

Remarks by CE at media session before ExCo (with video)

Following are the remarks by the Chief Executive, Mr John Lee, at a media session before the Executive Council meeting today (March 18):

Reporter: Good morning, Mr Lee. Firstly, about the controversies surrounding the deal by CK Hutchison Holdings to sell the ports that it owns. Firstly, what is the Government's view on the deal itself, and how should the company respond amid this apparent criticism by Beijing? Secondly, you mentioned earlier that any deal made in Hong Kong must adhere to the local laws and legislations. Should you elaborate a little bit on what you mean by that? You know, perhaps, would the Government consider using its own legislation, like National Security Law or potentially something else? And secondly, about the raising of the Hong Kong public hospital fees; when raising the fees of certain medical services provided by the Government, how can the Government itself ensure that residents in need would not have their diagnosis delayed due to these extra charges? And how would you address concerns that private hospitals might also raise their prices in light of this? Thank you.

Chief Executive: In regard to the transaction you mentioned, I have three points to make. First, there have been extensive discussions in society about the issue and this reflects society's concern over the matter. These concerns deserve serious attention. Second, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government urges foreign governments to provide a fair and just environment for enterprises, including enterprises from Hong Kong. We oppose the abusive use of coercion or bullying tactics in international, economic and trade relations. Third, any transaction must comply with the legal and regulatory requirements. Hong Kong will handle it in accordance with the law and regulations.

In regard to your question about reviews of charges and fees of hospitals, I must first emphasise this review is part of the healthcare reform. I have given three principles to the Health Bureau in this healthcare reform in relation to review of fees and charges. First, it is not an expenditure cutting exercise. We shall spend no less money. Just to readjust the spending distribution for the sake of efficiency and effectiveness. Second, priority should be given to the most needy. These include helping those with economic difficulties and those cases in which the patient suffers from an emergency, or the most serious and critical illnesses. Third, reduce waste of resources, including drugs and services waste. I have urged the Health Bureau to finalise the review and announce the details as soon as possible, and we aim at announcing the details within this month.

Reporter: Sorry, do you have anything to say about the legal aspects of the CK Hutchison deal? Thank you.

Chief Executive: We will deal with it in accordance with the law and

regulations.

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

Government launches Immigration Facilitation Scheme for Invited Persons

The Government has launched today (March 18) the Immigration Facilitation Scheme for Invited Persons to provide more convenient immigration arrangements for invited persons from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries, in order to promote economic and trade exchanges and cultural co-operation between Hong Kong and ASEAN.

Currently, frequent travellers to Hong Kong can apply for self-service immigration clearance. Among the 10 ASEAN countries, visitors from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam need a visa for visiting Hong Kong. Under the Scheme, relevant policy bureaux/departments will actively invite ASEAN nationals who are able to make considerable contributions to Hong Kong's economic development or who have been invited to attend important events in Hong Kong to enjoy the facilitation. The Immigration Department (ImmD) will provide one-stop processing of relevant applications from invited persons through an electronic platform, relax the application criteria for self-service immigration clearance and simplify the information required for visa applications.

A Government spokesman said, "ASEAN and Hong Kong have a long-standing relationship, and it is Hong Kong's second largest trading partner. We attach great importance to the co-operation with ASEAN countries. Under the Scheme, invited persons can enjoy self-service immigration clearance services at the control points of Hong Kong, greatly enhancing clearance efficiency and experience. Through the Scheme, we would like to actively provide more facilitation for ASEAN's business leaders and those in other fields to visit Hong Kong, so as to promote multifaceted exchanges and create mutual benefits and win-win outcomes."

While upholding effective immigration control, the Government is committed to actively attracting talent from all over the world to Hong Kong and facilitating business. In recent years, the Government has announced a series of ASEAN-specific visa facilitation measures. Following the relaxation of the criteria for Vietnamese for multiple-entry visas for travel and business announced in 2023, the 2024 Policy Address also relaxed the criteria for nationals of Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar applying for multiple-entry visas and extended the validity period of the multiple-entry visas from two years

to three years. To provide facilitation to group visitors from these ASEAN countries, the ImmD has also introduced a fast-track arrangement for visit visa applications submitted via local travel agents.

The Immigration Facilitation Scheme for Invited Persons will help enhance Hong Kong's image and status in ASEAN and further deepen the ties between Hong Kong and ASEAN. For details of the Scheme, please visit website of the ImmD (www.immd.gov.hk/eng/invitedpersons.html).

Postal services to United States return to normal

Hongkong Post announced today (March 18) that, as advised by the postal administration of the United States, mail delivery services to areas with postcodes 90001-95399 and 99556-99780 previously impacted by severe weather and wildfires have returned to normal.

FEHD Sunlight Market stalls for rent on March 25, April 1 and 8

The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) announced today (March 18) that eight vacant stalls at the FEHD Sunlight Market will be available to the public for renting on March 25, April 1 and 8 on a first-come, first-served basis.

The retail commodities allowed for sale in these stalls cover vegetables, fruits, other food-related wet goods and non-food related dry goods. The licence agreement is a 10-month fixed term starting from May 1, with no right of renewal upon expiry. The licence fee of the stalls varies depending on their sizes. Relevant information is available on the FEHD website.

Members of the public who are interested in renting a market stall should approach the Islands District Environmental Hygiene Office, Room 626, 6/F, Harbour Building, 38 Pier Road, Central (Tel: 2852 3606), to apply in person from 9.30am to 12.30pm or 2.30pm to 4.30pm during the abovementioned renting period.

A spokesman for the FEHD said, "Applicants for the market stalls must be at least 18 years old and ordinarily reside in Hong Kong. To allow more

people to select stalls and increase customer choices by enhancing the diversity in terms of the variety of stalls, a stall licensee can only rent one stall in the FEHD Sunlight Market. The terms and conditions of renting market stalls on a first-come, first-served basis have been uploaded to the FEHD website, detailing the qualifications of the applicants."

Details of renting market stalls in the FEHD Sunlight Market on a first-come, first-served basis have been uploaded to the FEHD website (www.fehd.gov.hk/english/pleasant_environment/tidy_market/FCFS/202503_sunlight.html). Interested applicants may visit the department website or contact the Island District Environmental Hygiene Office.

Red fire danger warning

Attention duty announcers, radio and TV stations:

The fire danger situation today (March 18) is red and fire risk is extreme. The countryside is extremely vulnerable to fire. If you are planning to spend the day in the countryside, please take pre-cooked food for a picnic and take all measures to prevent hill fires. The penalty for lighting fires illegally in the countryside is \$25,000 and a year's imprisonment.