

LCQ1: Tobacco control measures

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Johnny Ng and a reply by the Acting Secretary for Health, Dr Libby Lee, in the Legislative Council today (March 20):

Question:

It has been reported that before the presentation of the new Budget last month, due to a widespread rumour in the community about the Government's upcoming increase of tobacco duty, some sellers of duty-not-paid cigarettes (commonly known as illicit cigarettes) took the opportunity to step up sale promotion efforts, including distributing flyers to residents in public housing estates and widely sending messages to their customers, in order to remind them to purchase cigarettes as early as possible. Regarding tobacco control measures, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as it is learnt that the situation of selling cheap cigarettes with duty-not-paid (commonly known as "Cheap Whites") in the market has worsened in the wake of the proposal to increase tobacco duty put forward in the Budget presented in February last year, of the number of law enforcement actions (including decoy operations) taken by the authorities and the numbers of illicit cigarettes and "Cheap Whites" seised, with a breakdown by month;

(2) as the Government indicated in the reply to a question raised by a Member of this Council on May 31 last year that it would consider the printing of a QR code tag on each stick of duty-paid cigarette or each relevant cigarette pack for identification purpose, of the latest progress of the relevant work; whether it will strengthen the role and law enforcement work of the Tobacco and Alcohol Control Office of the Department of Health in respect of combating illicit cigarettes; and

(3) as there are views pointing out that increasing tobacco duty may not be an effective tobacco control measure and will on the contrary encourage the sale of illicit cigarettes and "Cheap Whites", and the Government completed the public consultation on the tobacco control strategies of "Vibrant, Healthy and Tobacco-free Hong Kong" on September 30 last year, of the latest progress of the relevant follow-up work?

Reply:

President,

Regarding the question raised by Dr the Hon Johnny Ng, having consulted the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau and the Customs and Excise Department (C&ED), our consolidated reply is set out below:

The Government's tobacco control policy seeks to discourage smoking, contain the proliferation of tobacco use and minimise the impact of second-hand smoke on the public. Since the early 1980s, the Government has progressively stepped up tobacco control through a multi-pronged approach,

including legislation, enforcement, taxation, education and smoking cessation, which has proved to be effective. Smoking prevalence in Hong Kong has gradually dropped from 23.3 per cent in 1982 to 9.5 per cent in 2021, making Hong Kong a forerunner of tobacco control in the world. The Government has made reference to the World Health Organization (WHO)'s target on tobacco control and aims to reduce smoking prevalence to 7.8 per cent by 2025.

Hong Kong is facing an ageing population and a continuous rising number of chronic disease patients, while smoking is the most important and preventable risk factor leading to chronic diseases and deaths. There are still about 580 000 people in Hong Kong who are daily smokers of traditional cigarettes, and a considerable portion of them belong to the lower income group in the society, which is the group that can least afford the health and economic damage brought about by smoking. Smoking will only continue to exacerbate the health and economic disparity between the rich and the poor, and the whole society and the healthcare system will have to pay a heavy price for smoking-related diseases. Preliminary data from a local study conducted in 2021 revealed that the economic loss resulting from tobacco-induced health problems was estimated to be about HK\$8.2 billion every year. There is a genuine need to put in place more stringent measures to minimise the harmful effects of tobacco on the society.

To further reduce smoking prevalence, the Government conducted the Vibrant, Healthy and Smoke-free Hong Kong public consultation on tobacco control strategies last year. The Health Bureau is exploring the implementation of tobacco control measures by phases, and plans to give an account of the next step of work in due course. The preliminary results of the consultation show that over 90 per cent of the respondents support further reducing smoking prevalence in Hong Kong, and many of the tobacco control measures proposed are widely supported by the public, including increase in tobacco duty. In fact, as supported by empirical evidence, increasing the tobacco duty is recognised internationally as the most effective means of reducing tobacco use. The WHO points out that every 10 per cent increase in tobacco price will reduce overall tobacco consumption by 4 per cent in high-income countries. Raising the overall retail price of tobacco and increasing the incentives for smokers, particularly low-income smokers, to quit smoking is the most important tool in narrowing the wealth gap between the rich and the poor caused by tobacco use.

The Government proposes in the Budget this year to increase the duty on cigarettes by 80 cents per stick. Later today, we will introduce the Dutiable Commodities (Amendment) Bill 2024 into the Legislative Council for First and Second Readings. I would like to take this opportunity to encourage smokers to quit smoking as soon as possible by calling the Integrated Smoking Cessation Hotline of the Department of Health (DH) at 1833 183.

