

Opening ceremony of Lai Wan Market held today (with photo)

The opening ceremony of the overhauled Lai Wan Market under the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) was held today (March 1), which marks the official reopening of the market.

Officiating at the opening ceremony, the Secretary for Environment and Ecology, Mr Tse Chin-wan, said that the Lai Wan Market is a project under the Market Modernisation Programme. The overhauled market is citizen- and district-centric, with a view to delivering quality services for the residents.

The overhauled Lai Wan Market adopts simplicity and modernity as its core design basis, and uses a vibrant colour scheme. It has reconfigured the overall market layout, enhanced the design of stalls, widened the passageways, improved drainage and ventilation facilities, etc. Moreover, a number of new facilities are provided at the market, including public seating, a carcass storage room, recycling facilities and barrier-free facilities.

The market provides 30 stalls which have progressively commenced business from February 2, and the market has been operating smoothly. The new environment and facilities of the market are also well received by the public. The FEHD introduces a new management model in the Lai Wan Market and has strengthened the role of the management service contractor in managing the market, including formulating market promotion and development strategies, with a view to increasing the attractiveness and patronage of the market.

Other officiating guests at the opening ceremony included the Permanent Secretary for Environment and Ecology (Food), Miss Vivian Lau; the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene, Ms Irene Young; the Director of Architectural Services, Mr Michael Li; the District Officer (Sham Shui Po), Mr Paul Wong; and Members of the Legislative Council (LegCo) Mr Yang Wing-kit, Mr Leung Man-kwong and Mr Vincent Cheng. They were joined by other attending guests including Members of the LegCo, members of Sham Shui Po District Council and Area Committees, members of the local community, etc.

The FEHD will continue to take forward other market development projects to keep public markets abreast with the times to meet public needs.



Illegal worker jailed

A Vietnamese illegal worker, holding a recognisance form, was jailed by the Shatin Magistrates' Courts yesterday (February 29).

During an anti-illegal worker operation conducted on November 29 in 2023, the Immigration Department (ImmD) investigators raided a restaurant in Tai Po. A Vietnamese male, aged 45, was arrested while working as an odd-job worker. Upon identity checking, he produced for inspection a recognisance form issued by the ImmD, which prohibits him from taking employment. Further investigation revealed that he was a non-refoulement claimant.

The illegal worker was charged at the Shatin Magistrates' Courts yesterday with taking employment while being a person in respect of whom a removal order or deportation order was in force. After trial, he was sentenced to 22 months and two weeks' imprisonment.

The ImmD spokesman warned that, as stipulated in section 38AA of the Immigration Ordinance, an illegal immigrant, a person who is the subject of a removal order or a deportation order, an overstayer or a person who was refused permission to land is prohibited from taking any employment, whether paid or unpaid, or establishing or joining in any business. Offenders are liable upon conviction to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and up to three years' imprisonment.

The spokesman reiterated that it is a serious offence to employ people who are not lawfully employable. Under the Immigration Ordinance, the maximum penalty for an employer employing a person who is not lawfully employable, i.e. an illegal immigrant, a person who is the subject of a removal order or a deportation order, an overstayer or a person who was refused permission to land, has been significantly increased from a fine of \$350,000 and three years' imprisonment to a fine of \$500,000 and 10 years' imprisonment to reflect the gravity of such offences. The director, manager, secretary, partner, etc, of the company concerned may also bear criminal liability. The High Court has laid down sentencing guidelines that the employer of an illegal worker should be given an immediate custodial sentence.

According to the court sentencing, employers must take all practicable

steps to determine whether a person is lawfully employable prior to employment. Apart from inspecting a prospective employee's identity card, the employer has the explicit duty to make enquiries regarding the person and ensure that the answers would not cast any reasonable doubt concerning the lawful employability of the person. The court will not accept failure to do so as a defence in proceedings. It is also an offence if an employer fails to inspect the job seeker's valid travel document if the job seeker does not have a Hong Kong permanent identity card. Offenders are liable upon conviction to a maximum fine of \$150,000 and to imprisonment for one year. In that connection, the spokesman would like to remind all employers not to defy the law and employ illegal workers. The ImmD will continue to take resolute enforcement action to combat such offences.

