

## Transcript of remarks by SJ and SCED after LegCo Ante Chamber exchange session (with photos/video)

The Secretary for Justice, Mr Paul Lam, SC, together with the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Algernon Yau; and the Commissioner for Belt and Road, Mr Nicholas Ho, met the media after attending the Ante Chamber exchange session at the Legislative Council this morning (July 17). Following is the transcript of remarks:

Reporter: Can you recap in English what you have discussed in the Ante Chamber? How will the Government do to increase its attractiveness and also its plan to get into RCEP?

Secretary for Justice: I try to summarise very quickly the gist of the discussion in the Ante Chamber. The focus today concerns the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), or to be more specific, how Hong Kong can participate in the BRI in a more proactive manner. We have invited colleagues from different bureaux, including the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau, the Innovation, Technology and Industry Bureau, the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau and other colleagues. Among other things, I think the Central People's Government takes the views that Hong Kong, in future, should focus firstly on enhancing Hong Kong's role as a platform for providing professional services, for example, to serve as an international legal service centre. Secondly, to promote financial services and to enhance Hong Kong's status as an international financial centre, in particular, in the area of green finance; and thirdly, to strengthen Hong Kong's status as an international cultural exchange centre, for example, to promote or expand the Belt and Road scholarship, which will benefit students or young people from countries belonging to the Belt and Road and to organise more cultural activities which could improve the mutual understanding between different cultures and between different people. As to more specific measures, perhaps I can invite Mr Yau to provide more details.

Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development: The Belt and Road Office is organising activities in co-ordination with the Central Government such as visits to the Belt and Road countries, taking enterprises and the professional services abroad and meeting different sectors to promote Hong Kong and our advantages. Under "one country, two systems", we have a very good setup in our legal system – we use the common law, the rule of law, free flow of capital. People from the Belt and Road countries would be very interested. Our professional services, such as legal, accountancy, architecture, innovation and technology, are all providing our advantages for people to look at. These visits would be able to expand our influence in those Belt and Road countries.

Regarding your question on RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership), we are working very hard with the RCEP members in getting their

support, and hopefully they will go through their normal process and give the accession as quickly as possible.

In the future, the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau will work hard on improving the CEPA (Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement) arrangements with the Mainland, and seeking to the RCEP accession. The Belt and Road Office will again take the delegation overseas and lead them to engage with the Belt and Road countries' counterparts to promote the benefits and advantages of Hong Kong.

At the end of this month, the Chief Executive is leading a delegation to go to Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia. The whole purpose is to foster closer connection with the new economies to promote Hong Kong and to provide more opportunities for enterprises and the professional services to go overseas. Thank you.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the transcript.)



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## [LCQ11: Reimbursement of Maternity Leave Pay Scheme](#)

Following is a question by the Hon Chau Siu-chung and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (July 17):

Question:

The Government launched the Reimbursement of Maternity Leave Pay Scheme (the Scheme) on April 1, 2021, through which employers can apply for reimbursement of the statutory maternity leave pay paid to employees in respect of the 11th to 14th weeks. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the numbers of applications under the Scheme in each of the past three

years and this year to date, and set out in Table 1 a breakdown by the monthly salaries of the employees involved and the respective percentages of the applications concerned;

Table 1

Monthly salary of employees involved	Number of applications (percentage)		
	2021	.....	This year to date
Below \$10,000			
\$10,000 to below \$20,000			
.....			
Above \$150,000			
Total			

(2) of the average processing time for the applications mentioned in (1) in each of the past three years and this year to date; among such cases, of the respective numbers (and percentages) of applications approved, rejected and withdrawn (set out in Table 2); the main reasons for rejection and withdrawal of the applications;

Table 2

Result of application	Number of applications (percentage)		
	2021	.....	This year to date
Approved			
Rejected			
Withdrawn			
Total			

(3) of the amounts reimbursed for the approved applications mentioned in (2) and distribution of the types of industries of the employers involved in each of the past three years and this year to date, as well as the respective percentages of the applications concerned (set out in Tables 3 and 4 respectively);

Table 3

Reimbursement amount	Number of applications approved (percentage)		
	2021	.....	This year to date
Below \$10,000			