There are suggestions that the illicit cigarettes market would become more active following the increase in tobacco duty. I would like to emphasise that studies conducted by the WHO and the World Bank have already pointed out that tobacco duty and the prices of tobacco products have limited impact on illicit cigarette market share at country level.

The Government spares no effort in combating illicit cigarettes. The C&ED is the primary enforcement agency responsible for the suppression of smuggling activities, including collecting and protecting revenue from dutiable commodities stipulated in the Dutiable Commodities Ordinance (Cap. 109). The Tobacco and Alcohol Control Office (TACO) of the DH is the primary enforcement agency under the Smoking (Public Health) Ordinance (Cap. 371), and at the same time charged with the responsibility of promoting a smoke-free culture, and co-ordinating the smoking cessation services, etc.

At present, the C&ED is mainly responsible for combating illicit cigarettes. The C&ED is closely monitoring the activities of illicit cigarette, and has strengthened the intelligence exchange and collection with the Mainland and overseas law enforcement agencies, and conducted investigations into the sale of cigarettes at abnormal prices. The C&ED will take resolute enforcement action against selling duty-not-paid cigarettes, whether or not they are regarded as "Cheap Whites". The quantity and market values of illicit cigarettes seized by the C&ED from 2023 to February 2024 are set out at Annex. The quantity of illicit cigarettes seized mainly reflects the effectiveness of the C&ED's enhanced enforcement strategy and efforts, and does not represent an increase in the quantity of illicit cigarettes entering the market. The number of duty-paid cigarettes in Hong Kong (before and after the COVID-19 epidemic) is also broadly in line with the trend of the overall number of smokers, reflecting that there is no rampant illicit cigarette trading activities as alleged by individual comments.

We are actively exploring with the C&ED on the feasibility of implementing a duty-paid labeling system, that is, adding a duty-paid label specified by the C&ED on each pack or piece of duty-paid tobacco products to clearly distinguish between duty-paid and duty-not-paid cigarettes. The C&ED will also continue to flexibly deploy its internal resources, strengthen its risk assessment and intelligence analysis, and combat illicit cigarette activities under a holistic enforcement strategy, i.e. intercepting smuggling in the upper stream, smashing storehouses in the middle, and tackling selling activities in the lower end.

On the other hand, the regulation of smoking products is mainly enforced by TACO. The Smoking (Public Health) Ordinance (Cap. 371) stipulates that no person shall display or cause to be displayed, or publish or distribute for the purpose of display, any kind of smoking products advertisements. To combat the distribution of smoking product advertisements also referred to as "tobacco flyer", TACO has established a co-operation mechanism with the Hong Kong Police Force, the C&ED and the Housing Department since January this year, and has been conducting joint operations in public housing estates in various districts. Since 2021, TACO has successfully prosecuted 12 offenders for distributing smoking product leaflets. The DH will continue to take enforcement actions against activities in contravention of the Smoking (Public Health) Ordinance.

Thank you, President.

LCQ6: Enhancing transport services to and from boundary control points

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Tan Yueheng and a reply by the Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Lam Sai-hung, in the Legislative Council today (March 20):

Question:

There are views that at present, the numbers of inbound and outbound passenger trips at Lok Ma Chau Spurline Control Point have increased as compared with those before the epidemic, but for the MTR East Rail Line (ERL), the frequency of trains plying to and from Lok Ma Chau Station is half of that plying to and from Lo Wu Station, which cannot effectively divert cross-boundary residents and tourists. On enhancing transport services to and from boundary control points, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it knows if the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) will make appropriate arrangements according to actual patronages during public holidays or peak periods of cross-boundary travel, and flexibly adjust the frequency of trains plying to and from Lok Ma Chau Station on ERL, so as to meet the needs of passengers; if MTRCL will not, whether the Government knows the difficulties MTRCL faces;

(2) whether it will enhance public transport services such as bus and minibus services at Lok Ma Chau Spurline Control Point during public holidays or peak periods of cross-boundary travel, so as to effectively divert residents and tourists heading for the North District; and

(3) as there are views that with the westward shift of Shenzhen's development and the commissioning of the Shenzhen Metro line connecting Shenzhen Bay Port within this year, it is expected that the numbers of inbound and outbound passengers going through Lok Ma Chau Spurline Control Point, Lok Ma Chau Control Point and Shenzhen Bay Port will continue to increase in the future, how the Government will make proper complementary transport arrangements and what deployments are in place on the Hong Kong side?

