

## LCQ17: Barrier-free facilities in public rental housing estates

Following is a question by the Hon Holden Chow and a written reply by Secretary for Housing, Ms Winnie Ho, in the Legislative Council today (November 27):

Question:

It is learnt that the Government had not published the Design Manual: Barrier Free Access ("the Design Manual") when some aged public rental housing ("PRH") estates were constructed, resulting in the design of these estates failing to meet the current requirements on barrier-free facilities. Some residents of these estates have relayed that the surfaces of the footpaths in the estates are mostly uneven and there is a lack of covered access connecting the buildings. Moreover, some buildings do not provide lift services for all floors, causing inconvenience to the daily lives of people such as the elderly and wheelchair users. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number and names of PRH estates that have not been designed in accordance with the requirements stipulated in the Design Manual;

(2) whether it has plans to enhance the barrier-free facilities in aged PRH estates in the light of the "Well-being design" guide introduced for PRH, using the Design Manual as the standard; if so, of the estates involved and the details of the enhancement work; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) whether it will construct barrier-free access in aged PRH estates that comply with the requirements stipulated in the Design Manual, provide level access exclusively for wheelchair users to alleviate their plight of difficulty in travelling, and retrofit covers for access between buildings; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(4) as the Design Manual specifies that "[w]here it is impractical to provide a passenger lift or a ramp, a self-operated vertical lifting platform should be considered as a reasonable alternative for vertical circulation for wheelchair users", and it is learnt that the lifts at Oi Shun House, Yau Oi Estate, Tuen Mun can only reach the 23rd floor, and residents have to use the stairs to reach the 24th floor, and that there are no barrier-free facilities between floors, whether the authorities have compiled statistics on the current number of aged PRH estates in Hong Kong with such a situation; if so, set out in a table the names of such estates, and whether the authorities will retrofit inclined or vertical lifting platforms in the buildings of such estates; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) endeavours to enhance barrier-free access and facilities in public rental housing (PRH) estates to meet the needs of PRH residents, especially the elderly and persons with disabilities. HA has adopted the concept of "Universal Design" in new estates to provide an inclusive and harmonious living environment for people with different physical abilities.

In addition to the provision of barrier-free facilities in common areas, the elderly or persons with disabilities can apply to HA for adaptation works on facilities in PRH flats if they have special needs in terms of movement. To better address the special needs of individual elderly persons and tenants in need, with reference to the advice from doctors, physiotherapists, occupational therapists or medical social workers, etc., HA carries out adaptation works free of charge for the tenants concerned. These works include provision of a ramp at the entrance of the flat where feasible, widening the doorway of bathrooms, laying anti-skid floor tiles on suitable floor surface, etc. If a tenant requests only for the installation of grab bars or conversion of a bath tub into a shower area in the bathroom, HA will directly arrange the relevant works for the tenant free of charge, without the need for tenants to seek advice from doctors or physiotherapists.

Moreover, in order to enhance the co-ordination work on barrier-free issues and to provide timely provision of assistance to residents, HA has launched the Access Co-ordinator and Access Officer Scheme since 2011. Access Officers station in various PRH estates to assist persons with disabilities in using the barrier-free access and facilities in PRH estates.

My reply to the respective parts of the question raised by the Hon Holden Chow is as follows:

(1) The "Design Manual: Barrier Free Access" (DM) stipulates the Mandatory Section and the Best Practice Section. It is the established policy of HA to comply with the prevailing requirements as set out in the DM on the provision of barrier-free access and facilities, wherever practicable. In view of the introduction of the "DM 1997" and "DM 2008", HA implemented improvement works in 2001 and 2010 respectively on its premises which were completed before the launch of the DM to provide necessary barrier-free facilities. The improvement works included providing ramps, installing suitable handrails at access routes, providing and adding tactile guide paths connecting main estate entrances to major facilities within estate area and entrances of residential blocks, etc. In some individual HA buildings, subject to different constraints such as building design, there may not be complete provision of the relevant facilities. Since DM covers an array of requirements and guidelines, HA did not keep comprehensive statistics related to all the requirements. All new HA buildings with construction commenced after December 1, 2008 as well as alterations and additions works to existing HA buildings shall meet the mandatory requirements as stipulated in "DM 2008" as far as practicable.