Under the existing mechanism, the ImmD will, as a standard procedure, conduct an initial screening of vulnerable persons, including illegal workers, illegal immigrants, sex workers and foreign domestic helpers, who are arrested during any operation, with a view to ascertaining whether they are trafficking in persons (TIP) victims. When any TIP indicator is revealed in the initial screening, the officers will conduct a full debriefing and identification by using a standardised checklist to ascertain the presence of TIP elements, such as threats and coercion in the recruitment phase and the nature of exploitation. Identified TIP victims will be provided with various forms of support and assistance, including urgent intervention, medical services, counselling, shelter, temporary accommodation and other supporting services. The ImmD calls on TIP victims to report crimes to the relevant departments immediately.

DoJ establishes Advisory Group of Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Lawyers and holds exchange session on legal practice in GBA (with photos)

The Department of Justice (DoJ) today (March 1) announced the establishment of the Advisory Group of Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Lawyers, chaired by the Deputy Secretary for Justice, Mr Cheung Kwok-kwan, and held an exchange session on legal practice in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA).

Mr Cheung thanked the members of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Task Force of the DoJ (GBA Task Force), members of the Advisory Group, representatives of the Law Society of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Bar

Association, the Global Chinese-speaking Lawyers' Association and the International Probono Legal Services Association, and other stakeholders for their participation in the exchange session.

At the session, members of the Advisory Group actively shared their practical experience and views on business development in the GBA, and joined other participants in expressing views on the direction and content of the DoJ's work plan on promoting the development of the rule of law in the GBA.

Mr Cheung said: "Our country has always been supporting Hong Kong's integration into the national development. This year marks the fifth anniversary of the promulgation of the Outline Development Plan for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. It is especially meaningful to establish the Advisory Group and hold the exchange session at this time, through which the Hong Kong legal sector can consolidate experiences and plan for future work with the DoJ.

"The Advisory Group will advise on the further development of legal business and enhancement of collaboration in legal services in the GBA. Being set up under the GBA Task Force, the Advisory Group consists of 12 members, including GBA lawyers who have obtained the Lawyer's License (GBA) and have been practicing in different areas of the GBA such as Shenzhen, Nansha and Hengqin; Hong Kong and Mainland lawyers with extensive experience in handling GBA or foreign-related matters; seasoned solicitors and barristers with over 10 years' professional experience; as well as the relatively less experienced solicitors and barristers. The composition of the Advisory Group is broadly representative and will be of great help to the DoJ in promoting the development of the rule of law in the GBA."

Mr Cheung mentioned that GBA lawyers are talents with capabilities and competitive strengths. The three jurisdictions in the GBA each have their own characteristics and complementary advantages. With more exchanges, cross-fertilisation and integration of rules within the region, there will be more room to give full play to the unique strengths of GBA lawyers.

He said that with the strong support from the Central Government, the duration of the pilot scheme of the GBA Legal Professional Examination (GBA Examination) has been approved to be extended to 2026, and the practice experience threshold for enrolment in the GBA Examination has been lowered from five years to three years. He hoped that the Advisory Group can foster professional exchanges and sharing of practical experience among GBA lawyers, thereby building up the "brand name" of GBA lawyers.

Mr Cheung emphasised that the DoJ attaches great importance to contributing to the development of the rule of law in the GBA. In his introduction of the DoJ's work in three major areas, namely facilitating the interface of the legal systems and rules, as well as the connection of talents, he mentioned that the characteristics of the GBA, namely "one country, two systems and three jurisdictions", present both advantages and challenges. There is a need to establish in the GBA mechanisms to efficiently and conveniently co-ordinate and bridge the different legal systems and rules, and to promote the interflow and nurturing of talents, so as to

provide a stable, fair, transparent and predictable rule of law environment for the development of the GBA, unleashing its tremendous development momentum.

