;

(3) as it has been reported that while LAE comprises a complete industry chain and there is demand for insurance under each of the components, LAE insurance is still at the stage of research in Hong Kong, of the Government's plans to encourage insurance companies to develop insurance products targeting areas of commercial application for LAE (such as freight logistics, passenger transportation and urban management, etc.);

(4) whether the Government will study the use the Geographic Information System complemented with three-dimensional geospatial data to establish a flight path planning information platform similar to "One Map" on the Mainland, and further, with the support of real-time meteorological data and based on the demand for take-off and landing points as well as major flight paths, design a "highway" for low-altitude airspace; and

(5) as it is learnt that many government departments in Shunde District of Foshan City have already applied a shared drone inspection system to collect data required by various departments supplemented by artificial intelligence (AI) models to effectively identify various urban management problems (including unauthorised building works and fly-tipping of refuse, etc.), thereby enhancing the efficiency of urban management, whether the Government will, by drawing reference from the relevant experience, study making use of low-altitude technology coupled with AI technologies to further enhance the efficiency of urban management and governance efficacy?

Reply:

President,

â€‹The Working Group on Developing Low-altitude Economy (the Working

Group) led by the Deputy Financial Secretary convened its first meeting on November 12 this year. Apart from discussing the overall strategy and work plan for the development of low-altitude economy (LAE), the Working Group also formulated the details of the Regulatory Sandbox (Sandbox) pilot projects. The Government will implement the Sandbox pilot projects progressively starting from early next year to foster innovation and facilitate the testing of potential application scenarios of low-altitude flying activities.

In consultation with the Development Bureau, the Environment and Ecology Bureau, the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau, the Innovation, Technology and Industry Bureau, the Civil Aviation Department (CAD), the Environmental Protection Department and the Hong Kong Observatory (HKO), the reply to Hon Elizabeth Quat's question is as follows:

(1) and (2) The Government will carry out the Sandbox pilot projects by batches and the first batch of the pilot projects is now open for application. The pilot projects will be conducted under different scenarios to test various technical and ancillary facilities requirements, including the technical specifications of different types of unmanned aircraft, mobile radio communications networks, signal reception of global navigation satellite system, and requirements of the low-altitude surveillance system. We hope that the locations and routes of the trials can cover areas with different terrains, topography and development densities in Hong Kong, as well as different application scenarios. The objective is to progressively expand and enrich the scope of low-altitude flying applications.

The Sandbox pilot projects will provide a controlled and conducive environment to simulate diversified scenarios, multiple air routes and overarching low-altitude airspace management, allowing industry stakeholders to explore different application scenarios for LAE, while gathering data and experience at the same time to assist in the Government's informed decision making for the formulation of appropriate infrastructure, related supporting facilities as well as standard rules and practices for the long term development of low-altitude flying activities.

To leverage on the expertise of the industry, the Government has appointed the Hong Kong Productivity Council as technical partner, and the Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation and the Hong Kong Cyberport Management Company Limited as venue partners to facilitate the implementation of the pilot projects, while fostering the development of LAE industrial chain at the same time. The Government will also continue to closely monitor and make reference to the application areas for LAE in Mainland cities, and make corresponding deployments in Hong Kong in accordance with local circumstances.

Regarding the Government's funding support to the pilot projects, the Government has all along been supporting research and development (R&D) in different technology areas through different funding schemes. For example, the Innovation and Technology Fund (ITF) has been supporting local universities, R&D centres and enterprises to conduct R&D in electronics, data

transfer and processing, which are related to LAE, through its funding schemes. To promote the development of the innovation and technology industry, the Government encourages enterprises (including those involved in industries related to LAE) to set up R&D centres and new smart production lines in Hong Kong, including enabling production activities by capitalising on resources of Hong Kong's existing manufacturing industry, to promote the development of the real economy.

(3) The existing Small Unmanned Aircraft (SUA) Order (Cap. 448G) adopts a risk-based approach in regulating SUA operations. SUA operations of different risks, irrespective of their intended use, are subject to corresponding regulatory requirements based on the weight of the SUA and the level of risks involved in its operations, including insurance requirements.

On the premise of safeguarding aviation and public safety, and having balanced the readiness of the market, the mandatory insurance requirements are implemented in a phased approach. The first phase, which has been implemented with immediate effect from the commencement of the SUA Order since June 2022, is mandatory insurance for advanced operations requiring Category B operations to take out insurance to cover liability for bodily injury and/or death of a third party, with a minimum sum insured of \$10 million. The second phase will be mandatory insurance for Category A2 operations, with a minimum sum insured of \$5 million against third party bodily injury and/or death. This requirement will come into operation on a later date to be specified by the Director-General of Civil Aviation by notice published in the Gazette. At present, there are insurance products available in the market that comply with the existing regulatory regime under the SUA Order. The CAD has also been maintaining close communication with the insurance industry to keep abreast of the latest market situation.