(2) In September this year, HA has published the "Well-being Design Guide"

which includes well-being concepts such as "Age-friendliness" and "Urban Integration" covering design suggestions for enhancing barrier-free access facilities. Besides application in new projects, HA would also take into account the situation of individual PRH estates and apply the relevant design concepts in existing estates. HA would enhance public spaces, facilities and environment of estates through two pilot projects namely "Let's Go Well-being" and "Well-being Design Pretest" and "HAPPY Family" and "Colourful and Fun Estate Project". Throughout the projects, the design team would invite residents and stakeholders to participate in discussions and workshops on design to collect suggestions for the improvement works, with a view to applying the well-being design ideas in suitable spaces in the estates. Should the pilot projects be well received, HA would take the projects as a basis to gradually extend the improvement works to other suitable PRH estates.

Currently, the pilot projects cover Kai Yip Estate, Fu Shan Estate, Chak On Estate, Shui Pin Wai Estate, Mei Lam Estate, Butterfly Estate, On Ting Estate, Kwai Fong Estate, Wan Hon Estate, Shun Tin Estate, Kai Tin Estate, Hing Man Estate, Yue Wan Estate, Sun Chui Estate, Lee On Estate, Ping Shek Estate, Lung Tin Estate, Shek Wai Kok Estate, Hung Hom Estate, Fu Cheong Estate, Tsz Lok Estate, Choi Yuen Estate, Tai Yuen Estate, Sam Shing Estate and Yau Oi Estate. The first phase of works for some estates (such as Wan Hon Estate, On Ting Estate and Yue Wan Estate) had been completed, providing social seatings and service counters that were convenient for the elderly and persons with disabilities in the estates. The improvement works for the remaining estates will also be completed by phase from 2025 to 2027.

(3) An Access Officer has been appointed in all individual premises under HA to provide assistance to persons with disabilities in accessing premises and using services and facilities therein, as well as handle enquiries regarding accessibility issues of the venue. In addition to the regular checks conducted by Access Officers, when estate staff identify defects and deficiencies in barrier-free access and facilities during daily patrols, they will take immediate follow-up actions including repairs to uneven footpaths. Regarding provision of access route exclusively for wheelchair users and addition of covered walkway in aged PRH estates, HA has to first conduct feasibility study and consider a number of factors, including constraints of Universal Design, management, and technical concerns about constructions, views of various stakeholders, statutory and leasing constraints, permitted plot ratio, etc., before commencing construction works where practicable. HA has previously taken forward the addition of covered walkways in aged PRH estates such as On Ting Estate, Cheung Hong Estate, and Kwai Shing West Estate, connecting major facilities within estates area and facilitate residents' access.

With regard to various facilities in PRH estates, HA will continue to actively communicate with district communities/individuals as well as residents in PRH estates and conduct studies to explore the alterations or additions of facilities in estates to cater for the need of various persons in estates, including the elderly, persons with disabilities etc.

(4) HA strives to retrofit lift entrances on floors without lift access,

where practicable. In addition, HA launched the "Lift Addition Programme" in 2008, retrofitting lifts within PRH estates, including in PRH blocks without lifts, to enhance pedestrian access and to provide barrier-free access for residents with a view to facilitating their use. HA has completed the works of retrofitting lifts to its PRH blocks where technically feasible and cost-effective. Currently, nearly 99 per cent of HA's PRH flats were provided with lift services.

For instance, Yau Oi Estate in Tuen Mun, which was built in the late 1970s, was designed in accordance with the public housing standards at that time, and hence the DM published in 1997 was not adapted. That said, due to building design constraints, it was not feasible to install lift entrances on the top floor of Oi Shun House. HA has also studied the installation of vertical lifting platforms between the 23rd and 24th floors of Oi Shun House, but it was proven the installation would be unsuitable due to the limitations of existing spaces and building design. Furthermore, according to current building fire safety requirements, non-fire services installations, such as inclined lifting platforms (also known as stair lifts), cannot be installed in fire escape staircases. Since all staircases in Oi Shun House are fire escape staircases, it is unsuitable to install inclined lifting platforms in Oi Shun House. In view of these circumstances, currently it is difficult for HA to install the aforementioned two devices in Oi Shun House. That said, HA will continue to keep in view the development of new technologies and review the feasibility of improvement works as necessary.

