

[HKETO, Brussels shares with Dutch companies the opportunities brought by the latest developments of tourism and trade in Hong Kong \(with photos\)](#)

The Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in Brussels (HKETO, Brussels) co-organised with the Netherlands Hong Kong Business Association, the Hong Kong Trade Development Council and Invest Hong Kong the "Dongzhi business seminar-cum-luncheon" in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, on December 11 (Amsterdam time), with the theme on tourism and trade developments in Hong Kong. The event has become an annual key business occasion in which prominent speakers from Hong Kong and the Netherlands provide Dutch companies with the latest updates on Hong Kong and the region.

Deputy Representative of HKETO, Brussels, Miss Fiona Li gave a presentation to about 70 business executives in the seminar. She elaborated about Hong Kong's prevailing advantages as an international financial, trading and logistics centre which offers unparalleled connectivity and quality services while highlighted also the latest government policies on promoting tourism. It included hosting more world-class mega-events not just for businesses, but also for sports, arts and culture. Efforts were also stepped up to better leverage the city's unique charms and strengths including our stunning harbour and waterfront, tranquil islands and countryside, rich gastronomy, and east-meets-west heritage to innovate tourism with new attractions and rediscovery of local cityscape.

"Besides establishing Hong Kong as a city of mega events, fusing arts with tourism and developing cultural and eco-tourism are also the directions we are going for", she said. Miss Li added that Hong Kong is well equipped with state-of-art infrastructure to realise these initiatives, namely the Hong Kong Palace Museum and M+ Museum in the West Kowloon Cultural District, and the Kai Tak Sports Park to be opened in early 2025. In addition to the three-runway system of Hong Kong International Airport coming into operation this November, Hong Kong is expected to become an even more popular tourist destination globally.

Citing the launch of more direct flight routes between Hong Kong and European cities in summer 2025 and Hong Kong's latest initiatives to reduce the duty rate for liquor to boost the development of logistics industry, tourism as well as high-end food and beverage consumption, Miss Li expected that more international visitors would be attracted to Hong Kong. "We are ready to welcome Dutch and other European travellers to experience the city's unique chic and glamour", Miss Li concluded.



Remarks by CE at media session in Beijing after reporting to President Xi Jinping (with photos/videos)

Following are the remarks by the Chief Executive, Mr John Lee, at a media session in Beijing after reporting to President Xi Jinping on work yesterday (December 13):

Reporter: President Xi has asked you to seek reforms and new economic momentum, does that mean that you have failed to put forward new ideas in related areas and what will you do to answer his call? The second question is the city will face another looming \$100 billion deficit, is the President concerned about it and will that derail his vision for the city to thrive through innovation?

Chief Executive: I think the President has already made his statement in the meeting with me, which was broadcast in the media, in which he fully recognised the efforts and contributions of myself and my Government. I think that recognition speaks for itself. I am a believer of "there is never the best, only the better". That is also the doctrine advocated by President Xi. In this area, we see things from the same angle. And I have been making reports to him as to how I can create extra synergy, new developments, and also create economic growth for Hong Kong. President Xi, of course, mentioned the importance of integrating into the development of the nation, and I fully agree that our country gives us the greatest opportunities. That is why we need to have a good grasp of all the opportunities we have and then make different policies to realise the potential.

I thank President Xi for recognising our efforts and also encouraging us to continue to govern in the direction which has been recognised not just by the society as correct, but also internationally, as you can see in the rise in rankings in different areas, including Hong Kong's position as a financial