\$10,000 to below \$20,000			
.....			
\$80,000			
Total			

Table 4

Type of industry of employers involved	Number of applications approved (percentage)		
	2021	.....	This year to date
Catering			
Construction			
Education services			
Finance			
Health services			
Hotel and accommodation			
Import/export			
Information and communications			
Insurance			
Manufacturing			
Professional service, administrative and other business support service activities			
Real estate			
Retail			
Social work activities			
Storage			
Transport, postal and courier services			
Wholesale			
Work within domestic households			
Other personal services			
Others			
Total			

(4) of the respective total reimbursement amounts involved in the approved applications mentioned in (2) in each of the past three years and this year

to date;

(5) as it is learnt that the authorities have appointed a private processing agent to assist in the implementation of the Scheme, of the respective expenditure on appointing the processing agent in the past three years and this year to date, as well as the manpower arranged by the processing agent for the Scheme; whether it has reviewed the effectiveness of the processing agent's assistance in the implementation of the Scheme; and

(6) whether it will consider stepping up publicity and promotion to enhance employers' or human resource practitioners' knowledge of the Scheme, so that more people can benefit from the Scheme?

Reply:

President,

The Labour Department (LD) has implemented the Reimbursement of Maternity Leave Pay Scheme since April 1, 2021. For the maternity leave pay (MLP) of the 11th to 14th weeks' maternity leave that is required to be paid to the employee under the Employment Ordinance (Cap. 57), employers may apply to the Scheme for reimbursement of MLP paid, subject to a cap of \$80,000 per employee.

The reply to the Member's question is set out below:

(1) Up to June 2024, a total of 25 105 applications have been received under the Scheme, with 6 127, 7 963, 7 367 and 3 648 applications received in 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024 (up to June) respectively. As employers are not required to provide the amount of monthly wages of employees on relevant application forms, the LD does not have breakdowns by monthly wage of employees involved.

(2) In general, employers receive the reimbursement within 15 working days upon submission of an application furnished with all the required information and documents. Breakdown by result of application is tabulated below:

Result of application	Number of applications (%)			
	2021	2022	2023	2024 (Up to June)
Approved	5 405 (98.2%)	7 480 (96.9%)	6 820 (94.7%)	3 507 (94.4%)
Rejected	6 (0.1%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (0.1%)	2 (0.1%)
Application withdrawn	91 (1.7%)	243 (3.1%)	375 (5.2%)	208 (5.6%)
Total	5 502 (100%)	7 723 (100%)	7 198 (100%)	3 717 (100%)

Note: Individual percentages may not add up to the total owing to rounding.

Applications were rejected mainly because the employee concerned had not been employed under a continuous contract for at least 40 weeks immediately before the commencement of maternity leave, i.e. the employee did not meet the eligibility criteria for MLP under the Employment Ordinance. The Scheme does not inquire employers about their reasons for withdrawing applications.

(3) Breakdown of approved applications by reimbursement amount is tabulated below:

Reimbursement amount	Number of applications approved (%)			
	2021	2022	2023	2024 (Up to June)
Below \$10,000	475 (8.8%)	580 (7.8%)	393 (5.8%)	165 (4.7%)
\$10,000 to below \$20,000	2 809 (52.0%)	3 670 (49.1%)	3 134 (46.0%)	1 586 (45.2%)
\$20,000 to below \$30,000	1 084 (20.1%)	1 566 (20.9%)	1 618 (23.7%)	821 (23.4%)
\$30,000 to below \$40,000	482 (8.9%)	742 (9.9%)	746 (10.9%)	418 (11.9%)
\$40,000 to below \$50,000	267 (4.9%)	447 (6.0%)	421 (6.2%)	218 (6.2%)
\$50,000 to below \$60,000	106 (2.0%)	194 (2.6%)	201 (2.9%)	128 (3.6%)
\$60,000 to below \$70,000	60 (1.1%)	100 (1.3%)	121 (1.8%)	56 (1.6%)
\$70,000 to below \$80,000	39 (0.7%)	55 (0.7%)	57 (0.8%)	21 (0.6%)
\$80,000	83 (1.5%)	126 (1.7%)	129 (1.9%)	94 (2.7%)
Total	5 405 (100%)	7 480 (100%)	6 820 (100%)	3 507 (100%)

Note: Individual percentages may not add up to the total owing to rounding.

The LD does not have breakdowns of approved applications by trade. Yet, according to our records, applications were mainly from employers of the financing, insurance, real estate and business services (21.6 per cent), import/export, wholesale and retail (21.1 per cent) and community, social and personal services (20.0 per cent) sectors.