To facilitate the access of elderly residents or tenants with disabilities who live on floors without lift services, the current policy allows them to apply for transfer to other flats in the same estate or other estates. HA will make suitable arrangements as far as practicable. Over the past three years, HA has approved about 180 cases of such special transfer.

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## **LCQ10: Smart Village Pilots**

Following is a question by the Hon Martin Liao and a written reply by the Secretary for Innovation, Technology and Industry, Professor Sun Dong, in the Legislative Council today (November 27):

Question:

The Government published the Smart City Blueprint for Hong Kong 2.0 in 2020, which covers initiatives including the implementation of the Smart Village Pilots (the Pilots). In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that the Pilots include the provision of telehealth services for the elderly living in remote areas, and the Hospital Authority (HA) has set

up "health huts" in some village offices in North District and Islands District where elderly people suffering from chronic diseases may receive remote medical consultations in the villages, and HA has also stated that it will extend such service to as much as 20 to 30 villages in 2024-2025, whether the Government knows (i) the details of and considerations in site selection by HA, (ii) if HA has plans to extend such service to other remote villages, and (iii) if HA has assessed the feasibility of further expanding the target group and scope of the service (i.e. not limiting consultation services to elderly people suffering from chronic diseases); if HA has, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) as there are views that communication networks are the key infrastructure for building smart villages, and the Government has already been providing free Wi-Fi service at over 150 village premises, whether the authorities will draw up a timetable for further extending free Wi-Fi service to more village premises, and review in a timely manner the quality of the Wi-Fi network operations (e.g. network speed and stability), so as to ensure that the quality of the networks can meet the needs of villagers in using various types of electronic services; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it will consider drawing reference from digital cultural tourism projects such as the Cloud Museum of Dunhuang Caves mini programme of the Mainland to further consolidate information on rural tourism in Hong Kong, so as to optimise users' experience; whether it will strengthen inter-sectoral cooperation with the tourism, media and innovation and technology sectors, and make use of innovative technologies such as augmented reality, artificial intelligence, digital interactive technology and 3D modelling, so as to promote the conservation and publicity of rural culture in digital form; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the Health Bureau, the Environment and Ecology Bureau, the Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau and relevant departments, a consolidated reply in response to the questions raised by the Hon Liao is as follows:

(1) As part of the Government's Smart Village Pilots, the Hospital Authority (HA) has been promoting the provision of telehealth services to suitable patients residing in remote areas, particularly the elderly and individuals with limited mobility, with a view to enhancing patient convenience and service efficiency. The HA will arrange medical and nursing services through telehealth, having taken into account the patient's clinical stability, clinical needs, and operational feasibility. In general, telehealth services are more suitable for chronic patients who are clinically stable, follow-up patients, and those who do not need to visit hospitals to undergo physical examinations.

Patients residing in remote areas who are suitable for telehealth

services can receive consultations and follow-up care from doctors through the HA Go mobile application, without visiting hospitals in person. Moreover, the HA will coordinate with some village offices and Rural Committees to provide guidance, facilities and related arrangements for telehealth services for patients in need, including conducting telehealth consultations at the "health huts" established in the area.

At present, the HA's telehealth services are provided in the North District (such as Fanling, Sheung Shui, Sha Tau Kok, and Ta Kwu Ling) and outlying islands (such as Peng Chau, Cheung Chau, Lamma Island, Mui Wo, Tai O, Tap Mun, Ko Lau Wan, Kat O, High Island, Ma Wan and the southern part of Lantau Island), covering around 50 villages and serving approximately 1 200 attendances annually. The HA plans to extend its service to 60 villages by early 2025. The site selection criteria include technical readiness (such as availability of communication devices and network stability) and collaborative arrangements with relevant stakeholders (such as village offices and non-profit organisations).