To tie in with the development of LAE, the Government has started to review the existing civil aviation legislation and regulatory regime (including the insurance requirements for the operation of different types of unmanned aircraft) and will carry out the legislative amendment work in phases. Under the first phase, the existing SUA Order will be amended to cover unmanned aircraft weighing more than 25kg but not exceeding 150kg. These unmanned aircraft will be subject to specified requirements, including insurance requirements.

Depending on the progress of the pilot projects under various application scenarios for LAE, the risk data collected and the relevant legislative requirements in the future, the Government will continue to maintain close communication with the insurance industry and facilitate the industry in the cultivation and launch of corresponding insurance products for the development of LAE.

(4) and (5) The Government attaches great importance to the safe and efficient development of LAE and understands the importance of the Geographic Information System (GIS) and three-dimensional (3D) geospatial data in the planning of air route networks in low-altitude airspace. The Government will make reference to the experience of the Mainland and other regions and embark

on technical studies and planning for low-altitude infrastructure, including take-off/landing sites, communication networks, air route networks, low-altitude surveillance and management systems. The studies will also include the feasibility of using GIS technology and 3D geospatial data, as well as the integration of real-time meteorological information. In particular, the HKO is considering how to integrate real-time meteorological data to meet the specific needs of LAE for meteorological information, in particular at the low-altitude take-off/landing points as well as along the major air corridors. Concurrently, the HKO will collaborate with relevant government departments and industries to explore the utilisation of new technologies, including new observation systems, to provide meteorological support for the management and information platforms of the low-altitude airspace.

Furthermore, the Common Spatial Data Infrastructure managed by the Spatial Data Office (SDO) under Development Bureau has collected more than 900 spatial datasets from over 60 departments and organisations. Such information covers areas including maps, roads, traffic condition, land use, buildings, engineering and weather. The TLB, the CAD and the SDO are in discussion to explore using spatial data to help draw up the flight paths of low-altitude aircraft, among other things.

The Government's target is to formulate a multi-layered development framework which can accommodate Advanced Air Mobility of different classifications and operating parameters, satisfy the needs of major applications such as logistics, community delivery, urban management and public services, and address the local circumstances in Hong Kong. Under the framework of the existing SUA Order, various government departments make use of SUA to enhance the efficiency of urban management and public services, such as building surveying work, land surveying and management work, detection of land irregularities, monitoring of illegal pollution and marine dumping activities, operations of large-scale polluting plants, progress of development works, assisting in evidence collection for prosecution actions, integrating artificial intelligence (AI) technology for investigation and maintenance of sewage facilities. Various government departments will actively explore ways to integrate unmanned aircraft applications with AI technologies to further enhance the efficiency of urban management and public services.

At the same time, the Working Group also encourages various government bureaux and departments to actively participate in the Sandbox pilot projects to broaden the scope of unmanned aircraft applications in enhancing urban management and public services. We believe that the wider use of unmanned aircraft by the Government can spearhead industry efforts to expand application scenarios for low-altitude flying activities.

LCQ22: Initiatives to encourage childbearing

Following is a question by Professor the Hon Chow Man-kong and a written reply by the Deputy Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Cheuk Wing-hing, in the Legislative Council today (December 18):

Question:

Since last year, the Government has been encouraging childbearing through the introduction of policies and initiatives such as the "Newborn Baby Bonus" ("the Bonus"), priority arrangements for subsidised sale flats and public rental housing, as well as supporting assisted reproductive services. There are views that the Government still needs to strengthen the relevant policy directions in order to reverse the persistently low fertility rate in Hong Kong. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number and percentage of applications submitted under the "Families with Newborns Flat Selection Priority Scheme" in the "Sale of Home Ownership Scheme Flats 2024";

(2) whether it will further introduce a combination of financial measures to encourage childbearing, i.e. apart from the Bonus, consider extending the arrangement for additional child allowance to the first three years of assessment following the birth of each child, introducing tax deduction on expenses for employing foreign domestic helpers, as well as subsidising the expenses for antenatal check-ups incurred by couples, so as to respond to the actual needs of different sectors of society (especially the middle class); if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) given that in October this year, the General Office of the State Council issued a circular entitled "Several Measures for Accelerating Improvement of Reproduction Policy Support Systems and Promoting the Establishment of a Reproduction-friendly Society", and the relevant specific measures include (i) setting up a childbearing subsidy, implementing care services for infants and children under the age of three, implementing a special policy on additional deduction of individual income tax on children's education, and enhancing support for families with many children to purchase homes, (ii) providing welfare-based child care services, and organising and carrying out child care activities during the summer and winter holidays as well as after-school hours to proactively assist workers in shouldering the pressure of child-rearing, and (iii) creating a batch of high-quality movies and TV dramas, stage dramas as well as web-based cultural and art works, increasing the production of, among others, thematic programmes and public service advertisements, and encouraging and guiding the participation of communities, units and individuals to jointly create a reproduction-friendly social environment, whether the authorities will consider implementing the aforesaid measures and encourage private organisations to follow the relevant