He said that as Hong Kong is the only common law jurisdiction within the country, the Hong Kong legal sector has great potential in the GBA. He encouraged the legal sector to join hands with the DoJ in contributing to the development of the GBA.



[Provisional Statistics of Retail Sales for January 2024](#)

The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) released the latest figures on retail sales today (March 1).

The value of total retail sales in January 2024, provisionally estimated at \$36.5 billion, increased by 0.9% compared with the same month in 2023. The revised estimate of the value of total retail sales in December 2023 increased by 7.8% compared with a year earlier.

Of the total retail sales value in January 2024, online sales accounted for 6.5%. The value of online retail sales in that month, provisionally estimated at \$2.4 billion, decreased by 20.9% compared with the same month in 2023. The revised estimate of online retail sales in December 2023 decreased by 29.5% compared with a year earlier.

After netting out the effect of price changes over the same period, the provisional estimate of the volume of total retail sales in January 2024 decreased by 1.2% compared with a year earlier. The revised estimate of the volume of total retail sales in December 2023 increased by 4.8% compared with a year earlier.

In interpreting the figures for January, it should be noted that retail sales tend to show greater volatility in the first two months of a year due

to the timing of the Lunar New Year. Local consumer spending normally attains a seasonal high before the Festival. As the Lunar New Year fell on February 10 this year but on January 22 last year, the year-on-year comparison of the figures for January 2024 with those for January 2023 might have been affected by this factor to a certain extent.

Analysed by broad type of retail outlet in descending order of the provisional estimate of the value of sales and comparing January 2024 with January 2023, and also bearing in mind the effect due to the difference in the timing of the Lunar New Year as mentioned above, the value of sales of jewellery, watches and clocks, and valuable gifts increased by 25.2%. This was followed by sales of other consumer goods not elsewhere classified (+7.4% in value); wearing apparel (+5.2%); medicines and cosmetics (+25.2%); motor vehicles and parts (+23.7%); furniture and fixtures (+20.5%); books, newspapers, stationery and gifts (+27.8%); and optical shops (+0.7%).

On the other hand, the value of sales of commodities in supermarkets decreased by 9.3% in January 2024 over a year earlier. This was followed by sales of food, alcoholic drinks and tobacco (-8.0% in value); electrical goods and other consumer durable goods not elsewhere classified (-26.2%); commodities in department stores (-9.2%); fuels (-14.5%); footwear, allied products and other clothing accessories (-8.2%); and Chinese drugs and herbs (-20.1%).

Based on the seasonally adjusted series, the provisional estimate of the value of total retail sales decreased by 3.2% in the three months ending January 2024 compared with the preceding three-month period, while the provisional estimate of the volume of total retail sales decreased by 3.0%.

Commentary

A government spokesman said that the value of total retail sales continued to increase in January over a year earlier, but at a moderated pace due in part to the different timing of the Lunar New Year. It would thus be more meaningful to examine the figures for January and February combined, when available, to assess the latest retail sales performance alongside other relevant factors.

Looking ahead, the spokesman added that continued increase in visitor arrivals alongside further recovery of handling capacity and organisation of mega events would bode well for retail businesses. Rising household income and the Government's initiatives in boosting consumption sentiment should also provide support. The Government will continue to monitor the situation.

Further information

Table 1 presents the revised figures on value index and value of retail sales for all retail outlets and by broad type of retail outlet for December 2023 as well as the provisional figures for January 2024.

Table 2 presents the revised figures on value of online retail sales for

December 2023 as well as the provisional figures for January 2024.

Table 3 presents the revised figures on volume index of retail sales for all retail outlets and by broad type of retail outlet for December 2023 as well as the provisional figures for January 2024.

Table 4 shows the movements of the value and volume of total retail sales in terms of the year-on-year rate of change for a month compared with the same month in the preceding year based on the original series, and in terms of the rate of change for a three-month period compared with the preceding three-month period based on the seasonally adjusted series.

The classification of retail establishments follows the Hong Kong Standard Industrial Classification (HSIC) Version 2.0, which is used in various economic surveys for classifying economic units into different industry classes.