Besides, the HA has progressively implemented telehealth in suitable healthcare services, including some Specialist Out-patient Clinics, General Out-patient Clinics, Nurse Clinics and Allied Health Clinics, etc. The HA will regularly review the effectiveness of telehealth services with a view to better supporting patients' needs and improving cost-effectiveness.

(2) The Government launched the "Subsidy Scheme to Extend Fibre-based Networks to Villages in Remote Areas" in 2018, with a view to providing financial incentives for the fixed network operators to extend their fibre-based networks to rural and remote areas. At present, fibre-based networks have been rolled out to more than 200 villages. The Government has also provided free public Wi-Fi services at over 150 village premises, which are managed by service providers on a day-to-day basis. Such management includes real-time monitoring and provision of prompt maintenance where necessary in accordance with contract requirements to ensure the normal operation of the Wi-Fi services.

Moreover, the Government consulted the industry in mid-2024 on the "Subsidy Scheme to Extend 5G Coverage in Rural and Remote Areas" and is currently reviewing the feedback received to finalise the arrangement of improving 5G coverage in villages. As for the free public Wi-Fi services, the Government will review from time to time the needs of other village premises not yet covered, technical feasibility and views of local residents before deciding whether to extend the services to more village premises.

(3) The Government is dedicated to promoting smart tourism to enhance the travel experience for visitors so as to strengthen Hong Kong's competitiveness as a premier tourism destination. With regard to rural tourism, we have integrated smart elements into various attractions and tourism projects and made use of smart technology to foster the preservation and promotion of Hong Kong's countryside and nature.

For example, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department launched the "Enjoy Hiking" thematic website ([hiking.gov.hk](http://hiking.gov.hk)) in 2019 to

provide the public with detailed information on hiking routes and attractions. The website compiles and provides information on the features, scenic spots, and transportation of various hiking routes and attractions, making it convenient for the public and visitors to plan hiking activities and experience the natural beauty and cultural history of the countryside. For example, the website introduces the Sheung Yiu Folk Museum at the Pak Tam Chung Nature Trail, various ancient trails within the country parks, etc.

Hong Kong UNESCO Global Geopark (Hong Kong Geopark) launched the "Same Roots & Same Origins" project in 2017. This initiative preserves village culture by oral history, with innovative technological elements added to enrich visitor experience. Hong Kong Geopark has launched online 3D virtual tours for Geopark communities (including Kau Sai Village and Yim Tin Tsai, as well as story rooms at Lai Chi Wo, Ap Chau, Kat O and Kau Sai Village), and developed the "Our Stories" webpages to feature the oral history of Seven Villages of the Hing Chun Alliance ([ourstories.hk](http://ourstories.hk)) and Kat O ([luckyharbour.hk](http://luckyharbour.hk)). In addition, the Kat O Heritage Trail was established, allowing visitors to listen to villagers and geopark guides telling stories about the island by scanning the QR code on interpretation panels.

The Countryside Conservation Office (CCO) under the Environment and Ecology Bureau is also establishing Smart Countryside Conservation Trails (CCTs) in Lai Chi Wo and Mui Tsz Lam, and Kuk Po, which are expected to be rolled out gradually in 2025. Similarly, visitors may scan the QR codes on information panels to access audio guides and short videos for an in-depth insight of the stories behind the village attractions. The CCTs will later be enhanced with an application incorporating Augmented Reality for visitors to check-in at relevant points of interest. 3D virtual tour will also be available on the CCO's dedicated website for visitors to explore the CCTs anytime and anywhere.

Moreover, the Tourism Commission incorporated the use of virtual tour technology in various tourism projects. The websites of both "Yim Tin Tsai Arts Festival" and "Sai Kung Hoi Arts Festival" provide virtual tours with a 360-degree virtual reality function and audio guides to facilitate visitors' further understanding of the creative concepts of artworks. All the artworks and signage of the two festivals are also provided with QR codes connecting to the websites of the Festivals. One of the artworks displayed at Yim Tin Tsai curated under Sai Kung Hoi Arts Festival 2024 also utilises the application of augmented reality to express the emotions and memories of villagers leaving and returning home.