(4) For the approved applications mentioned under (2), the Scheme has reimbursed \$545 million up to June 2024. The reimbursement amounts in 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024 (up to June) were \$118 million, \$173 million, \$166

million and \$88 million respectively.

(5) In the past three years, the total service contract value for engaging a processing agent (PA) by the LD to implement the Scheme was \$90 million. During the contract period, PA is responsible for the operation of the Scheme, which included setting up a service centre for the Scheme; developing, operating and maintaining the Disbursement Information System; processing and approving applications in accordance with the operation guidelines and requirements as prescribed by the LD; conducting quality assurance checks and internal audit checks; handling enquiries and complaints from the applicants; assisting in conducting publicity activities; and organising public engagement activities.

According to the service contract, PA is required to appoint at least three managerial personnel to assist in implementing the Scheme and to employ at least 39 staff members for handling various specified tasks under the Scheme.

The LD regularly conducts quality assurance checks, including performing random checks on PA's vetting records and related information, conducting on-site inspections and convening management meetings, for monitoring the performance and service effectiveness of PA.

(6) The LD has been promoting the Scheme through different channels such as broadcasting radio announcements in the public interest; placing advertisement; disseminating promotional messages through mobile applications, Internet platforms, the Reimbursement Easy Portal and the LD's homepage; as well as displaying posters and distributing leaflets.

Particularly for employers and human resources practitioners, in addition to organising briefings and workshops on details of the Scheme, the LD also places advertisements in publications of different chambers of commerce, employers' associations and organisations of human resources management to publicise the Scheme. The LD will continue to explore suitable promotional channels to further enhance the publicity efforts.

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## **LCQ12: Developing a hub for primary and secondary education**

â€‹Following is a question by Professor the Hon William Wong and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Dr Choi Yuk-lin, in the Legislative Council today (July 17):

Question:

It has been reported that, with the worsening situation of low birth rate in Hong Kong, primary and secondary schools are facing "class reduction and school closure" one after another. On the other hand, the Chief Executive has proposed in the 2023 Policy Address to build Hong Kong into an international hub for post-secondary education. There are views that Hong Kong's primary and secondary basic education also have significant advantages in developing international education (including teachers having all undergone high-quality and systematic training, and the curriculum being taught in both languages of Chinese and English, etc.), and the Government should make good use of such advantages and introduce policies to alleviate the impact of low birth rate, replenish the sources of students and nurture talents for the long-term development of Hong Kong. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the respective numbers of Mainland and overseas students currently enrolled in international schools at primary and secondary levels;
- (2) whether it will consider constructing new school premises or converting the premises of some primary and secondary schools which have been closed or are likely to be closed, as well as providing additional supporting facilities (e.g. hostels), so as to operate primary and secondary schools dedicated to absorb Mainland and overseas students;
- (3) whether it has plans to promote and admit students to local primary and secondary schools (including international schools and schools dedicated to offering Mainland curriculum) in the Mainland, neighbouring Chinese-populated regions and overseas, so as to increase the sources of students for various types of schools in Hong Kong; and
- (4) whether it has plans to, while building Hong Kong into an international hub for post-secondary education, build Hong Kong into an international hub for primary and secondary education; if so, of the details; if not, whether it will consider the plans concerned?

Reply:

President,

The Chief Executive's 2023 Policy Address outlined the direction to develop Hong Kong into an international post-secondary education hub and a cradle of future talents. This policy is based on the fact that Hong Kong has world-renowned universities and outstanding research talents, thus focusing only on post-secondary education. Regarding primary and secondary education, parents are provided with diverse and quality choices under the education system of Hong Kong.

The Government provides 12 years' free primary and secondary education to eligible children through public sector schools. Non-local students who come to live in Hong Kong with their parents (including those who come to Hong Kong under various talent admission schemes) may also choose to enrol in any local public sector schools, Direct Subsidy Scheme schools or private



schools (including international schools) that suit them, provided they meet the relevant eligibility requirements. We are glad to see that Hong Kong's diverse and quality education is also one of the factors attracting talents to Hong Kong.

Faced with a structural decline in school-age population, the Government accords top priority to the interests of students when planning for the future development of education. Aiming for a "soft landing", we review the policies and effectiveness of utilisation of public resources, and adjust the number of schools in a gradual and orderly manner to ensure a healthy and sustainable education ecosystem and optimal use of public resources. As to non-public sector schools, they may also admit overseas students in accordance with prevailing policies, should they provide adequate supporting arrangements.

