

Transcript of remarks by FS (with video)

The Financial Secretary, Mr Paul Chan, joined by the Secretary for the Environment, Mr Wong Kam-sing; the Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury, Mr James Lau; and the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, met the media today (December 4) on initiatives to support enterprises and employment. Following is the transcript of remarks:

Reporter: Many of the subsidies and waivers that you mentioned just now seem to be focusing on non-residential users. Why not, or has the Government actually considered such measures or similar subsidies for residential users as well? Second question, regarding to paying tax in phases and waiving the late fees and stuff, you mentioned that people in need can apply. Who is qualified to apply for this and can everybody do it? And the third question, how many more rounds of relief measures does the Government actually expect to roll out, because there have been several rounds of such relief measures and they don't really seem to help much and it seems that it's very hard for us to reach a breakthrough as long as the Government refuses to satisfy the protesters' five demands? So, how many more rounds?

Financial Secretary: For this round of measures, most of them are targeted towards supporting businesses, especially small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Our concept is that by supporting businesses it will help safeguard employment. During economic downturn, supporting employment is the number one priority of the Government. Besides, there are two measures which will also benefit individuals, say for example the proposed increase in the allowance for people receiving training from the Employees Retraining Board. Also, the instalment tax payment is also available to individuals. So what we have been trying to do is to balance the resources available to address the needs of the community.

We have launched a few rounds of measures and we are now in the process of preparing the Budget. The economic situation in Hong Kong has been evolving very rapidly, responding to external international environment as well as domestic social unrest. As the Government, we have been monitoring this very closely and assessing the impact on businesses, especially SMEs, as well as the impact on our people. So instead of waiting for all these to develop and come up with one package, we do think that we should roll out measures as early as possible to relieve the burdens of the people being seriously affected. You mentioned about the demands of the protesters. Yes, on political question, we still need to find solutions, and in fact the Chief Executive has been working with us very hard in trying to find solutions, but in the meantime we also need to take timely measures to address the economic challenges faced by many.

Reporter: Can everybody apply to pay taxes in phases? Everybody can do it?

Financial Secretary: It is on a merit basis. So, for example, if one really comes across financial difficulties, say for instance a married couple, one of them got laid off and they find it difficult to meet the tax payment on time, they may apply to the Inland Revenue Department to have their tax payment rearranged by instalment, and what we are going to do is that in such circumstances, the normal surcharge to be imposed will be waived.

Reporter: So it's case-by-case consideration, basically?

Financial Secretary: Case by case, on justifiable circumstances.

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