The Government will continue to promote smart tourism in different areas to enhance visitors' experience.

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## LCQ19: Policy on development of international schools

Following is a question by the Hon Tang Fei and a written reply by the Acting Secretary for Education, Dr Sze Chun-fai, in the Legislative Council today (November 27):

Question:

There are views that Hong Kong is facing a demographic problem brought by a low birth rate and the persistent under-enrolment in schools on the one hand, while the number of applications for late admission of dependent children of arrivals under various talent admission schemes has increased sharply on the other, posing new challenges to the supply and demand of school places. Meanwhile, the policy of allocating vacant school premises/school sites for the development of international schools has further affected the allocation of local education resources. Regarding the policy on the development of international schools, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of applications received and approved by the authorities from school sponsoring bodies of international schools applying for operation in Hong Kong in each of the past five years; the factors on which the authorities based in approving the applications from international schools for operation;

(2) under the policy of allocating vacant school premises/school sites for the development of international schools, of the criteria by which the Government allocates sites for the development of international schools; how it ensures that the provision of sites for the development of international schools does not undermine local education resources at the same time; and

(3) whether it knows the respective requirements for local and non-local students under the enrolment policies of international schools and private schools newly applying for operation; how the Government ensures that, after the conversion of aided schools to private schools, sufficient aided school places can still be maintained in Hong Kong to uphold educational equity?

Reply:

President,

The education system in Hong Kong provides parents with diversified and high-quality choices. The Government's policy objective is to provide 12 years' free primary and secondary education to all children through public sector schools. Apart from publicly-funded schools, private schools in Hong Kong have been playing a unique role in offering local and non-local curricula according to their mission. International schools belong to the



private school sector and operate on a self-financing and market-driven basis. In general, they are not subsidised by public funds for capital costs and daily operation.

The Government is committed to supporting the development of a vibrant international school sector, mainly to meet the demand for school places from non-local families living in Hong Kong and families coming to Hong Kong for work or investment. This policy objective is crucial in attracting and retaining talent in support of Hong Kong's development as an international centre on finance, business, innovation and technology, education and culture, and reinforcing Hong Kong's role as an international cosmopolitan with global connectivity.

Regarding the question asked by Hon Tang Fei, the reply is as follows:

(1) and (2) There are 54 international schools (including one special school) in Hong Kong. There is no newly established international school in the past five years. In the 2023/24 school year, international schools admitted about 42 100 students, accounting for 6.4 per cent of primary and secondary students in Hong Kong. There are two ways to set up an international school in Hong Kong:

(i) Application for registration as a private school first and seek recognition as an international school: School sponsoring body may identify private land and/or school premises in Hong Kong for operation of school and apply to the Education Bureau (EDB) for registration as private school. After the private school has been in operation for a certain period of time, the school operator may then seek the EDB's recognition of the school as an international school subject to its fulfillment of relevant requirements. The start-up requirements include at least 70 per cent of the school places allocated to non-local students (Note), a proven track record of school operation and full accreditation from an established accreditation body, a sustainable financial plan.

(ii) Participation in the School Allocation Exercise (SAE): The supply of international school places is planned on a territory-wide basis. The EDB commissions a consultancy study from time to time on the provision of international school places at primary and secondary levels in Hong Kong. When there is a projected shortfall of international school places, the Government will allocate greenfield sites or vacant school premises (VSPs) for international school use through an open and competitive bidding mechanism as appropriate, to increase the number of international school places. It has been 10 years since the last allocation of greenfield sites and VSPs to international schools (in 2014). In the light of the overwhelming response to various talent admission schemes in the past two years, the EDB is conducting an SAE to allocate two VSPs offering some school places in meeting any short-term surge in education needs of dependant children of incoming talent from both the Mainland and overseas.

All along, the vast majority of education expenditure and land resources have been allocated to publicly-funded schools. For example, since the

implementation of the existing SAE mechanism in 1999, the Government has allocated 156 school sites or VSPs for public sector primary and secondary schools. During the same period, the Government allocated only 16 school sites or VSPs for international school development. Since 2017, the EDB has sought funding approval from the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council and completed a total of 37 school building projects during the period, all of which are public sector school projects except one was an international school redevelopment project.