These retail sales statistics measure the sales receipts in respect of goods sold by local retail establishments and are primarily intended for gauging the short-term business performance of the local retail sector. Data on retail sales are collected from local retail establishments through the Monthly Survey of Retail Sales (MRS). Local retail establishments with and without physical shops are covered in MRS and their sales, both through conventional shops and online channels, are included in the retail sales statistics.

The retail sales statistics cover consumer spending on goods but not on services (such as those on housing, catering, medical care and health services, transport and communication, financial services, education and entertainment) which account for over 50% of the overall consumer spending. Moreover, they include spending on goods in Hong Kong by visitors but exclude spending outside Hong Kong by Hong Kong residents. Hence they should not be regarded as indicators for measuring overall consumer spending.

Users interested in the trend of overall consumer spending should refer to the data series of private consumption expenditure (PCE), which is a major component of the Gross Domestic Product published at quarterly intervals. Compiled from a wide range of data sources, PCE covers consumer spending on both goods (including goods purchased from all channels) and services by Hong Kong residents whether locally or abroad. Please refer to the C&SD publication "Gross Domestic Product (Quarterly)" for more details.

More detailed statistics are given in the "Report on Monthly Survey of Retail Sales". Users can browse and download this publication at the website of the C&SD (www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/EIndexbySubject.html?pcode=B1080003&scode=530).

Users who have enquiries about the survey results may contact the Distribution Services Statistics Section of C&SD (Tel. : 3903 7400; E-mail : mrs@censtatd.gov.hk).

Speech by STL at Smart Mobility Forum (English only)

Following is the speech by the Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Lam Sai-hung, at the Smart Mobility Forum organised by Invest Hong Kong today (March 1):

Director-General Alpha (Director-General of Investment Promotion at Invest Hong Kong, Ms Alpha Lau), distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

May I start by commending Invest Hong Kong for organising the Smart Mobility Forum here today. This forum provides an invaluable opportunity for different stakeholders, including policymakers and industry leaders, to sit together, have a chat, and think about the future of Hong Kong's smart mobility landscape. It is my pleasure to be here with you today and share my thoughts on the subject.

In recent years, the development of smart cities has become a global trend. Many cities have been making greater efforts towards this end. What we could do to make the transportation and commuting experience safer, smarter and greener has been an important question that I hold dear to my heart. Under the Smart City Blueprint for Hong Kong 2.0 published in 2020, it is the Government's ambition to embrace innovation and technology to build a world-renowned smart Hong Kong, characterised by a strong economy and high quality of living. Transportation, as an integral part of our daily lives, plays a vital role in improving the economic well-being of Hong Kong. To this end, smart mobility is particularly critical to the smart city development.

I am an engineer by training and I have been practicing engineering for over 40 years. Whenever I come across and go deep into smart mobility, the imagination and crazy ideas always keep me, an engineer, awake for a whole night. Hong Kong is a small and densely populated city with ever-increasing transport and traffic demands. Over the years, we have taken pride in our highly efficient road and railway networks, which have been able to handle over 12 million public transport trips every day. By leveraging on innovation and technology, and making reference to the experience of Mainland and overseas cities, smart mobility development enables more-effective traffic management, facilitates journeys of the public, and makes the best use of public transport. Not only do these alleviate road traffic congestion and reduce overall carbon emissions, but also protect the environment and promote sustainable development in Hong Kong.

The success of Hong Kong's public transport system is attributed to the collaborative and enduring efforts of the Government and various stakeholders who, throughout the development history, have consistently embraced innovation. To name just a few, we had Asia's first cable funicular, the Peak Tram, in 1888. In the 1970's, we developed Southeast Asia's first Area

Traffic Control System, and in 1997, the Octopus was put into the market, which set a model for contactless payment for many other cities. When we talked about the area traffic control, I remember when I worked in the Transport Department, the Government sent its first batch of locally trained engineers working in the Government to the UK (United Kingdom) to receive training in advanced traffic and transport management. After that, the area traffic control took root in Hong Kong.