Reply:

President,

There are currently a total of seven land boundary control points (BCPs) between Hong Kong and Shenzhen, including two rail-based BCPs (i.e. Lo Wu and Lok Ma Chau Spur Line) and five road-based BCPs (i.e. Shenzhen Bay, Lok Ma Chau, Man Kam To, Heung Yuen Wai and Sha Tau Kok). The Government will take into account the respective nature and positioning of the BCPs in planning the appropriate public transport connections. The Government and public

transport operators will also closely monitor the changes in travel patterns and number of travellers, with a view to making timely adjustments to the services as and when necessary, so as to facilitate the flow of people between the two places.

A case in point is the past Lunar New Year (LNY) holidays. To tie in with the operating hours of the Shenzhen Bay Port and Lo Wu Control Point under special boundary-crossing arrangements, the Government coordinated with the public transport operators to make corresponding service arrangements in order to meet the transport needs of cross-boundary travellers. Amongst others, the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) enhanced the service of the East Rail Line (EAL) to/from Lo Wu Station and to/from Lok Ma Chau Station during the holidays. Service hours of trains to/from Lo Wu Station were also extended on LNY's eve and the evening of the second day of LNY. The Transport Department (TD) also coordinated with the public transport operators to introduce two additional special overnight bus routes and additional overnight cross-boundary coach service terminating at Shenzhen Bay Port to match the 24-hour passenger clearance arrangement during the holidays. Service of the "Yellow Bus" plying between Lok Ma Chau Control Point / Huanggang Port was also enhanced.

In consultation with the Security Bureau, the TD and the MTRCL, my reply to the question raised by Dr the Hon Tan Yueheng is as follows:

(1) Unlike Lo Wu Control Point, which is only connected by railway service, cross-boundary travellers can also travel to/from Lok Ma Chau Spur Line Control Point by franchised bus, green minibus and taxi. Therefore, in addition to considering the overall arrival and departure passenger traffic at Lok Ma Chau Spur Line Control Point, the Government and the MTRCL have been closely monitoring the patronage of railway service to/from the BCP with a view to making timely adjustments to the EAL service as and when necessary.

We noted a growing passenger demand for railway service to/from Lok Ma Chau Spur Line Control Point during the morning and evening hours on weekends and public holidays. The MTRCL has thus enhanced the train service to/from Lok Ma Chau Station during the morning and evening hours of weekends and public holidays since last Saturday (i.e. March 16), by enhancing the train service frequency from five trains per hour (i.e. at 12-minute intervals) to six trains per hour (i.e. at 10-minute intervals). Meanwhile, in view of the overall increase in the patronage of railway service to/from Lo Wu Control Point and to/from Lok Ma Chau Spur Line Control Point during the evening hours of weekends and public holidays, the MTRCL has also enhanced the train frequencies to/from Lo Wu Station, and to/from Lok Ma Chau Station on the same day to meet passenger demand.

The Government and the MTRCL will continue to closely monitor the passenger flow at Lo Wu Station and Lok Ma Chau Station, and review the service arrangements of the EAL in a timely manner with adjustments to be made as and when necessary.

(2) The MTR EAL has been providing convenient, fast and efficient public transport service to travellers between Northeast New Territories and Lo Wu

Control Point and Lok Ma Chau Spur Line Control Point. Travellers going through Lok Ma Chau Spur Line Control Point can also take KMB Route No. B1 for travelling to/from Yuen Long and Tin Shui Wai. Currently, KMB Route No. B1 operates with a minimum frequency of eight-minute intervals during hours with high demand. In practice, during periods of particularly strong passenger demand such as weekends and public holidays, the KMB will flexibly enhance the service to operate more departures than scheduled. Apart from KMB Route No. B1, Green Minibus Route No. 75 also provides supplementary transport service between the Lok Ma Chau Spur Line Control Point and Yuen Long.

The Government has been working with public transport operators to draw up plans ahead of the peak periods of cross-boundary travel. For example, during the LNY holidays, the TD made advance preparations with the KMB for additional manpower and buses to enable arrangement of additional departures of Route No. B1 in a timely manner having regard to passenger needs. Simultaneous boarding of multiple buses were also arranged at Lok Ma Chau Spur Line Public Transport Interchange to facilitate quick dispersal of travellers.