arrangements, so as to create a more favourable environment for child-rearing; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Hong Kong and many countries or places worldwide are facing a decline in fertility rate. In the face of this challenge, the Government must formulate measures to raise fertility rate. As such, the Chief Executive announced in his 2023 Policy Address a host of measures to promote fertility and create a conducive environment for childbearing through a " combination punches " approach. These measures include providing Newborn Baby Bonus, giving families with newborns priority on flat selection and allocation, enhancing child care support and increasing tax concessions. The implementation of the Newborn Baby Bonus is administrated by the Deputy Chief Secretary for Administration 's Office, while Bureaux involved in the implementation of other measures include the Housing Bureau, the Labour and Welfare Bureau, the Health Bureau, the Education Bureau, the Home and Youth Affairs Bureau and the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau.

In consultation with the relevant Bureaux, the consolidated reply to the questions raised by Professor the Hon Chow Man-kong is as follows:

(1) The Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) has implemented the Families with Newborns Flat Selection Priority Scheme (Priority Newborns Scheme) as scheduled, starting from 2024 under the Home Ownership Scheme (HOS) sale exercise as announced in the 2023 Policy Address. A quota of about 40 per cent of the new flats (i.e. 2 900 flats) under the Sale of HOS flats 2024 (HOS 2024) has been set aside for eligible applicants under the Priority Newborns Scheme and the Priority Scheme for Families with Elderly Members for balloting and priority flat selection. Family applicants of HOS with babies born on or after October 25, 2023 will be eligible if their children are aged three or below on the closing day of the application of HOS.

During the application period of HOS 2024, the HA received a total of around 106 000 applications, 50 000 of which were family applicants. Among these applications, around 16 000 and 3 000 applications came under the Priority Scheme for Families with Elderly Members and the Priority Newborns Scheme respectively, corresponding to about 30 per cent and 10 per cent of the total number of family applicants respectively.

In addition, regarding the allocation of public rental housing (PRH) flats, the HA has implemented the Families with Newborns Allocation Priority Scheme since April 1, 2024. PRH family applications with babies born on or after October 25, 2023 and aged one or below will have their waiting time deducted by one year. As at end-November 2024, about 3 000 eligible PRH family applications under the scheme have their waiting time reduced by one year, of which 170 families have already been successfully housed to PRH.

(2) The Government announced in the 2023 Policy Address that a cash reward of \$20,000 will be provided to eligible parents for each baby born from October

25, 2023, for a period of three years. Starting from October 25, 2023, parents can submit an application for the bonus at the same time when registering the birth of their baby and applying for a birth certificate. As of end-November 2024, a total of 32 811 qualified applications have been received, and the bonus has been distributed to 32 107 applicants, at a total amount of approximately \$640 million. We plan to conduct a review two years after the bonus is launched.

As regards tax concessions, starting from the year of assessment (YA) 2023/24, the basic child allowance and the additional child allowance for each child born during the year of assessment have been raised from \$120,000 to \$130,000. In addition, starting from YA 2024/25, for taxpayers who live with their children born on or after October 25, 2023 and meet the prescribed conditions, the deduction ceiling for home loan interest or domestic rents will be raised from \$100,000 to \$120,000 for a maximum of 19 YAs. These measures can encourage childbearing by helping to alleviate the financial burden of taxpayers from raising children.

In respect of the proposals to extend the claim period of additional child allowance and to introduce tax deduction for expenditure on hiring foreign domestic helpers, the Government must ensure that a balance is struck between promoting relevant policy objectives and exercising fiscal prudence, especially at a time when the Government's fiscal deficit is high. For the latter, the Government must also examine whether the proposal should apply to similar services (including the hire of local domestic helpers) and the possible implications. The Government has no plan to adopt the said proposals at this stage.