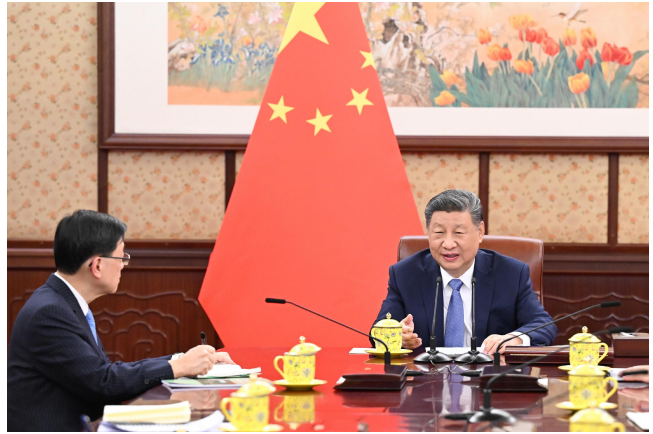
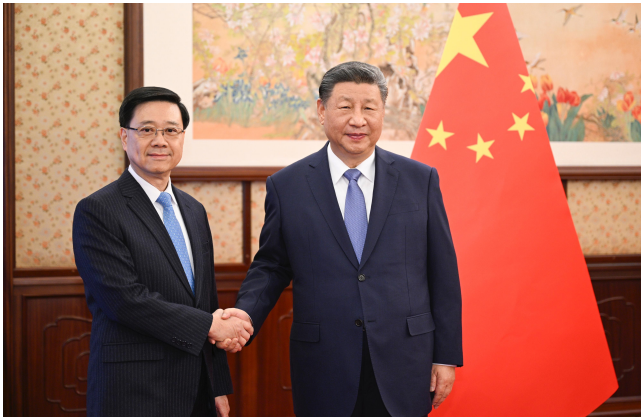
centre has risen one position and now is rated as the number three in the world. And our international competitiveness has gone up two rankings and now is ranked number five in the world, so on and so forth. President Xi's recognition, of course, gives strong encouragement to me and to my Government, and we are very thrilled to receive President Xi's recognition, but we will try our best to do even better, because while we thank President Xi and the Central Government for recognising our efforts and trusting us, it is important that we do our best so as to show our gratitude to the caring guidance and the strong support by President Xi and the Central Government.

I have reported in my duty report the economic situation of Hong Kong, as well as the fiscal position of the Government. And I have explained that a series of strategies that will be adopted to ensure that we will eventually make a balanced budget. That may take a few years, but we do have a strategy, and I've explained and that strategy to the Central Government. We will be starting the Budget consultation very soon. The Financial Secretary is seriously working on a number of possible strategies to ensure that we will eventually make a balanced budget. I would imagine that there will be a lot of good opinions and advice from different sectors. That has been the attitude of the Hong Kong Government to listen as much as possible to the wisdom and experience of the community. And I'm sure that the Financial Secretary will take a very serious attitude to listen to all the different views, and we will eventually strike a good balance. But what is important, I think, in trying to balance the budget is, of course, we will be trying to reduce the expenditure, we'll try to increase income, but we'll do it with a balanced approach so that the society will not be affected too seriously. More importantly, I think government income will be increased if the economy grows, because if businesses can make money and opportunities are more for them to realise their potential, then government income will be more as a result of income tax, as a result of corporate tax. We have been working hard to strengthen the economy of Hong Kong. And we have been, for example, expanding outside Hong Kong, making visits to ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), to Middle East, likely later, to Central Asia. And I've been to Latin America as well, during which I witnessed the signing of a FTA (Free Trade Agreement). So we are making all opportunities to ensure that Hong Kong's economic growth will continue and will thrive in that regard. And we are also creating extra growth areas, new growth areas such as what I have described in my Policy Address, building an international gold trading centre, and also to create a commodity trading ecosystem. All these will create extra growth as a result of which I think businesses can make more profits, and then the government's incomes will increase.

Also, I think, Invest Hong Kong, and also our OASES (Office for Attracting Strategic Enterprises), the office which attracts strategic enterprises to come to Hong Kong, has been doing very well. So the number of enterprises registered in Hong Kong is now a record high. And also the strategic enterprises that have been invited to come to Hong Kong will be creating over, say that is a HK\$40 billion investment which will create 13 000 jobs. So all these are growth areas that we are working hard. In due course, I think, enterprises will be making more profits, and the government's expenditure will eventually be balanced by the income we will

get more as a result.

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



[DEVB proposes amendments to the Buildings Ordinance](#)

The Development Bureau (DEVB) issued a Legislative Council (LegCo) paper today (December 13) proposing to amend the Buildings Ordinance (BO) along three aspects, namely speeding up building inspection and repair, rationalising the policy on handling unauthorised building works (UBWs), and enhancing building safety. The target is to introduce the amendment bill in the first half of 2026.

A DEVB spokesman said, "Our review and recommendations are based on four guiding principles: first, it is the owners' primary responsibility to maintain and repair their properties. Second, we will adopt a carrot and

stick approach. On one hand, we support owners in complying with statutory orders and notices. On the other hand, we impose legal responsibilities and a penalty system to compel owners' compliance with the orders and notices. Third, to strike a balance between lenient and stringent enforcement, and to adjust enforcement degree having regard to the type and nature of contravention. Fourth, the policy principles and objectives should be clear, while enforcement should be pragmatic."

