

SFST continues visit to New York (with photos)

The Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury, Mr Christopher Hui, yesterday (April 9, New York time) continued his visit to New York, the United States.

In the morning, Mr Hui met with the Founder of Bloomberg L.P. and Bloomberg Philanthropies, Mr Michael Bloomberg. Hong Kong is making tremendous efforts in developing into an international hub of green and sustainable finance as well as family office business. Mr Hui discussed with Mr Bloomberg Hong Kong's policy initiatives to turn the city into a global centre for philanthropy, and the financial means to resolve the challenges brought about by climate change.

Speaking at a luncheon co-organised by the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office, New York and the Asia Society, Mr Hui shared with the participants Hong Kong's vision and strategies on strengthening the positions as a global financial hub and a gateway to Asia in three simple letters – A, B and C.

"A" stands for anchor. "Hong Kong is like an anchor, being stable and resilient during uncertain times.

"Our stability is backed by the 'one country, two systems' principle. High degree of autonomy, courts' independent exercise of judicial power and the rule of law are all upheld in Hong Kong," Mr Hui noted.

Despite the hit by COVID-19 on the economy, Hong Kong remains Asia's largest hub for hedge funds and the second largest for private equity, behind only Mainland China. Hong Kong currently oversees nearly US\$4 trillion in assets. There are over 2 700 single family offices in Hong Kong, demonstrating the city's status as a premier hub for global family offices and wealth owners. The Linked Exchange Rate System is supported by robust foreign currency reserve assets of over US\$420 billion, 1.7 times the size of Hong Kong's monetary base.

Mr Hui continued, "'B' stands for buffer. Hong Kong has long positioned itself as an international risk management centre, providing a diverse range of risk management channels including professional insurance services. We strive to diversify our financial services offerings, for example developing RMB (Renminbi) businesses, as we seek to provide a buffer against external economic challenges and uncertainties."

He was referring to Hong Kong's active promotion of the development of insurance-linked securities, on-going efforts to deepen the various mutual-market access schemes that facilitate RMB cross-boundary investment and two-way fund flows, and encouragement of provision of more offshore RMB products and risk management tools by financial institutions.

Regarding "C", Mr Hui said it is capstan, meaning that Hong Kong's strategic location as a gateway to Asia and beyond makes it an ideal place for global businesses and investors. He added that Hong Kong is not only a gateway to the fast-growing markets of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, but also to the broader Belt and Road Initiative regions.

"We will host the Conference of Belt and Road Initiative Tax Administration Cooperation Forum in September, providing a platform for representatives from governments, international organisations, academic institutions, and strategic enterprises to establish connections and exchange ideas on tax administration co-operation and capacity building," Mr Hui noted.

Mr Hui yesterday also joined a roundtable discussion on Hong Kong's fintech development, which was joined by leaders of companies engaging in fintech business. Apart from Hong Kong's vibrant fintech scene, Mr Hui introduced to the roundtable the government efforts to build a holistic Web3 ecosystem, including provision of an enabling environment and support measures to help the sector flourish.

Moreover, yesterday afternoon, Mr Hui met with the Founder and Managing Partner of family office Accathon Capital, Mr Michael Zhu, and a number of investment fund clients of J.P. Morgan to exchange views on the challenges and opportunities amid the current global financial landscape.

Before concluding his visit yesterday, Mr Hui paid a courtesy call to the Chinese Consul General in New York, Mr Huang Ping.

On April 10 (New York time), Mr Hui will join a breakfast roundtable on the sharing of listing practices hosted by an international, multi-practice law firm, and attend a luncheon with Committee of 100, a membership organisation of prominent Chinese Americans in business, government, academia, science, technology, and the arts. Mr Hui will then depart for Chicago in the evening.