(3) Private schools, which operate on a self-financing and market-driven basis, may set their own school-based admission requirements and procedures for admitting students (including non-local students who have been approved to study or reside in Hong Kong). The requirement on the percentage of non-local students to be admitted applies to the international schools operated by the English Schools Foundation and the new campuses of international schools which entered into a service agreement with the EDB upon allocation of school premises or sites since 2007. These schools/campuses were required to enrol no less than 50 per cent of non-local students, and the percentage has been raised to 70 per cent by the EDB since 2009, in accordance with the terms of the service agreements. As Hong Kong has returned to normalcy and has been actively attracting more foreign investment and talent to the territory, the EDB expects that the number of non-local students, including those from the Mainland and overseas, to be admitted by international schools will increase gradually.

The EDB will continue to closely monitor the number of newly-arrived children and the demand for school places of the dependants of various talent schemes, and to conduct dynamic assessment of the demand for and supply of school places, as well as reserve sufficient school places in public sector schools for eligible school-age children. Should an existing publicly-funded school wish to cease operation and convert into a private school, it has to apply to the EDB for change of its mode of operation and for registration. The EDB will consider a basket of factors, including the lease conditions and restrictions on the use of the land of the school, curriculum planning, class structure, staff establishment, etc, to ensure that the school is capable of providing quality education.

Note: Local students refer to those who are Hong Kong permanent residents (with the right of abode in Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR)) and do not have any valid passport other than HKSAR Passport. Students not covered by this definition are all regarded as non-local students.

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**[Tenders invited for tenancies at Heung](#)**

# Yuen Wai Boundary Control Point

The Government Property Agency (GPA) is inviting two separate tenders for (i) Shop No. 1 and (ii) Shop No. 2, both on the Ground Floor, Passenger Terminal Building (Public Transport Interchange), Heung Yuen Wai Boundary Control Point, New Territories, Hong Kong, each for a three-year tenancy subject to the provisions for renewal for a further term of two years.

Both premises should only be used for general retail and/or services purposes, excluding:

- (i) fast food shop, restaurant, godown, residential use, office use; and
- (ii) sale of any goods or commodities that are subject to export control under the laws of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, any regulations made thereunder and any amending legislations.

The tender notices were uploaded today (November 27) to the GPA Property Portal: [www.gpaproperty.gov.hk/en/index.html](http://www.gpaproperty.gov.hk/en/index.html). Tender documents are available for collection at the GPA, 9/F, South Tower, West Kowloon Government Offices, 11 Hoi Ting Road, Yau Ma Tei, Kowloon, during the period from 9am to 6pm from Monday to Friday, except public holidays. The documents can also be downloaded from the GPA Property Portal.

Interested tenderers who wish to conduct a site inspection of the premises should make a prior appointment with the GPA by calling 3842 6915/3842 6917 by December 4.

Tenderers must submit their tenders by placing them in the Government Logistics Department Tender Box placed at the Ground Floor, North Point Government Offices, 333 Java Road, North Point, Hong Kong, before noon on December 18. Late tenders will not be accepted.

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## LCQ21: Consolidating and enhancing Hong Kong's status as international financial centre

Following is a question by the Hon Robert Lee and a written reply by the Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury, Mr Christopher Hui, in the Legislative Council today (November 27):

Question:

At its third plenary session, the 20th Central Committee of the

Communist Party of China has firmed up further deepening reform comprehensively to advance Chinese modernisation, which includes consolidating and enhancing Hong Kong's status as an international financial centre. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the measures currently in place to promote the further development of Hong Kong's markets in securities, fixed income, futures, derivatives and precious metals, etc, and the effectiveness of such measures; how it will enhance the structure of Hong Kong's multi-level capital market to attract more domestic and foreign investors to take part in it;

(2) of the latest specific policy measures to expedite the integration of Hong Kong's financial services industry into the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA), such as taking forward the mutual recognition of professional qualifications and further lowering the eligibility thresholds for the Cross-boundary Wealth Management Connect Scheme in GBA, so that more industry players can engage in GBA business; and

(3) whether it will introduce more targeted measures to facilitate the upgrading and transformation of Hong Kong's small and medium-sized financial institutions, so as to promote a high-tech, smart and eco-friendly development in the industry?