No doubt, these examples could all be considered as smart mobility initiatives when they were first introduced many years ago. However, innovation is a never ending journey of pushing the limits and exploring new frontiers. We shall never be complacent about what we have already achieved.

Transportation, in particular, calls for constant innovations. Continuing to expand our physical transportation infrastructure might be one possible way out in the short run, but we all know that it is definitely not a sustainable solution, given the limited size of Hong Kong. To propel the efficiency of our transportation system to new heights, we must seek innovative solutions that can address our future needs, and the Government has been sparing no effort in implementing various smart mobility initiatives since the release of the Smart Mobility Roadmap for Hong Kong in 2019.

One of the major initiatives under smart mobility is the implementation of the free-flow tolling service, or HKeToll in short, which enables motorists to pay the tunnel tolls remotely using toll tags at the government tolled tunnels and Tsing Sha Control Area. With HKeToll fully implemented last year, including the three road harbour crossings, drivers no longer need to stop and wait at toll booths anymore. This brings a smoother traffic flow, thereby improving the road traffic in the vicinity of tunnels. Moreover, the commuting public would also be benefitted after the existing toll booths at toll plazas are demolished, freeing up space for other transport-related purposes such as enhancement of existing bus stops or bus interchanges. Together with the traffic flow optimisation of the three road harbour crossings through the implementation of a time-varying toll plan in December last year, I am sure that this will bring you all an elevated driving experience.

We implemented the time-varying tolls since December 17 last year, so we are talking about basically two and a half months. Some of you may not be too familiar with the cross-harbour tunnels. Hong Kong Island is connected to Kowloon through three cross-harbour tunnels. In the past, some of my friends were divided into two groups. For one group, they considered that there were only two effective tunnels because one of the tunnels was extremely expensive. Basically they would not use that. The other group only used one tunnel because the other two tunnels were too congested. So with the implementation of time-varying tolls, I think the three tunnels are now fully utilised for the well-being of Hong Kong. Of course, I have to be prudent because the current success may not last but we will do whatever we can to make sure that the infrastructure can perform its functions properly and effectively.

Harnessing big data is the key to success for many businesses, and it is

also crucial for supporting our smart mobility initiatives. To enhance traffic management and transport efficiency through the application of big data analytics, the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer and the Transport Department, with the assistance of the Hong Kong Observatory, jointly developed the Traffic Data Analytics System, which is a model with a good range of historical and instantaneous data including the amounts of rainfall, traffic incidents, and journey times of different road sections of Hong Kong. The model can then produce forecast of a journey time in the coming 90-minute period, taking into account factors of traffic and weather conditions. This keeps road users informed of the road traffic and weather conditions, and assists them in better planning their routes ahead. In case traffic congestion happens at a certain road section, road users will be able to get early alerts and prepare alternative route plans. Meanwhile, the big data collected and analysed by the Traffic Data Analytics System also helps strengthen the Transport Department's ability in preparing for traffic management and contingency measures.

Another smart mobility initiative is to facilitate technological advancement and industry development of vehicle-to-everything (V2X) and autonomous vehicles (AVs) with a vision to realise wider trials and use of AVs on public roads in Hong Kong. AV technology has developed rapidly in recent years and trials have been carried out around the world. This new mode of transport could bring huge benefits to us, such as promoting road safety, avoiding traffic congestion, enhancing the mobility of citizens, reducing exhaust emissions caused by traffic congestion, etc.

To allow wider and more flexible trials and usage of AVs in Hong Kong, we have recently introduced a suitable and flexible regulatory framework for the use of AVs, at the same time ensuring public safety, paving the way for the long-term development of AVs in Hong Kong. Coincidentally, the regulatory framework comes into effect today. We have been continuously promoting the development of Cellular V2X (or C-V2X) technology in Hong Kong. Researches and field trials on public roads have been conducted.