[LCQ8: Connectivity between Northern Link and Central Rail Link](#)

Following is a question by the Hon Gary Zhang and a written reply by the Acting Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Liu Chun-san, in the Legislative Council today (April 10):

Question:

The Northern Link (NOL) will be built between MTR Kam Sheung Road Station and MTR Kwu Tung Station which is under construction, and the MTR

Corporation Limited's target is to commence construction in 2025. On the other hand, the Central Rail Link (CRL) is currently at the planning stage with its proposed alignment connecting Kam Tin in Yuen Long and Kowloon Tong. Many members of the public have indicated their hope for the provision of through train service between those two railway lines, which will save them the inconvenience of having to interchange at Kam Sheung Road Station. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council if the Direct Current (DC) or Alternating Current power supply specification will be adopted for NOL, and of the reasons and considerations involved; if the DC power supply specification will be adopted, whether there is a need for the same power supply specification to be adopted for CRL so as to set the condition for the provision of through train service between the two railway lines (i.e. from Kwu Tung Station to MTR Kowloon Tong Station direct via Kam Sheung Road Station); if there is such a need, whether it has studied the feasibility of the relevant technology; if it has studied and the outcome is in the affirmative, whether the Government will expressly require that relevant equipment (including power supply and signalling systems and trains) which is compatible with CRL must be adopted for NOL when it makes the relevant project agreement, so as to allow the provision of through train service between the two railway lines in the future; if it will not, of the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The reply to the Hon Gary Zhang's question is as follows:

As the transportation backbone of the Northern Metropolis, the Northern Link (NOL) would connect the existing East Rail Line (ERL) and Tuen Ma Line (TML) to form a railway loop linking up the New Territories and Kowloon, which will not only improve the connectivity of the existing railway network and serve the Kwu Tung North New Development Area and the San Tin Technopole, but also unleash the development potential of land around Au Tau, Ngau Tam Mei and San Tin. The MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) is carrying out the detailed planning and design for the NOL Main Line, and would review various technical specifications, including that for power supply, in the light of technical feasibility, cost-effectiveness and relevant railway operation requirements.

The proposed Central Rail Link (CRL) would connect Kam Tin of Yuen Long with Kowloon Tong via Kwai Chung, connecting other existing and proposed railway lines including the TML, Tsuen Wan Line, Kwun Tong Line, ERL and NOL, and provide citizens with more direct and faster routes for travelling between the Northern Metropolis and different districts of Hong Kong Island and Kowloon. The Government is preparing for the next stage of implementation of the CRL, which includes formulating the mode of implementation and financial arrangements, etc. The relevant technical specifications, including that for power supply, could only be established in the course of the subsequent detailed planning and design of the project.

As there is a proposed station at Kam Tin under CRL, the Government has requested MTRCL, in finalising the design of NOL, to consider the technical and operational arrangements for connecting NOL with the proposed CRL.

LCQ18: Measures to facilitate travel on Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Dennis Lam and a written reply by the Acting Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Liu Chun-san, in the Legislative Council today (April 10):

Question:

It has been reported that the utilization of train service of the Hong Kong Section of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link (XRL) has risen sharply as compared with the situation before the epidemic, and its trains are often full on major festivals. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it knows (i) the annual carrying capacity and (ii) the carrying capacities on major festivals of the XRL Hong Kong Section in the past year;

(2) given the special boundary-crossing arrangements made by the Government at two boundary control points during the Lunar New Year just passed, whether the authorities will consider extending the opening hours of the XRL West Kowloon Immigration Control Point to 3am as well as increasing the train service frequency of the XRL Hong Kong Section on major festivals, so as to facilitate Hong Kong people and Mainland visitors in entering and leaving Hong Kong; and

(3) whether it will consider implementing the clearance mode of "collaborative inspection and joint clearance" at the XRL West Kowloon Immigration Control Point?

Reply:

President,

The Hong Kong Section of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link (XRL) connects with the over 40 000 kilometres long national high speed rail (HSR) network. It is a key component of the highly accessible transport network and economic circle of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, and consolidates Hong Kong's position as a regional transport hub. In

2023, service of the XRL Hong Kong Section was extended with the addition of four new short-haul destinations (Dongguannan, Dongguan, Guangzhoudong and Changping) and 12 new long-haul destinations (including Chengdudong and Zhanjiangxi lines), making it a more comprehensive network. The daily train service frequency has also increased from 166 train trips before the epidemic, to the current level of 188 train trips, providing passengers with more frequent service.

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

(1) Train service of the XRL Hong Kong Section has resumed progressively since January 2023, starting with short haul destinations and destinations within the Guangdong Province. Long-haul train service has also resumed in full since April 2023, and patronage has been on a steady increase.