Reply:

President,

The Third Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC Central Committee) adopted the Resolution of the CPC Central Committee on Further Deepening Reform Comprehensively to Advance Chinese Modernization. The Resolution calls on Hong Kong to fully harness the institutional strengths of "one country, two systems" while consolidating and enhancing its status as an international financial, shipping, and trade centre. It also supports Hong Kong's position to become an international hub for high-calibre talents, to exert a greater role in our country's opening up to the world, and to deepen collaboration within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) through better harmonisation of rules and mechanisms.

On financial development, Hong Kong ranked third globally and first in Asia in the Global Financial Centres Index. We have a robust financial regulatory system and a rich pool of financial professionals, as well as a deep and broad capital market. The Government will uphold the spirit of promoting development through reforms, leveraging our advantages of having the strong support of the motherland while being closely connected to the world to give full play to our role as a "super connector" and "super value-adder". We will take into account local circumstances in developing new quality productive forces and proactively open up new horizons of development as well as identify fresh areas for growth, so as to further enhance the competitiveness of the financial services industry.

On the Hon Robert Lee's question, upon consulting the Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) and the Securities and Futures Commission (SFC), my reply is as follows:

(1) We are committed to optimising different aspects of Hong Kong's capital market. On the securities market, we, together with the regulators and Hong Kong Exchanges and Clearing Limited (HKEX), have been taking forward concrete enhancement measures to continuously enhance the competitiveness and liquidity of the market. Specifically, in response to the recommendations put forward by the Task Force on Enhancing Stock Market Liquidity, we have collaborated with the regulators and the industry to introduce various measures to optimise the market this year, including reforming GEM for small and medium enterprises (SMEs), enhancing the listing regime for specialist technology companies, launching the arrangements for maintaining securities market trading under severe weather, and expanding the scope of mutual access of Exchange-traded Funds between the Mainland and Hong Kong. In addition, we have put in place a more certain timetable for the vetting of listing applications, and have conducted consultations on further improving corporate governance of listed companies, expanding the paperless listing regime, etc.

On fixed income market, we will enhance the market infrastructure by, for instance, the set-up of a central clearing system for RMB (Renminbi)-denominated bond repurchase transactions, so as to make RMB sovereign bonds issued in Hong Kong a more popular choice of collateral in offshore markets. For derivatives, we have reformed the position limit regime of derivatives and enhanced the Swap Connect. The HKEX is now developing a new derivatives platform offering near 24-hour derivatives trading to enhance trading and clearing efficiency. We will continue to closely monitor changes and needs of markets in and outside of Hong Kong, and work on medium to long-term directions to optimise the stock market, with a view to further enhancing its competitiveness and promoting its sustainable development.

On precious metals market, in the Policy Address this year, the Chief Executive proposed to develop Hong Kong into an international gold trading centre. We will promote the industry to develop world-class gold storage facilities. By facilitating the storage and delivery of spot gold by users and investors in Hong Kong, we can scale up associated support services in insurance, testing and certification, logistics, etc, while in parallel expanding related transactions including collateral, loan and hedging, hence creating a comprehensive ecosystem in a progressive manner. This will drive all-round multi-currency trading, clearing and delivery, as well as the development of the regulatory system (covering transactions using offshore Renminbi), thereby establishing a holistic gold trading centre with an industry chain. We will also at suitable juncture explore mutual access with the Mainland financial market, injecting new impetus into Hong Kong's financial industry. In this regard, we will set up a working group within this year to implement specific work, including strengthening the trading mechanism and regulatory framework, promoting application of cutting-edge financial technology, and exploring with the Mainland authorities on the inclusion of gold-related products in the mutual market access programme.