(3) The Government has been closely monitoring the demand for clearance services at various land BCPs. On the basis of the 24-hour passenger clearance services currently provided at Lok Ma Chau Control Point and Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge Hong Kong Port, the Government will liaise with the Mainland authorities on extending the operating hours of the passenger clearance service at respective land BCPs as and when necessary to further facilitate the flow of people between the two places. The Government will closely monitor the clearance arrangements and flow of travellers at the BCPs, and maintain a close liaison with public transport operators with a view to increasing their service frequencies to meet passenger needs in a timely manner.

In order to further promote connectivity in the Greater Bay Area, the governments of Hong Kong and Shenzhen established in 2021 the Task Force for Hong Kong-Shenzhen Co-operation on Cross-Boundary Railway Infrastructure to take forward two cross-boundary railway projects, namely the Hong Kong-Shenzhen Western Rail Link (Hung Shui Kiu-Qianhai) (HSWRL) and the Northern Link (NOL) Spur Line. Specifically, we are currently undertaking the second stage of study of the HSWRL project, which is expected to be completed within this year. The proposed NOL Spur Line will also provide a direct railway connection to the new Huanggang Port in Shenzhen. Hong Kong and Shenzhen are now proactively taking forward the relevant planning work, with the target of commencing the detailed planning and design of the project within this year.

Thank you, President.

LCQ8: Promoting Hong Kong to Arab States of Gulf

Following is a question by the Hon Holden Chow and a written reply by the Acting Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism, Mr Raistlin Lau, in the Legislative Council today (Mar 20):

Question:

The Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) is one of Hong Kong's important trading and investment partners, and its six member states (namely Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)) are home to over 50 million people. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the number of travellers coming from the member states of GCC to Hong Kong in each of the past 10 years;
- (2) of the details of the authorities' effort to publicise Hong Kong to the member states of GCC in the past two years, including the advertisements placed and promotional activities organized;
- (3) whether it knows the activities organised by the representative office set up by the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) in Dubai, UAE for publicising Hong Kong in the past two years, and the existing channels mainly through which the representative office publicises Hong Kong to the local residents;
- (4) whether it knows if the HKTB has plans to upgrade its representative office in Dubai to a worldwide office; if it has, of the details;
- (5) whether it has compiled statistics on the number of students coming from the member states of GCC to study in Hong Kong in each of the past five years; and
- (6) whether specific measures or plans are in place to attract students from the member states of GCC to study in Hong Kong; if so, of the details?

Reply:

President,

In respect of the question raised by the Hon Holden Chow, having consulted the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau (CEDB), the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau (FSTB) and the Education Bureau, the reply is as follows:

- (1) According to the figures provided by the Immigration Department, visitor arrivals from the six member states of the Cooperation Council for the Arab

States of the Gulf (GCC) (namely Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)) to Hong Kong ranged from around 33 000 and 49 000 annually from 2014 to 2019. Following the resumption of cross-border travel since February 2023, visitor arrivals from GCC member states last year was around 16 000. With the gradual resumption of flights between GCC member states and Hong Kong, the number of visitors from GCC member states is expected to increase this year.

(2) to (4) Bureaux and departments of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government carry out publicity and promotion activities targeting GCC member states in many different areas including economics, finance, environmental protection, culture and art, tourism, etc, in order to promote exchanges in various aspects and enhance economic benefits.

On the economic front, the CEDB remarked that their Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in Dubai (Dubai ETO) has actively forged closer ties with the six GCC member states over the past two years, meeting with government officials relevant to commerce and trade, chambers of commerce, business organisations and individuals, and hosting various events to promote Hong Kong's unique business advantages and investment opportunities under the "one country, two systems", as well as Hong Kong's culture, arts and creative industries, thereby further enhancing Hong Kong's international status. The Dubai ETO also arranged media personnel in the region to visit Hong Kong under the Sponsored Journalists Programme to cover major events such as the Asian Financial Forum, EdTech Month Summit, Hong Kong Arbitration Week, and Hong Kong FinTech Week, so as to deepen the understanding of Hong Kong's actual situation by various sectors in the aforementioned six member states. In addition, the Dubai ETO regularly posts on social media platforms to promote the HKSAR Government's latest policies on commerce, economy and investment, Hong Kong's business environment, activities participated and/or organised by the ETO, as well as Hong Kong's tourism attractions. The Information Services Department also promotes Hong Kong by publishing print advertorials and placing online advertisements on media outlets in the Middle East, working with individual newspapers to produce online and social media contents as well as placing advertisements in the international airports in the region.