As regards the proposal of subsidising the expenses for antenatal check-ups incurred by couples, currently the Obstetrics and Gynaecology Departments of the Hospital Authority and the Maternal and Child Health Centres (MCHCs) of the Department of Health (DH) provide free antenatal services for all local pregnant women who are eligible persons (who generally refer to holders of Hong Kong Identity Cards or such other persons as may be approved by the Chief Executive of the Hospital Authority/ Director of Health) to ensure the health of the pregnant women and their fetuses. The scope of services includes the first antenatal check-up, personal and family medical history, as well as various investigations and vaccinations conducted by doctors according to the clinical needs of individual pregnant women. Generally speaking, pregnant women receive check-ups every four to six weeks before the 28th week of pregnancy, every two to four weeks between the 28th and 36th weeks of pregnancy, and every one to two weeks after the 36th week. The Obstetrics and Gynaecology departments of public hospitals will make appropriate arrangements according to the circumstances of individual pregnant women.

Besides, as announced in the 2024 Policy Address, the DH will revamp maternal and child health and family planning services to strengthen pre-pregnancy counselling and parental education and promote healthy fertility. The DH will provide the new pre-pregnancy health services to reproductive age group women at the MCHCs in phases, support women in preparing for pregnancy through health consultation and counselling, health assessments, arrangement

of blood tests and other investigations, and provide nutritional dietary and lifestyle advice, to align with the Government's policy of encouraging and promoting healthy fertility as well as protecting and advancing maternal and child health. In addition, the DH will review and adjust the scope of the subsidised family planning service currently provided by non-government organisations (NGOs), so as to dovetail with the Government's policy of encouraging and promoting healthy fertility. Details on the above initiatives will be announced at an appropriate juncture.

(3) The Hong Kong SAR Government (HKSARG) is implementing different family-friendly measures, which are in the same direction as the "Several Measures for Accelerating Improvement of Reproduction Policy Support Systems and Promoting the Establishment of a Reproduction-friendly Society" issued by the General Office of the State Council. Specific measures implemented by the HKSARG include:

(i) Strengthen the construction of childcare service system: the Government has been supporting parents who cannot take care of their young children temporarily through subsidising NGOs to provide a variety of day child care services, including Child Care Centre (CCC) services for children aged from birth to under 3, an After School Care Programme and a Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project (NSCCP). To strengthen support for working families in childbearing, the Government has announced the setting up of an addition of 11 aided standalone CCCs in phases, doubling the total number of service places to reach around 2 000. The Government is extending the After School Care Programme for Pre-primary Children to cover all districts in phases, and increasing the number of service places under NSCCP to 2 500 with the estimated number of beneficiaries increasing to 25 000. The Government also launched the School-based After School Care Service Scheme to provide focused support for students in need (particularly those from single-parent families) to stay in school after school hours for care and learning support, thereby allowing their parents to take up jobs. Over 110 primary schools covering 18 districts across the territory participated in the scheme in the 2024/25 school year, providing about 6 000 places. Subject to the actual utilisation and outcome of the scheme, we plan to encourage more schools to participate in the scheme in the 2025/26 school year, without imposing any quota; and

(ii) Strengthen the support measures for education: with the Kindergarten Education Scheme implemented since the 2017/18 school year by the Education Bureau, about 90 per cent of half-day kindergartens are currently free of charge, while the school fees for whole-day kindergartens are maintained at a low level. Families with financial needs may apply for fee remission under the Kindergarten and Child Care Centre Fee Remission Scheme (KCFRS). Starting from the 2022/23 school year, the fee remission ceiling under the KCFRS has been raised from the 75th percentile in the past to the 100th percentile charged by respective half-day and whole-day kindergartens joining the Kindergarten Education Scheme. In other words, parents can receive full level of fee remission and need not pay any difference in school fees. Besides, the Education Bureau has regularised the provision of student grant starting from the 2020/21 school year. All students studying in secondary day-schools, primary schools and special schools as well as kindergartens will receive a

student grant of \$2,500 every school year to alleviate parents' burden in education expenses; and

(iii) Create a fertility-friendly social atmosphere: the Home and Youth Affairs Bureau has been supporting the work of the Family Council in promoting a culture of loving families, as well as encouraging the wider adoption of more diversified and flexible family-friendly employment practices (FFEPs) in the community. These measures will also help promote a childbearing-friendly environment. Since 2023/24, the Family Council has been launching promotional videos entitled "Family-friendly Workplace" featuring various FFEPs adopted by local companies/ organisations with sharing by employers and employees. The FFEPs presented include breastfeeding-friendly arrangements, allowing employees to bring their children to work during summer vacation, work-from-home arrangement and flexible work hours. The Family Council has also collaborated with Radio Television Hong Kong to produce radio programmes to promulgate different FFEPs. The Family Council will continue the relevant promotion work.

The HKSARG will continue to keep in view the implementation of various measures to promote fertility and will conduct reviews at an appropriate time.