(2) In February 2023, the Central financial authorities and the People's Government of Guangdong Province jointly promulgated the "Opinion on Providing Financial Support for the Comprehensive Deepening Reform and Opening Up of the Qianhai Shenzhen-Hong Kong Modern Service Industry Cooperation Zone", leveraging Qianhai's deepening reform to support Hong Kong's integration into the national development of the reform and opening up of the financial market. We attach great importance to and will seize the enormous opportunities brought by the GBA development to the financial and professional services sectors in Hong Kong, so as to promote the continuous growth of the industry.

For cross-boundary financial services, at the corporate level, the HKMA and the People's Bank of China are promoting cross-boundary credit referencing to resolve the pain points in cross-boundary financing for SMEs in the Mainland and Hong Kong. After setting out the co-operative arrangements in early 2024, a number of Shenzhen-Hong Kong pilot cases for southbound transfer of credit reference data to Hong Kong have been successfully conducted. Innovation and technology SMEs in the GBA can raise funds through Hong Kong's international fundraising platforms.

Besides, Cross-boundary Wealth Management Connect in the GBA (WMC) has seen continuous and steady development since its launch in September 2021. The market also has responded positively to the series of enhancement measures commenced in February 2024. As at end-September 2024, over 124 500 individual investors participated in WMC and cross-boundary fund remittances (including Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao) amounting to over RMB91.4 billion had been recorded, promoting mutual access of GBA financial markets and creating new opportunities for the banking, securities and wealth management sectors in the three places. SFC and the Mainland regulator also announced on November 1, 2024 the first batch of 14 licensed corporations in Hong Kong and their Mainland partner brokers eligible to participate in WMC, bringing further development opportunities for the industry. We will continue our discussion with relevant Mainland authorities to explore further enhancements to WMC.

At the individual level, as economic activities in the GBA further integrate, there is a growing trend for Hong Kong people to travel, live, work, and reside across the boundary, raising the demand for cross-boundary financial services. The facilitative measure for cross-boundary remittances for property purchases in GBA cities launched early this year has to a large extent responded to the demands from Hong Kong residents for financial services in relation to cross-boundary property purchases, and has also brought immense opportunities for the finance sector. The HKMA and Mainland finance authorities are actively exploring further facilitative measures under different scenarios.

(3) We are actively promoting the high-quality development of the financial industry by supporting industry upgrading and transformation, establishing new growth points and providing more diversified financial services.

In terms of green transition, the Government launched the Pilot Green

and Sustainable Finance Capacity Building Support Scheme in December 2022, providing subsidies to eligible local practitioners and prospective practitioners in green and sustainable finance to participate in relevant training in response to the new trend of developing low carbon and sustainable economy. This measure helps to build up a green and sustainable finance talent pool for the finance sector in Hong Kong (including small and medium-sized financial institutions).

Furthermore, the Green and Sustainable Finance Cross-Agency Steering Group (Steering Group) formed by relevant Government bureaux, financial regulators and the HKEX in collaboration with the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology launched the free greenhouse gas emissions calculation and estimation tools in February 2024. The tools help equip Hong Kong enterprises including small to medium-sized financial institutions with the means to manage their environmental footprint and encourage market participants to improve sustainable business practices. Also, the Steering Group launched the Climate and Environmental Risk Questionnaire for non-listed companies/SMEs to facilitate relevant institutions' sustainability reporting, and to facilitate financial institutions to collect and assess company-level data for risk assessment and relevant business decisions. The electronic Questionnaire has been uploaded to the website of the Steering Group.

Regarding fintech, the Government has been working closely with the financial regulators and industry players to adopt a multi-pronged approach in promoting fintech development. According to a survey in 2023, the adoption of Generative artificial intelligence (AI) by Hong Kong financial institutions was the highest among different financial markets. At the Hong Kong FinTech Week in October 2024, we issued a policy statement setting out the Government's policy stance and approach towards the responsible application of AI in the financial market. We will closely monitor market developments and draw on international experience in promoting the responsible use of AI in the financial services sector (including small and medium-sized financial institutions) for accelerating the development of new quality productive forces tailored to local conditions. At present, there are plenty of AI models and infrastructures available to financial institutions. We encourage the financial services industry to make full use of these resources in the market, thereby promoting the high-quality development of the industry.