The Dubai ETO also, in conjunction with relevant departments, initiated and co-ordinated visits by Principal Officials of the HKSAR Government to countries under its purview, such as the high-level business delegation to Saudi Arabia and the UAE led by the Chief Executive in February 2023 to promote to the local political and business sectors the unique advantages of Hong Kong, which include its role as the key link for the country's Belt and Road (B&R) Initiative, its status as an international trade centre as well as the immense opportunities brought by the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. During the visit, Hong Kong signed a total of 13 high-quality Memoranda of Understanding or Letters of Intent with various enterprises and organisations of Saudi Arabia and the UAE, laying a solid foundation for the long-term development of Hong Kong businesses in the Middle East region while attracting its local companies and capital to invest in Hong Kong. Relevant Hong Kong enterprises and organisations have maintained close liaison with

these local contacts, with the conclusion of additional 16 co-operation initiatives after the visit.

Riding on the fruitful outcomes of the Chief Executive's visit to the Middle East region, Hong Kong held the 8th Belt and Road Summit (the Summit) under the theme of "Prospering on a Decade of Collaboration" on September 13 and 14, 2023, with the addition of the Middle East Forum which was well attended by the representatives of key enterprises in addition to government representatives from the Middle East countries. Through the project investment sessions focusing on Saudi Arabia, the UAE and the emerging markets, some 50 investment/co-operation projects in the Middle East region were explored. During the Summit, a total of 21 Memoranda of Understanding or Letters of Intent were signed, six of which are related to the Middle East region, covering various areas such as sustainable energy and construction resources as well as research and development. These collaboration initiatives have paved the groundwork for further co-operation with the Middle East markets.

Invest Hong Kong also proactively organised and participated in various investment promotion events in the six GCC member states, including the Single Family Offices Leaders Forum and Opportunity Asia – Destination Hong Kong: Growth Opportunities in the New Era held in Dubai, the Global Family Office Roundtable held in Jeddah, the Web Summit Qatar held in Doha, among others.

In terms of financial and environmental co-operation, the FSTB and the Environment and Ecology Bureau joined the Chinese delegation to attend the 28th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP28) in Dubai from late November to early December 2023. The Financial Services Development Council (FSDC) and the Friends of the Earth (HK) co-hosted a side event forum titled "Hong Kong's Drive Towards Green and Sustainable Development and Cutting-Edge Innovations" at the China Pavilion at COP28. The FSTB attended the forum and delivered a keynote speech to showcase to the participants the unique role of Hong Kong in leading the regional green development as well as how to leverage on the strengths of green finance in jointly building a sustainable future. The FSDC has also established research collaboration with the Financial Sector Development Program (FSDP) in Saudi Arabia in 2023, and signed a memorandum of understanding with the FSDP at the Asian Financial Forum in January 2024 to signify the bilateral co-operation.

In terms of tourism, GCC member states including Saudi Arabia, UAE, etc, are potential visitor source markets. Through its representative office in Dubai, the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTb) engages local tourism professionals for marketing and publicity. This arrangement of having a representative office offers flexibility and efficiency.

In 2022, the HKTb partnered with the Dubai ETO and the Hong Kong Trade Development Council to promote Hong Kong tourism at a local dinner reception celebrating the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the HKSAR. During the reception, the HKTb leveraged on advanced technology to promote Hong Kong

as a leisure travel destination, and deepen the understanding of new markets in the Middle East, including setting up a kiosk making use of virtual reality (VR) technology and giving away VR headsets.

In tandem with the reopening of Hong Kong's tourism and the launch of the "Hello Hong Kong" large-scale global promotion campaign, the HKTb rolled out various kinds of promotion around the world. For instance, the HKTb organised briefings in the Middle East to introduce new tourism products to the local travel trade, promoted special Hong Kong tourism offers, and rolled out travel packages in collaboration with various tourism brands to attract visitors from the Middle East to visit Hong Kong.

In February this year, the HKTb demonstrated Hong Kong's traditional culture and tourism appeal through a series of promotions, including souvenir handouts and dragon dance performances in a Dragon Boat event in Dubai. In a dinner reception held by the Dubai ETO, the HKTb showcased the city's appeal through a promotional video.