Let me try to give a pledge here – by the end of this year, Hong Kong citizens will have the opportunity to experience the first tested AVs on open roads, of course with full insurance coverage. There are many trials happening on the Mainland and other parts of the world. The AV trials on the Mainland focus on taxis or private cars. I think differently for Hong Kong. I would try to push AV for some sort of minibuses or the equivalent. Those minibuses may not be the one we perceive like the green or red public minibuses in Hong Kong. What I am talking about is a small bus that can carry more than 10 passengers or so and covers a fixed route. We will give a trial for that purpose so that Hong Kong citizens can have an opportunity to ride on this kind of AV on fixed routes. In Hong Kong it makes it a bit difficult if an AV is a taxi because we can't define the routes beforehand and passengers may need to go to areas like downtown, which may be a bit difficult at the start of the trial run. That's why I would try to put the focus on small bus trials.

On the other hand, the Government will continue to strengthen the exchanges and connections with other cities on the Mainland, in particular,

within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, in respect of recognising the experience of trials and use of AVs as well as standardising relevant technical requirements and industry practices for AVs.

The technological advancements in recent years, for example Internet of Things, 5G communication network, sensing technologies and autonomous vehicles, have established a fertile ground for further development of smart mobility solutions. In order to tie in with economic and social development and enhance Hong Kong's competitiveness, we commenced the Traffic and Transport Strategy Study, or TTSS in short, in December 2021 to map out a long-term strategy blueprint, with a view to maintaining a reliable, safe, smart, environmentally friendly and highly efficient overall transport system for Hong Kong.

Based on the vision of "Transforming Travel to People-centric, Efficient and Green Journeys Connecting Daily Lives", we have put forward nine transport strategy recommendations as the initial recommendations of the TTSS in the end of last year. These recommendations can be subsumed under three main strategies, namely "Enjoyable Journeys", "Well-connected City" and "Healthy Mobility". Examples of the recommendations include:

(1) Building a new generation of transport interchange hubs at strategic locations, which will integrate various transport facilities and amenities in a one-stop manner;

(2) Developing smart motorways, which, with adequate traffic detectors and lane control signals etc, will allow conversion of hard shoulders to regular lanes where traffic flow demands or use of the hard shoulders in emergency situations, and;

(3) Promoting autonomous vehicles, which have the advantage of eliminating human error, preventing driving misbehavior and resolving operational issues caused by different driving rules in Hong Kong and the Mainland.

When we talk about AVs, I always say that it is quite easy if all the vehicles are autonomous vehicles. But the most complicated area is on the hybrid, where some of the vehicles are driven by human beings and some by computers. This is the most difficult phase that we have to tackle and I don't know how long this transition will be. May I appeal to all of you in the audience today to help think about this – how we can achieve phase two full automation when we have to face the more difficult phase one first.

At the same time, we are collaborating with the Environment and Ecology Bureau in the promotion of electric and new energy vehicles. We are working on the necessary preparation works for the smart and green mass transit systems in East Kowloon, Kai Tak and Hung Shui Kiu/Ha Tsuen New Development Area. The smart and green mass transit systems are recommended under the Hong Kong Major Transport Infrastructure Development Blueprint, which was promulgated in December last year, to serve as a light and green feeder service to nearby railway stations and major public transport interchanges in areas with limited space or lower transport demand, with a view to suitably

and effectively utilising public resources to meet the transport demand arising from local developments.

Smart mobility is a rethinking of the transportation infrastructure utilised in daily life and business, connecting many aspects of technology and mobility. The initiatives I outlined above are by no means exhaustive. We will continue to promote smart mobility along three key dimensions, namely, the active provision of smart transport infrastructure, facilitation of data sharing and analytics, as well as the launch of user-friendly applications and services.

Looking ahead, we target to promulgate the Transport Strategy Blueprint in next year to map out our visions up to 2050. Nevertheless, our effort to promote smart mobility initiatives never stops. With the ever-evolving technology, achieving our vision requires the concerted effort of government departments, the transportation industry and, of course, all of your innovative contributions.

Ladies and gentlemen, I sincerely invite everyone to join us and put forward your innovative solutions to meet Hong Kong's transport and traffic needs for the many more years to come, and transform Hong Kong into a smarter, more livable and sustainable city.

Last but not least, may I extend my best wishes for the success of this event and a fruitful day ahead for all participants. Thank you.