During the Labour Day holidays in 2023, the West Kowloon Control Point recorded a daily average passenger traffic of nearly 90 000 passenger trips; while over 70 000 passenger trips were recorded during the following summer holiday (i.e. July to August); as for the National Day and Christmas holidays in 2023, as well as the New Year and Lunar New Year holidays in 2024, a daily average of over 100 000 passenger trips were recorded.

In 2023, the yearly total of passenger traffic at the West Kowloon Control Point reached about 19.65 million passenger trips, a record high since the commissioning of the XRL Hong Kong Section. The daily patronage also set a new record on 23 December 2023 (the first day of the Christmas long weekend) with over 120 000 passenger trips. In the first two months of 2024, a total passenger traffic of about 4.42 million passenger trips were recorded at the West Kowloon Control Point.

(2) The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government, the MTRCL and the relevant Mainland authorities have been in close communication, and closely monitor the patronage of the XRL Hong Kong section, as well as the travel patterns and needs of passengers, with a view to offering passengers a more convenient and comfortable travelling experience.

To meet the travel needs of passengers during festive season, the MTRCL will discuss with the relevant Mainland railway authorities the train service arrangement in advance before the festivals, with a view to enhancing the service of the XRL Hong Kong Section based on demand. For example, during the Easter and Ching Ming festival holidays, railway operators of both places enhanced the train service between West Kowloon Station (WEK) and Futian Station in response to passenger demand. Over 120 train trips were running between WEK and Futian, and a total of over 200 train trips were running between WEK and various Mainland destinations per day during the holidays.

Regarding the suggestion of extending the operating hours of various control points during festive season, the arrangement involves various considerations, such as passenger demand, the operating arrangements and

manpower deployment of the control points of both sides, public transport service arrangements, etc. Arrangements for the XRL service will also require particular consideration on the national HSR train scheduling and the repair and maintenance of the railway during non-traffic hours. The HKSAR Government will maintain close communication with the relevant Mainland authorities and railway authorities, and consider different measures to further enhance the service of the XRL Hong Kong Section in light of the actual circumstances.

(3) In planning for the redevelopment of existing boundary control points (BCPs) and the development of new BCPs in the future, the HKSAR Government will actively explore the adoption of new clearance mode to enhance passenger clearance efficiency, including implementing the "collaborative inspection and joint clearance" mode in new land BCPs projects. Issues involved in changing the clearance mode of existing BCPs (including the one at HSR WEK commissioned in 2018) are much more complicated than implementing new clearance mode at new BCPs, and the related works must be carried out on the premise that the BCPs' existing operations will not be affected. It is therefore necessary for the HKSAR Government and relevant Mainland authorities to make careful planning to ensure that the port design, boundary arrangements, facilities layout, passenger flow, and other ancillary facilities can accommodate the operation of the new clearance mode before its implementation could be considered.

LCQ 10: Manpower of Government

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Tan Yueheng and a written reply by the Secretary for the Civil Service, Mrs Ingrid Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (April 10):

Question:

Regarding the manpower of the Government, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of time-limited/supernumerary non-directorate civil service posts and their full staff cost (including salaries and staff on-cost) in each of the past two years; if it does not keep such information, of the reasons for that; and

(2) of the number of dedicated offices established by the Government to meet various policy objectives in the past two years, and the following information on the various offices: the time limits for their establishment, the number of staff (including civil servants and non-civil service contract staff), and the full annual staff cost (including salaries and staff on-cost)?

Reply:

President,

The civil service establishment includes posts on the permanent establishment and time-limited posts on the non-permanent establishment. The number of posts of the latter (including directorate and non-directorate posts) has already been counted towards the establishment.

Our reply to various parts of the question is as follows:

(1) The Controlling Officer's Reports of the bureaux/departments (B/Ds) have set out the establishment and provision ceilings of the respective B/Ds in a particular financial year. The Heads of B/Ds may, with regard to their operational needs and the nature of work, create permanent or time-limited non-directorate posts to meet their staffing needs flexibly provided that their respective ceilings are not exceeded. Generally speaking, for tasks that are time-limited in nature or require review in future, the creation of time-limited posts to undertake the tasks would be more appropriate and can ensure proper use of public resources. The duration of time-limited posts would vary depending on operational needs. The Government has not set a specific ratio on the number of permanent and time-limited posts.