In addition, the HKTb partners with travel agents in these markets to launch travel packages and promotes new tourism products about Hong Kong through social media, blogs, electronic direct mail, etc, to encourage bookings for visits to Hong Kong by visitors. The HKTb also participated in various business-to-business meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions events and exhibitions, including the Meetings Arabia and Luxury Travel (MALT) Congress, the Kingdom Business Luxury Travel (KBLT) Congress, etc, to connect with the travel trade in these markets, introduce Hong Kong as a travel destination to them, and showcase the city's tourism appeal.

The HKTb will also team up with airlines to offer travel packages to visitor segments with different spending power. The HKTb will also host familiarisation trips for the travel trade, media and key opinion leaders (KOLs) from these markets to enable them to experience Hong Kong first-hand.

The HKTb, together with more than 20 travel trade representatives, will soon participate in the Arabian Travel Market, a leading travel trade exhibition in the Middle East. The event will be held in May this year in Dubai and is expected to attract about 40 000 visitors. The HKTb will set up a dedicated Hong Kong pavilion to promote Hong Kong's tourism offerings and experiences.

Looking ahead, the HKTb will continue to promote Hong Kong in the region. Riding on a series of international art and cultural events to be held in Hong Kong and various Chinese and Western festivities, the HKTb will partner with local media to target and attract young and family travellers through various contents and videos on social media.

Apart from conducting promotions in the area, the HKTb has been inviting media representatives from Muslim regions to come to Hong Kong to visit local "Muslim-friendly" establishments. The Muslim familiarisation trip organised in September last year showed the incoming trade that Hong Kong welcomes and is suitable for Muslim visitors. The HKTb also consolidated a series of

information about Hong Kong on its DiscoverHongKong.com website for Muslim visitors, ranging from cuisine, hotel accommodation, local culture to activities suitable for Muslim visitors, etc, to attract them to visit Hong Kong and enhance their travel experience in the city.

(5) In the 2019/20 to 2023/24 academic years, the numbers of non-local students from GCC member states pursuing the University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded programmes are set out in the following table:

Academic year	Non-local students from GCC member states
2019/20	1
2020/21	1
2021/22	2
2022/23	4
2023/24 (provisional figures)	3

Note: The above numbers refer to the countries of origin of the non-local students, i.e. their nationalities or residing locations.

(6) The Chief Executive proposed in the 2023 Policy Address to develop Hong Kong into an international post-secondary education hub. To this end, the Government is stepping up efforts in promoting the internationalisation and diversity of the post-secondary education sector of Hong Kong, so as to attract outstanding non-local students (including those from GCC member states) to study in Hong Kong. Measures include increasing the admission quota of non-local students to Government-funded post-secondary institutions, expanding the quotas of scholarship schemes, including the B&R Scholarship and The Hong Kong PhD Fellowship Scheme, etc. In addition, the eight UGC-funded universities have established the Heads of Universities Committee Standing Committee on Internationalisation (HUCOMSCI) and conducted overseas recruitment activities and exhibitions together under the brand of "Study in Hong Kong". To strengthen the promotion of Hong Kong's higher education along the countries of the B&R initiative, the UGC has allocated around \$10 million in the 2022-25 triennium for the HUCOMSCI to commence a new project to formulate the promotion strategy targeting these countries, produce publicity publications and short videos, etc. In tandem, the Education Bureau and the UGC Secretariat have also advised the UGC-funded universities that in order to support the development of Hong Kong into an international post-secondary education hub, the universities should provide more suitable campus facilities and catering services to support students of different religions, languages, customs and cultures, as well as tending to their needs at social and personal levels, thereby enhancing the support for non-local students in various aspects as far as practicable.

Auction of traditional vehicle registration marks to be held on April 6

The Transport Department (TD) today (March 20) announced that the auction of traditional vehicle registration marks will be held on April 6 (Saturday) in Meeting Room S421, L4, Old Wing, Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, Wan Chai.

"A total of 350 vehicle registration marks will be put up for public auction. The list of marks has been uploaded to the department's website, www.td.gov.hk/en/public_services/vehicle_registration_mark/index.html," a department spokesman said.

Applicants who have paid a deposit of \$1,000 to reserve a mark for auction should also participate in the bidding (including the first bid at the reserve price of \$1,000). Otherwise, the mark concerned may be sold to another bidder at the reserve price.