Our reply to the questions raised by Professor the Hon William Wong is as follows:

(1) The numbers of non-local students in international schools in the 2023/24 school year are tabulated as follows:

Level	Non-local students		
	Mainland students	Other non-local students	Total
Primary	1 209	13 497	14 706
Secondary	1 008	11 676	12 684
Total	2 217	25 173	27 390

Notes:

(i) Figures refer to the position as at mid-September 2023.

(ii) Figures include students in international schools, but not those in special schools.

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

(iv) Mainland students refer to those with Chinese nationality (including those from Mainland China, Macao and Taiwan).

(2) The Education Bureau (EDB) has all along upheld the principle of optimising the use of public resources, and handles vacant school premises (VSP) in accordance with Central Clearing House mechanism. The EDB conducts reviews on whether the vacant or to-be-vacant school premises are suitable to be retained for school use (primary and secondary school), having regard to factors such as the size, location and physical conditions of the premises,

as well as the educational needs and relevant policy measures. Upon confirming that such premises are not required to be retained for school use, the EDB should, in accordance with the said mechanism, release the relevant sites for the Planning Department (PlanD)'s consideration of suitable long-term alternative uses. Since the establishment of the prevailing mechanism in 2011, the EDB already released over 250 vacant or to-be-vacant school premises sites. For details, please refer to the list of VSP sites updated by PlanD regularly on their webpage ([www.pland.gov.hk/pland\\_en/resources/vsp/vsp\\_list.html](http://www.pland.gov.hk/pland_en/resources/vsp/vsp_list.html)).

(3) and (4) As mentioned above, the policy of developing Hong Kong into an international post-secondary education hub focuses on post-secondary education, and the Government has no plan to extend the policy to primary and secondary schools at this stage. Public sector primary and secondary schools would continue to focus on the learning needs of eligible students in Hong Kong. At the same time, the Government is committed to developing a vibrant international school sector to meet the demand for international school places from non-local families living in Hong Kong and families coming to Hong Kong for work or investment. In addition, with the vibrant development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and Hong Kong's commitment in promoting the interflow of talent with the Mainland and creating strong impetus for growth, it is considered that there would be demand for Mainland curriculum from Mainland families in Hong Kong. Hence, we have allocated, via the School Allocation Exercise mechanism, the greenfield site at Tin Shui Wai for the establishment of the very first non-profit-making private school offering the Mainland curriculum in Hong Kong.

Non-public sector schools with adequate supporting arrangements may admit overseas students in accordance with prevailing policies. Schools admitting underage overseas students who come to Hong Kong to study on their own without parental accompaniment should, in the interest of students' well-being, consider the relevant supporting arrangements and services required, including the provision of adequate support, proper care and sound protection (e.g. arrangements for accommodation, guardianship, counselling, etc.) to cater for the needs of the students in respect of their learning, daily life, personal growth and mental health etc., so as to ensure students' healthy development.

In terms of publicity and promotion, the EDB works closely with the Hong Kong Talent Engage (HKTE) to provide non-local families who are interested in coming to Hong Kong with clear information on future studies in Hong Kong via the dedicated online platform. The HKTE actively collaborates with several working partners to introduce information about education in Hong Kong, which enables incoming talents to have a better understanding of the education system in Hong Kong. In addition to providing school profiles of public sector schools, the EDB has also launched a new thematic website to introduce international schools in Hong Kong.

On the other hand, local school councils also organise joint exhibitions and talks in the Mainland to provide information to and answer enquiries from the Mainland parents and students who are interested in studying in local

schools. Some schools have even arranged school visits, class observations and experiential learning sessions for newly-arrived families and/or those intending to apply to come to Hong Kong with a view to allowing them to directly experience the learning environment and conditions in Hong Kong.

To conclude, we would continue to develop a diverse and quality education system and tell the good stories of Hong Kong's education through various channels.