Speed up building inspection and repair

"Under the multi-pronged strategy, for owners who are willing to carry out proper building maintenance, the Government will continue to provide financial and technical assistance through the Operation Building Bright 2.0 ('OBB 2.0') and other programmes. For owners of 'three-nil' buildings and other owners who are unable to co-ordinate among themselves, the Government will carry out default works as necessary. However, it is important to note that public resources are not unlimited, and over-intervention will bring about moral hazard. Therefore, the Government's intervention must be targeted and with public interest in mind. We will take stringent enforcement action against owners who neglect their building maintenance responsibilities," said the spokesman.

Since May this year, the DEVB and the Urban Renewal Authority (URA) have introduced improvement measures to enhance support for owners under OBB 2.0, including pre-qualifying inspectors and contractors by the URA for tendering; issuing tender documents by the URA on behalf of owners where necessary; and standardising tender assessment procedures to facilitate owners. In addition, the DEVB established a multi-party collaboration platform in the third quarter of last year, comprising the Buildings Department (BD), the URA, the Home Affairs Department (HAD), etc., to organise briefings in old districts to provide direct answers on compliance with notices under Mandatory Building Inspection Scheme (MBIS) and Mandatory Window Inspection Scheme (MWIS). In addition, the BD has regularised an external wall inspection programme since this year to make use of drones to inspect the external walls of high-risk buildings and carry out emergency works as necessary. Target buildings include "three-nil" buildings.

In view of the unsatisfactory compliance rate of the MBIS and MWIS (e.g. only 40 per cent of the notices involving common parts of a building were complied with), to compel compliance with the various orders and notices by owners, we propose –

(a) Introducing fixed penalty: introducing a fixed penalty of \$6,000 for non-compliance with MBIS notices and increasing the fixed penalty for non-compliance with MWIS notices from \$1,500 to \$3,000.

(b) Increasing penalty: the maximum penalty for non-compliance with MBIS and MWIS notices and orders will be increased. The maximum penalty in respect of MBIS notices involving external walls or projections thereof is proposed to be increased by four times from \$50,000 to \$200,000, with the imprisonment term be kept at one year; for non-compliance with MWIS notices, the maximum penalty will be increased from \$25,000 to \$100,000, with the imprisonment

term be kept at three months. Besides, the penalty for unco-operative owners obstructing building inspection or maintenance will be increased from \$10,000 to \$25,000.

(c) Introducing a new offence: a maximum fine of \$300,000 and imprisonment for one year will be imposed for non-compliance with a MBIS or MWIS notice or a statutory order if there was damage to the external walls or its projections or the windows of a building, leading to death, injury or property damage, so as to enhance deterrence.

Apart from legislation, we will continue to consider suggestions for providing better support to Owners' Corporations and owners, including drawing on the experience of the URA to consider how to assist owners and property management companies in drawing up maintenance manuals and making financial planning for future maintenance works.

Rationalising the policy for handling unauthorised building works (UBWs)

Under the existing B0, except for certain exempted works, building works require prior submission of plans to and approval by the BD, or should be carried out under the simplified procedures of the Minor Works Control System (MWCS). Any contravention of the above regulatory requirements will be regarded as UBWs. In other words, facilities that range from small-scale as drying racks, supporting frames for air-conditioners or canopies, which are related to the daily life of the public, to large-scale structures such as enclosed rooftops or unauthorised basements are all regarded as illegal works or UBWs which can be ordered for removal if the relevant works are not carried out in accordance with the B0.

The spokesman said, "There are views in the community that some minor UBWs are related to the needs of people's daily lives and are of relatively low safety risk, and that enforcement against such may cause nuisance to the public. On the other hand, the existing penalties have not been effective in deterring building works that are in serious contravention of the B0, and that some individual owners have derived considerable economic or personal benefits from the erection of large-scale UBWs but have not been subject to proportional legal responsibilities. In order to strike a balance between the daily needs of the public and the risks of minor UBWs, as well as to optimise the use of limited enforcement resources, we will adopt a pragmatic and facilitating approach in dealing with minor UBWs, while focusing on the effectiveness of enforcement against serious UBWs. Specifically, we will handle UBWs under the existing framework in two categories."