The establishment figures of non-directorate posts in the Controlling Officer's Reports of B/Ds already include permanent posts and time-limited posts without separate breakdown on the two types of posts. The Civil Service Bureau does not maintain records on the time-limited non-directorate posts created in B/Ds.

(2) According to the relevant policy bureaux, the information relating to the dedicated offices under their purview established in the past two years (i.e. 2022 to 2023) is tabulated below:

| | Office | Establishment Date (Month/Year) | Tentative Duration (Month/Year) | Number of Staff (Note 1) | | Staff Cost (including Salaries and Staff On-cost) (\$ million) | |
|---|---|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|---|--|---|
| | | | | Position as at December 31, 2022 | Position as at December 31, 2023 | 2022 | 2023 |
| 1 | Office for Attracting Strategic Enterprises | December 2022 | Till March 2027 | 18 (including 16 staff seconded from other departments) | 13 (all seconded from other departments) | — (Note 2) | 22.99 (including the cost of about \$16.2 million borne by the departments of the secondees) |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|--|--------------|---------------------|---|---|---|--|
| 2 | Northern Metropolis Co-ordination Office | June 2023 | Till March 2028 | – | 34 (including 4 staff seconded from other departments) | – | 20.95 (including the cost of about \$1.6 million borne by the departments of the secondees) |
| 3 | Hong Kong Talent Engage | October 2023 | Till September 2026 | – | 16 | – | 2.75 |
| 4 | National Games Coordination Office | October 2023 | Till March 2026 | – | 35 | – | 7.37 |

Note 1: The number of staff includes full-time and part-time government employees employed on civil service terms and non-civil service terms. The number of staff listed in the table above represents the position of the relevant offices as of December 31 of the year concerned. The number of staff may have increased or decreased during the year.

Note 2: Office for Attracting Strategic Enterprises was established on December 23, 2022. As at December 31, 2022, the duration since its establishment was less than one month.

LCQ20: School bullying

Following is a question by the Hon Lai Tung-kwok and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Dr Choi Yuk-lin, in the Legislative Council today (April 10):

Question:

Some members of the public have noted that according to the guidelines on the handling of bullying incidents set out in the School Administration Guide published by the Education Bureau (EDB), the EDB advises schools to adopt a "Whole School Approach" (WSA) to formulate and implement anti-bullying strategies; the EDB requires schools to intervene and follow up bullying incidents as soon as possible only if such incidents occur; and the EDB should be notified only if the school bullying incidents are of a more severe nature (e.g. teachers being the bullies, and incidents involving brutal violence, injuries or deaths). There are views that as neither the adoption of WSA nor the reporting of school bullying incidents is mandatory, the handling of school bullying incidents has been ineffective for a

prolonged period. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of student cases involving school bullying handled by schools, as well as the respective numbers of requests for assistance, complaints and reported cases in relation to school bullying received by the EDB, in each of the past three school years;

(2) of the number of schools currently adopting WSA to formulate and implement anti-bullying strategies, as well as their proportion to the total number of schools;

(3) whether it has grasped the primary reporting channels and handling procedures for school bullying adopted by schools under WSA; if so, of the details;

(4) whether it has plans to change the current practice of not requiring schools to notify the EDB of all school bullying cases; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(5) given that the authorities have indicated the establishment of a one-stop hotline and the offering of online counselling services in the 2023-2024 school year to provide students and parents with advice on and support in handling school bullying, of the details of such hotline and services, and whether an assessment of their effectiveness has been conducted?

Reply:

President,

The Education Bureau (EDB) has all along been adopting a "zero tolerance" policy on school bullying. Any bullying act, irrespective of the form or for whatever reasons, is totally unacceptable. School is a place where students learn to show care, concern, support and respect for one another. Creating a safe and harmonious school environment for students to learn and grow up happily is the fundamental responsibility of schools, as well as the common goal of the EDB and all educators. Our reply to the question raised by the Hon Lai Tung-kwok is as follows:

(1) According to the information collected from the EDB's annual questionnaire survey on guidance and discipline cases in public sector primary and secondary schools, the number of student cases handled by schools related to school bullying from the 2020/21 to 2022/23 school years was about 420 on average per year. Schools have all along been handling bullying incidents properly and explaining the incidents to parents in accordance with their school-based policy. Parents and other people may also seek assistance from the EDB as necessary. In the three school years, the EDB had received a total of 47 requests for assistance, complaints and reports in relation to school bullying, which mainly involved physical/ behavioural violence and verbal attack. The EDB had completed 45 cases, of which five complaints were

found substantiated or partially substantiated upon investigation.