People who wish to participate in the bidding at the auction should take note of the following important points:

(1) Successful bidders are required to produce the following documents for completion of registration and payment procedures immediately after the successful bidding:

- (i) the identity document of the successful bidder;
- (ii) the identity document of the purchaser if it is different from the successful bidder;
- (iii) a copy of the Certificate of Incorporation if the purchaser is a body corporate; and

(iv) a crossed cheque made payable to "The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region" or "The Government of the HKSAR". (For an auctioned mark paid for by cheque, the first three working days after the date of auction will be required for cheque clearance confirmation before processing of the application for mark assignment can be completed.) Successful bidders can also pay through the Easy Pay System (EPS). Payment by post-dated cheques, cash or other methods will not be accepted.

(2) Purchasers must make payment of the purchase price through EPS or by crossed cheque and complete the Memorandum of Sale of Registration Mark immediately after the bidding. Subsequent alteration of the particulars in the memorandum will not be permitted.

(3) A vehicle registration mark can only be assigned to a motor vehicle which is registered in the name of the purchaser. The Certificate of Incorporation

must be produced immediately by the purchaser if a vehicle registration mark purchased is to be registered under the name of a body corporate.

(4) Special registration marks are non-transferable. Where the ownership of a motor vehicle with a special registration mark is transferred, the allocation of the special registration mark shall be cancelled.

(5) The purchaser shall, within 12 months after the date of auction, apply to the Commissioner for Transport for the registration mark to be assigned to a motor vehicle registered in the name of the purchaser. If the purchaser fails to assign the registration mark within 12 months, allocation of the mark will be cancelled and arranged for re-allocation in accordance with the statutory provision without prior notice to the purchaser.

For other auction details, please refer to the Guidance Notes – Auction of Traditional Vehicle Registration Marks, which can be downloaded from the department's website, www.td.gov.hk/en/public_services/vehicle_registration_mark/tvrm_auction/index.html.

LCQ4: Kai Tak Sports Park

Following is a question by the Hon Kenneth Fok and a reply by the Acting Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism, Mr Raistlin Lau, in the Legislative Council today (March 20):

Question:

There are views that the Kai Tak Sports Park (KTSP) is a venue developed with the objective of becoming a "world-class destination for all interests", and under the Government's goal of making every effort to promote sports development along the "five strategic directions", the KTSP shoulders important missions, such as hosting the National Games and major sports events, as well as facilitating the integrated development of sports in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA). In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as the Government indicated in the reply to a question raised by a Member of this Council on January 24 this year that the KTSP would be completed by phases by the end of this year, of the progress of the relevant works, and whether it can provide the latest timetable for completion to demonstrate clearly if the works can be completed as scheduled;

(2) given the upcoming 15th National Games in 2025, whether the authorities have plans to reserve venues in the KTSP for conducting long-term exchanges or training by sports organisations in the GBA; if so, of the details; if

not, the reasons for that; and

(3) as the KTSP's Main Stadium has a seating capacity of up to 50 000, whether the authorities have assessed if catering and other ancillary facilities in the KTSP have sufficient capacity to provide services at a reasonable standard?

Reply:

President,

The Government is committed to promoting sports development in Hong Kong by promoting sports in the community, supporting elite sports, developing Hong Kong into a centre for major international sports events, enhancing professionalism and developing sports as an industry. This include promoting sports at community level, increasing and enhancing sports and recreation facilities, and encouraging collaboration among communities in fostering a strong sporting culture; strengthening the support to elite athletes as well as attracting major international sports events to Hong Kong. At the same time, we endeavour to promote sports development in Hong Kong through enhanced professionalism in the sports sector and the development of sports as an industry.

Being the largest sports infrastructure project in Hong Kong's history, the Kai Tak Sports Park (KTSP) is crucial to the Government's implementation of the relevant sports policies. The KTSP adopts a "Design, Build and Operate" model, with Kai Tak Sports Park Limited (KTSPL) as the Contracted Party responsible for the design, construction and future operation of the KTSP. The contract is for 25 years, including five years for design and construction and approximately 20 years for operation.

Occupying an area of about 28 hectares, the KTSP will provide modern and multi-purpose sports and recreation facilities upon completion, including a 50 000-seat Main Stadium, a 10 000-seat Indoor Sports Centre, a 5 000-seat Public Sports Ground and about 14-hectare landscaped open space and other ancillary facilities. Among others, the Main Stadium, equipping with a retractable roof, offering different stage positioning and seating configurations as well as adopting a flexible pitch system design, provides more options for hosting different types of large-scale cultural and entertainment events such as concerts.