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## **LCQ3: Measures to facilitate elderly persons to retire in Mainland**

Following is a question by the Hon Kingsley Wong and a reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (July 17):

Question:

The Guangdong (GD) Scheme and the Fujian (FJ) Scheme under the Social Security Allowance Scheme allow eligible Hong Kong elderly persons who have moved to reside in these two provinces to receive the Old Age Living Allowance (OALA) or the Old Age Allowance (OAA). On the other hand, it has been reported that according to a survey conducted by an organisation, nearly 400 000 Hong Kong residents are of Hainan origin, and among them, about 85 000 are elderly persons aged above 65, and due to the beautiful environment, good air quality and low cost of living in the Hainan Province, many Hainanese who responded to the survey have expressed their intention to settle in their home province after retirement. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will study introducing a "Hainan Scheme" to allow eligible Hong Kong elderly persons who have moved to reside in the province to receive OALA or OAA so as to meet their keen demand; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) in addition to the portable Social Security Allowance and a series of schemes relating to residential care services and healthcare, of other policy initiatives put in place by the authorities to facilitate elderly persons to settle in the Mainland after retirement, in order to provide them with an additional option for quality ageing; and

(3) of the current respective numbers of beneficiaries of the GD Scheme and the FJ Scheme; what new measures are in place to step up publicity on the two schemes?

Reply:

President,

The Government currently implements a number of measures to facilitate Hong Kong elderly persons' retirement on the Mainland and provide them with more choices. Amongst them, portable cash assistance initiatives include the Guangdong (GD) Scheme, the Fujian (FJ) Scheme and the Portable Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (PCSSA) Scheme. Under the GD Scheme and the FJ Scheme, eligible Hong Kong elderly persons who choose to retire in GD and FJ can receive the Old Age Allowance (OAA) or the Old Age Living Allowance (OALA) without returning to Hong Kong every year. As at March 2024, there were 25 011 and 2 447 elderly persons benefiting from the GD Scheme and the FJ Scheme respectively.

Portable cash assistance only covers eligible elderly persons retiring in GD and FJ because there are relatively more Hong Kong residents residing in these two provinces, and the two provinces are uniquely and closely connected with Hong Kong on social, economic and transport fronts, etc. According to the data of the Census and Statistics Department and the National Bureau of Statistics, most Hong Kong elderly persons or residents residing on the Mainland stay in GD and FJ, accounting for about 80 per cent of the total number of such persons.

At present, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) has appointed agents to assist in the implementation of the portable cash assistance initiatives and provide a range of services, including submitting applications for elderly persons who cannot return to Hong Kong, conducting case reviews, providing enquiry and declaration services to recipients, assisting the SWD in recovering overpaid allowances from recipients and investigating suspected fraud cases, etc. Our country has a vast area, and Hong Kong elderly persons residing in other provinces or municipalities on the Mainland are relatively small in number and scattered. If the scope of the portable cash assistance initiatives is to be expanded to more Mainland provinces and municipalities, we need to carefully consider the administrative expenses involved in appointing agents to provide relevant services in these areas and the associated cost-effectiveness.

Furthermore, we must point out that the portable cash assistance initiatives involve relaxing the requirement of recipients' residence in Hong Kong while they receive relevant cash assistance. The financial implications must be carefully considered when implementing the relevant initiatives.

When the Government considers expanding the cash assistance initiatives, it must take into account long-term fiscal sustainability and prudently use public funds to support Hong Kong elderly persons. We will carefully listen to the community's views on the portable cash assistance initiatives, with a view to striking a balance between addressing the demands of Hong Kong residents and making appropriate use of limited welfare resources. The Government currently has no plan to expand the scope of the portable cash assistance initiatives to Hainan Province.

The Member is concerned about whether the Government has other policy measures to facilitate elderly persons' retirement on the Mainland. In order to strengthen support for elderly persons retiring in GD and FJ, the Housing Bureau provides flexibility to elderly persons who need to surrender their public rental housing (PRH) units or delete their names from the tenancies upon receiving portable cash assistance. Considering that Hong Kong elderly persons may encounter adaptation issues after moving to the Mainland, the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) and the Hong Kong Housing Society (HKHS) currently allow elderly persons to keep their PRH units for no more than three months, with the grace period starting from the date of the elderly persons' departure from Hong Kong.

If the recipients voluntarily surrender their PRH units, the HA and the HKHS will issue a Letter of Assurance to the recipients upon their request while recovering the PRH units, provided that there is no breach of the Tenancy Agreement. In the event of their return to Hong Kong for good and redemption of the Letter of Assurance, the recipients will be allocated a refurbished PRH unit by the HA or the HKHS if they meet the eligibility criteria for PRH application and the conditions as laid down in the Letter of Assurance, subject to availability of resources.