Minor UBWs that are related to people's daily lives

Regarding pre-existing minor UBWs that fall within the scope of minor works (i.e. not erected in accordance with the requirements of the MWCS), taking into account that the scale of the structures concerned may be relatively small and closely related to people's daily lives, we will deal with such works sympathetically in a lawful manner –

(a) Adding more types of "designated exempted works" or relaxing the

requirements for existing works items, so that more works can be carried out without needing BD's approval. Such types of pre-existing works will no longer be regarded as UBWs. Examples include retractable awnings and drying racks below a specified height, etc.

(b) Consolidating the three existing urban validation schemes into one integrated scheme and extending the scope of validation to allow owners to retain minor UBWs erected before the commencement of the amendment ordinance and meeting the specified dimensions, such as canopies, supporting frames for air-conditioners, enclosed balconies, signboards, etc., after a one-off or regular validation by registered building professionals or registered contractors (all but signboards are subject to one-off validation only). There will be a grace period of three years upon the implementation of the integrated scheme during which no enforcement action will be taken, so as to urge for early participation by owners. After three years, the BD will progressively take enforcement action against unvalidated minor UBWs.

As for new building works, the new "designated exempted works" mentioned in paragraph (a) above will not be subject to BD's regulation when the amendment ordinance comes into effect. We will also increase the types of minor works or relax the requirements of existing minor works items so that works related to the people's daily lives that pose low risks (including erection or alteration of supporting frames for air-conditioners and poles protruding from external walls) can be carried out under the simplified procedures.

In terms of enforcement, it is recommended that –

(a) Introducing fixed penalty: introducing a fixed penalty of \$10,000 for non-compliance with removal orders for new minor works carried out without complying with the regulations or existing minor UBWs that have not been validated.

(b) New penalty for re-conviction: failure to comply with a removal order after the imposition of a fixed penalty is liable to prosecution. The maximum penalty on first conviction will be maintained at \$200,000 and imprisonment for one year. A new provision will be added to increase the maximum penalty on subsequent conviction to a fine of \$400,000 and imprisonment for one year to enhance the deterrent effect.

Serious UBWs

There is a general consensus in the community that UBWs posing a threat to public safety or constituting a serious contravention of the law (e.g. erecting unauthorised basements, enclosing rooftop structures, erecting podiums/backyard structures, etc.) should not be tolerated from the perspective of safety and policy fairness and the UBWs must be removed. This message should be clearly conveyed through legislation. To this end, we propose –

(a) Increasing penalties: the maximum fine for non-compliance with a removal order will be increased from \$200,000 and imprisonment for one year to \$300,000 and imprisonment for two years, and to \$600,000 and imprisonment for

two years in the event of a subsequent conviction.

(b) Lowering the prosecution threshold: under the existing B0, the Government may prosecute an owner, registered building professional or registered contractor, etc., who "knowingly" erects a structure without BD's approval. To lower the prosecution threshold, we propose to remove the word "knowingly". In other words, for unauthorised works commenced without BD's approval, the BD may initiate prosecution if it has reasonable doubt that the situation is related to an owner and/or a professional. We also propose to increase the penalty from a maximum fine of \$400,000 to \$2,000,000 and maintain the imprisonment term at two years. We will invite the court to take into account factors such as the size of the UBWs concerned, the location of the property or the rateable value of the property when considering the sentence, so that the difference in economic benefits between, say, a luxury detached house and an old building with rooftop UBWs can be reflected in the sentence.

(c) Introduction of a new offence and indictable offence arrangement: in the past, some owners have avoided liability by arguing that they had only taken over the UBWs erected by the previous owner. To plug this loophole, a new offence is proposed to be created so that an owner commits an offence if there is a serious UBW in a property acquired after a certain specified period after the commencement of the amendment ordinance, irrespective of whether the UBW was erected by the owner. The maximum penalty is proposed to be a fine of \$300,000 and imprisonment for two years on summary conviction at the Magistrates' Court. On conviction on indictment in the District Court or a higher court, it is proposed that the maximum fine should be higher than that on summary conviction or the current maximum fine under the B0 (\$1,000,000).

(d) Aiding an offence is tantamount to committing an offence: we propose to amend an existing provision so that a person who knowingly assists an owner in committing the new offence in (c) above (e.g. a solicitor or estate agent involved in a property transaction who assists an owner in acquiring a property with a serious UBW after a certain specified period after the commencement of the amendment ordinance) will be deemed to be guilty of and be held liable to the same offence and subject the same penalties for that offence.