(2) to (4) The EDB has required all public sector schools in the territory, through issuance of circulars and guidelines, to take bullying incidents seriously, implement proactive measures and adopt the Whole School Approach in formulating and implementing anti-bullying policies. The School Administration Guide (SAG) and circular issued by the EDB lay down clearly and in details the principles of handling school bullying, as well as the relevant procedures, methods and follow-up actions, which should include a clear standpoint of "zero tolerance", reporting mechanism and handling procedures, and monitoring with high transparency. In addition, the EDB has also adopted a multi-pronged approach to help schools implement the policy on prevention and handling of school bullying, including raising anti-bullying awareness among students and school staff, nurturing students' proper values and cultivating in them a positive sense of mutual trust, inclusion and friendship through school curriculum, learning and teaching resources, student activities and teacher training.

Under the spirit of school-based management, the Incorporated Management Committees should lead schools in formulating their school-based mechanisms and procedures for administering school operation, including the policy on prevention and handling of school bullying, with a view to fostering of a harmonious school environment that enables student learning and growth. Schools should take a proactive approach to handle each school bullying incident seriously, while all school staff are required to report to the school management or the responsible team when any bullying case is known to them. If school bullying incidents occur, schools should take education, guidance and protection of their students as the prime concern, handle the cases in accordance with the "Flowchart for Handling Bullying Incidents in Schools" provided in the SAG and circular by the EDB and activate school-based crisis management mechanism as the situation so warrants. Upon informed of a school bullying incident, action should be taken to stop the bullying immediately. The school should assess whether the student(s) concerned is/are injured or emotionally unstable, contact their parents as soon as possible and arrange for first aid or treatment as appropriate if there is any physical injury. Thereafter, the school should intervene and render an initial mediation, and arrange guidance personnel or relevant professional service outside school to provide in-depth follow-up for the student(s) involved in the school bullying incident. For school bullying incidents of a more serious nature (such as those involving serious violence or injury), the school should notify the respective regional education office of the EDB as soon as possible so that assistance could be rendered. If illegal acts are involved, schools should proactively contact the respective Police School Liaison Officer. For serious cases, schools should report the incidents to the Police immediately. The EDB will liaise with the schools, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) and the Police for appropriate handling measures.

We believe that in the handling of bullying incidents, education, guidance and protection of students should be the prime concern. Schools are staffed with professionals (including guidance personnel, school social workers and school-based educational psychologists) to provide students in

need with due support and mediation. In the process of handling these cases, schools should work with parents to help the students involved rectify their behaviours and better protect the students being bullied. Moreover, through professional consultation and school visits, the EDB's guidance professionals review with schools their anti-bullying work on an ongoing basis, and provide appropriate support according to schools' needs. To further enhance schools' capability of preventing and handling bullying in schools, the EDB will continue to provide professional training programmes, seminars and workshops for school personnel to keep them abreast of the latest information and strengthen their skills in handling bullying incidents, thereby enabling schools to implement their anti-bullying measures more effectively. The EDB will collaborate with other government departments such as the SWD and the Police to provide schools with assistance in various aspects to facilitate the cultivation of a harmonious and caring school environment. The EDB will continue to monitor the situation of schools and provide timely support to prevent school bullying and protect the well-being of students.

(5) The EDB will set up a one-stop hotline and offer online counselling services in the 2023/24 school year to provide students and parents with advice on and support in handling conflicts among peers or school bullying. Through the hotline and online services, duty counsellors and registered social workers will provide advice and counselling services for students and parents, and may refer the cases to government or non-governmental organisations for follow-up where necessary. The hotline and online counselling services will commence operation in May 2024. The EDB will disseminate the details of the hotline and online services through various channels such as circular memorandum, briefings and websites, and will monitor the services operation on an on-going basis.