If the recipients delete their names from the PRH tenancies while their family members still live in the PRH units, they can apply to the HA for a Letter of Reinstatement. In the event of their return to Hong Kong for good and redemption of the Letter of Reinstatement from the HA, subject to the prevailing housing policies, the recipients may apply for reinstatement of their names in the tenancies as authorised family members, provided that the tenancies of the units are still valid. The HKHS also puts in place similar arrangements for its PRH units.

The SWD has set up thematic websites about the GD Scheme and the FJ Scheme to provide online application forms and information such as eligibility criteria, application procedures and frequently asked questions. The Government's Cross-boundary Public Services thematic website also provides relevant services and information to facilitate Hong Kong residents' submission of applications on the Mainland. From time to time, the SWD promotes the two schemes through various channels, including promotional videos on television and cross-boundary coaches, newspaper advertisements, putting up posters and distributing promotional flyers and application forms, etc. Furthermore, the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in Guangdong of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government and the SWD's agents on the Mainland would assist in promotion through their websites, physical networks and WeChat official accounts, etc.

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## LCQ17: Developing "silver economy"

Following is a question by the Hon Jeffrey Lam and a written reply by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Algernon Yau, in the Legislative Council today (July 17):

Question:

In February this year, the Government established the Advisory Panel on Silver Economy (Advisory Panel) to conduct research on the market demand and development of the "silver economy" and give relevant recommendations. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether the Advisory Panel has commenced the aforesaid research; if not, of the reasons for that; if so, whether the scope of the research includes (i) the trend in the proportion of elderly population in the next five years, (ii) the consumption potential (e.g. income, assets and the balance of the Mandatory Provident Fund account) of soon-to-be-elderly persons (i.e. persons aged 55 to 64) and the elderly (i.e. persons aged 65 or above), and (iii) the current contribution percentage of the elderly care industry to Gross Domestic Product; if so, of the preliminary results of the research; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether the authorities will, in order to collect data on elderly consumption, consider conducting regular research on the consumption activities and potential of the elderly, as well as the proportion of elderly population; if so, of the planning of such research; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) as there are views pointing out that in recent years, there has been a tendency among local elderly people to go north for spending, of the authorities' policies in place to attract them to stay and spend in Hong Kong;

(4) whether it will consider developing overseas silver markets and promoting "silver tourism", such as introducing measures to attract overseas elderly people to visit Hong Kong for sightseeing and spending; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(5) given that the Mainland defines the "silver economy" as the collection of a series of economic activities such as providing products or services to the elderly and preparing for old age, whether the Government will draw reference from this definition and include products and services aimed at preparing middle-aged and young people for old age (e.g. anti-ageing health products, medical beauty services, and wealth planning and insurance products) in its plan to develop the "silver economy"?

Reply:

President,

The consolidated reply to the question raised by the Hon Jeffery Lam is as follows:

The growing elderly population in Hong Kong is emerging as an important consumer group. According to the projection of the Census and Statistics Department, the number of persons aged 65 or above in Hong Kong will soar from 1.64 million in 2023 to 2.67 million in 2043, representing 35 per cent of the total population by then.

To tap into the business potential of the "silver economy", the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau (CEDB) established the Advisory Panel on Silver Economy (Advisory Panel) in February 2024. Chaired by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, the Advisory Panel comprises experts from different fields such as the business and social welfare sectors, conducts in-depth research on the market demands of the "silver economy" and the development and business activities of its related industries (such as the cultural, tourism, telecommunications and exhibition industry), and will offer recommendations in one year's time.

Since its establishment, the Advisory Panel has convened two meetings, to review such statistics as the trend in the proportion of the elderly population, the consumption capability, patterns and habits of the elderly and soon-to-be-elderly persons, and existing Government policies and measures that are conducive to the development of "silver economy", including gerontechnology solution and products, financial and digital services, public transport fare subsidy, as well as consumer education and protection. The Advisory Panel has also referred to the Opinions on Developing the Silver Economy to Improve the Well-being of the Elderly promulgated by the General Office of the State Council in January 2024, when considering how to facilitate the market development of products and services catering to the elderly population and inject economic impetus into relevant industries.

"Silver economy" encompasses a wide array of products and services, covering a wide range of industries and trades. To unleash the business potential of the elderly market, and strengthen support for the needs and desires of the elderly, the Government is setting directions and goals and formulating policy measures for the development of the "silver economy". The Government will provide relevant research data, results, and recommendations as soon as possible.