Separately, the Government launched a one-off administrative reporting scheme for UBWs in New Territories Exempted Houses in 2012, and the reporting period ended in December 2012. In response to the views of villagers and Legislative Council members, we propose to re-launch the reporting scheme to allow owners who at that time did not report their UBWs to do so, but we will continue to adopt all the old arrangements under the scheme, including applying the scheme only to UBWs erected before June 28, 2011 and requiring regular safety check of the reported UBWs.

Enhancing building safety

In order to enhance building safety, we propose to introduce an indictable offence for serious injury or death caused by works carried out by registered building professionals or registered contractors directly involved in the works by making reference to the Occupational Safety and Health

Ordinance. We propose to raise the maximum penalty from \$1,000,000 to \$10,000,000 to be on par with the Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance, while maintaining the imprisonment term at three years. We also propose to empower the BD to require interviews, search and seizure of documents under warrants, etc., and introduce new offences for refusing to attend interviews or provide site supervision documents, etc., so as to provide the BD with sufficient power to conduct investigation and collect evidence.

In addition, the Government proposes to enhance the registration and disciplinary systems for registered contractors, including extending the renewal period from three years to a maximum of five years in response to the industry's wish for a longer operation period to encourage long-term investment and healthy development of the industry. On the other hand, we propose to empower the Building Authority to approve registration renewal for a period of less than three years and to impose renewal conditions having regard to individual case merits. Apart from speeding up disciplinary board hearings through various measures, we also propose to increase the maximum penalty from \$250,000 to \$400,000 and to enable the disciplinary board to impose more than one sanction (in addition to fines, consideration may be given to ordering a reprimand and/or removal of the contractor from the register at the same time) in order to enhance the deterrent effect.

"The implementation of the above proposed amendments will raise awareness of safeguarding construction site safety, improve the regulatory regime for building works and enhance the deterrent effect against works carried out in a dangerous manner," the spokesman said.

The DEVB will launch a two-month consultation on the above proposed legislative amendments starting from December 30, and the consultation document will be uploaded onto the website of the Development Bureau on the same day. Any views are welcome to be submitted through the online form or by email on or before February 28, 2025 at bo_consultation@devb.gov.hk. Taking into account public views, the DEVB will commence drafting of the amendment bill for introduction into the Legislative Council in the first half of 2026.

[Special announcement on vegetation fire in Yuen Long](#)

Attention TV and radio duty announcers:

Please broadcast the following special announcement as soon as possible, and repeat it at suitable intervals:

A vegetation fire broke out in the vicinity of Tai Tong, Yuen Long, at 8.59pm today (December 13). The Fire Services Department is deploying a

firefighting operation.

Members of the public who are being affected by the smoke and an unusual odour carried by the wind are advised to close their doors and windows and stay calm.

CFS urges public not to consume several kinds of prepackaged granola bars suspected to contain pieces of metal

â€‹The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department today (December 13) urged the public not to consume several kinds of prepackaged granola bar imported from Canada as the products might contain pieces of metal. The trade should stop using or selling the affected batches of products concerned immediately if they possess any of it.

Product details are as follows:

Product name (Best-before date/Lot number):

(1) Granola Bars Chocolate Banana (Best-before date: May 11 – September 13, 2025/Lot number: 687456213040)

(2) Granola Bars Chocolate Chip (Best-before date: June 8 – October 13, 2025/Lot number: 687456213019)

(3) Granola Bars Mixed Berry (Best-before date: June 27 – September 7, 2025/Lot number: 687456213026)

(4) Granola Bars Strawberry (Best-before date: May 22 – September 6, 2025/Lot number: 687456213170)

Brand: MadeGood

Place of origin: Canada

Net weight: 120 grams per pack

Importer: Impex Quality Products Limited

A spokesman for the CFS said, "The CFS noted information from the Canadian authorities that the above-mentioned products may contain pieces of metal, and are being recalled. Upon learning of the incident, the CFS immediately contacted the local importers and retailers for follow-up. A preliminary investigation found that the above-mentioned importer had imported into Hong Kong and supplied the affected batches of the products."

The importer has stopped selling and removed from shelves the affected products upon the CFS's instructions and has initiated a recall. Members of the public may call the importer concerned at 3521 2020 during office hours for enquiries about the recall.

The CFS will alert the trade to the incident, and continue to follow up and take appropriate action. The investigation is ongoing.