My consolidated reply to the questions raised by the Hon Kenneth Fok is as follows:

The construction of the KTSP commenced in February 2019. Currently, the main structure of the Public Sports Ground, the Indoor Sports Centre and the Main Stadium have been largely completed. The construction works of the KTSP reached a significant milestone last month as the exterior building façade panels of the Main Stadium, designed with the theme "Pearl of the Orient", has been completed successfully. This brings another significant landmark for Kowloon East and our Victoria Harbour. The construction of the KTSP as a

whole has now entered into the final phase of construction. Works that are taking place at present include installation and testing of building services, interior renovation works, landscaped works, trees planting, roof and walkway greening. According to the current construction process, we expect that the major facilities of the KTSP will be completed by end of 2024. When the construction works, defects rectification and all statutory testing are completed, KTSPL will arrange test runs and test events for its facilities. Upon successful implementation of the test events and satisfactory completion of various testing, the KTSP will be open in the first half of 2025.

Being the Contracted Party, KTSPL is committed to providing a one-stop sports, leisure, catering and shopping experience for citizens and tourists. With respect of the catering services, the 57 executive suites in the Main Stadium are supported by catering service providers offering various kinds of upscale dining options. Besides, there are some 30 bars and catering outlets in the Main Stadium which should be able to meet the catering needs as compared to other facilities of similar scale in the world. In addition, KTSPL will, with reference to the scale and needs of different events and matches as well as at the requests of organisers, arrange 10 to 20 mobile catering booths during the staging of large-scale events. The number of catering booths will be flexibly increased based on actual situation to ensure the provision of diversified and reasonably-priced Chinese, Western and Asian cuisines well-liked by the public, thereby meeting the needs of people from different countries and of different multicultural background.

Apart from the catering facilities in the Main Stadium, there are over 700 thousands feet of retail and catering facilities in the KTSP, providing international cuisines in some 70 outlets. There is a covered Sports Avenue running across the entire precinct from North to South, connecting the harbourfront promenade and the Dining Cove in the southernmost part of the KTSP. Citizens and tourists can choose to dine in the indoor or outdoor areas in the nine diversified concept restaurants thereat and enjoy the breath-taking views of the Victoria Harbour. In fact, the neighbouring districts of Kowloon City and To Kwa Wan which are in close proximity of the KTSP also provide an array of dining options. Citizens who visit the KTSP for matches or large-scale events can easily proceed to the two districts for a taste of our local culinary delights.

Other than committing to providing exceptional experience for visitors, KTSPL is dedicated to providing quality and multi-purpose facilities for different sports organisations and clubs. KTSPL has been liaising closely with different government departments and relevant stakeholders, including national sports associations, sports organisations, schools, as well as representatives of sports sector in the Guangdong-Macao-Hong Kong Greater Bay Area (GBA) and the Mainland, to understand more on their needs of using the facilities of the KTSP and exchange views with a view to formulating long-term co-operation strategies.

The 15th National Games would be unprecedentedly co-hosted in Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao in 2025. Hong Kong citizens, people living in the GBA and

even sports lovers from all parts of the Mainland can visit the competition venues in Hong Kong for watching the high-level matches and cheer for the athletes. With some of the competitions to be staged in the KTSP, we believe that sports exchange between the citizens in Hong Kong and the GBA will be even more frequent. In fact, the sports sector in Hong Kong has all along maintained a close relationship with their counterparts in the GBA. Local athletes and sports organisations make frequent visits to nearby provinces and cities for exchange and competitions. Upon its completion, the KTSP will not only become one of the major sports venues in the GBA, but also provide a new platform for exchange, promoting the overall sports development of Hong Kong. KTSPL is formulating the venue booking mechanism, including giving priority arrangements for sports activities.

The vision of the KTSP is to be a sports park for the people of Hong Kong. Despite the challenges we faced since the commencement of the construction works in February 2019, we are now a few steps away in welcoming the most important investment in sports infrastructure of Hong Kong in the past few decades. We believe that the KTSP, upon completion, will bring significant synergy to the Government's commitment in promoting sports in the community, supporting elite sports, maintaining Hong Kong as a centre for major international sports events, enhancing professionalism and developing sports as an industry. It will not only support the comprehensive sports development in Hong Kong, but also stimulate economic development, thereby consolidating Hong Kong's status in the world. The Cultural, Sports and Tourism Bureau will continue to work closely with KTSPL and government departments to ensure the successful completion of the KTSP and its becoming of a new landmark of Hong Kong.

â€‹Thank you, President.