

LCQ4: Measures to boost economy

Following is a question by the Hon Kwok Wai-keung and a reply by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau, in the Legislative Council today (July 8):

Question:

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) epidemic has dealt a heavy blow to Hong Kong's economy. In the first quarter of this year, the Gross Domestic Product contracted by a record of 8.9 per cent in real terms from a year earlier and the unemployment rate also soared, hitting a new high in ten years. Given that the epidemic has subsided recently, quite a number of members of the public hope that the Government can unite society and boost the economy. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as the Chief Executive has indicated that she has appealed for a number of times to the landlords of private shop premises to reduce rents so as to ride out the hard times with their tenants but to little avail, of the Government's new measures to prompt those landlords to reduce rents, so as to lower the operating costs of the tenants;

(2) whether it will consider, by drawing reference from the approach adopted by the Government when the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome epidemic was over in 2003, setting up an economic relaunch strategy group comprising government officials and non-government individuals, so as to bring together the strengths of the Government, the business sector and the community to jointly boost the economy; and

(3) given that inbound tourism has come to a complete halt due to the epidemic, of the Government's new measures and strategies to promote local consumption so as to sustain the economic heat; whether it will launch a second-round of Cash Payout Scheme and consider afresh issuing consumption vouchers or providing consumption subsidies, so as to step up efforts to boost the economy?

Reply:

President,

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, Hong Kong's economy has been hard-hit. In order to provide support to enterprises and people affected by the pandemic, the Government has rolled out three rounds of relief measures, totalling \$287.5 billion, under the Budget and two rounds of Anti-Epidemic Fund (AEF), with a view to supporting enterprises and safeguarding jobs. However, all economic recovery measures can only be effective on the basis that the pandemic situation is under control, and that the general community continues to abide by the public health protective measures, fights the pandemic together and is supportive of each other. At the same time, we will work tirelessly and in a timely manner to pave the way for economic recovery

as soon as the pandemic situation stabilises.

Having consulted the Financial Secretary's Office and the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau, the consolidated reply to the Hon Kwok's question is as follows:

(1) To alleviate the pressure arising from the pandemic on businesses, the Government has on the one hand appealed to landlords in the private sector to offer rental concessions to their tenants so as to sail through the difficult period together. On the other hand, we have also, led by example, proactively offered rental concessions to eligible business/organisations operating in government premises and other related properties. For the period from April to September 2020, rental concessions for eligible tenants have been increased from 50 per cent to 75 per cent, and the scope of rental concessions has been extended to cover more businesses. As for businesses operating in government premises and other related properties which have to completely cease operation due to anti-epidemic measures imposed by the Government, they will receive a full rental waiver during the closure period. Public bodies, including the Airport Authority, the Hong Kong Housing Society, the Mass Transit Railway Corporation Limited, the Urban Renewal Authority, etc, have also followed suit.

The Chief Executive has repeatedly mentioned in public that she has appealed to the real estate sector that, as landlords, they should ride out the difficult times with their tenants together. I believe that the Chief Executive and other government officials will continue the appeal in this respect.

Apart from rental concessions, the Government has also strived to lower operating costs for enterprises. The Government has announced a series of measures in the Budget and the two rounds of AEF, including waiving of profits tax, rates for non-domestic properties and business registration fees; subsidising electricity charges; and reduction of water and sewage charges, etc. These measures aim to benefit enterprises from different sectors and of all sizes.

(2) The Chief Executive, the Financial Secretary and other relevant government officials have been engaging different sectors and professionals through various channels and advisory bodies to discuss the current economic situation, with a view to mapping out the strategy for economic development and recovery. For example, the Council of Advisers on Innovation and Strategic Development chaired by the Chief Executive and, for the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau, the Trade and Industry Advisory Board and the recently established Task Force on External Relations chaired by myself discussed extensively and took forward economic support measures together with the trade. The support measures rolled out in the past two years, in response to either the US-China trade conflict or the recent pandemic outbreak, are all the results of the close liaison with various sectors of the community. The Government will continue to maintain partnerships with different sectors in forging the way forward to revive the economy.

(3) To restart the economy and encourage local consumption, the Government

has introduced the \$10,000 Cash Payout Scheme with a view to reinvigorating the local economy. As the Financial Secretary wrote in his blog this week, more than \$40 billion funding will be disbursed to the respective bank accounts in the coming week, and for those who register later will also receive their payment in turn. We believe that the Scheme will boost local consumption, driving the demand in other services sectors. The Financial Secretary also responded to media enquiry earlier that there are different ways to stimulate local consumption, and the Government introduced the Scheme to let people decide on spending the money according to their needs. The Government considers that the Scheme is a more appropriate measure, and that cash payout can reach the public earlier when compared with consumption vouchers.

With regard to tourism, as cross border restrictions are still in place, we will begin with local tourism so as to rebuild the city's vibrant atmosphere and stimulate consumption. To this end, the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTb) launched the Holiday at Home campaign in mid-June to encourage Hong Kong people to be tourists in our own city. With the staunch support of the local tourism, retail and catering industries, etc, the campaign provides different offers to boost overall local consumption. The HKTb will also roll out offers later so that residents can redeem free local tours through spending. In the meantime, the Government enhanced in June 2020 the Green Lifestyle Local Tour Incentive Scheme which was announced late last year. Through enhancing cash incentives for travel agents, the Scheme has contributed to the revival of the tourism sector and supported the food and beverage and transport sectors.

For the convention and exhibition sector, the Government has, through the AEF, subsidised convention and exhibition activities organised by the Hong Kong Trade Development Council (HKTDC) and other organisers. The HKTDC will organise the Hong Kong Book Fair next week in which participants will be eligible for full subsidy for their participation fees. In the coming months, the HKTDC and other organisers will host a range of exhibitions targeting the local market. These exhibitions will benefit from the Government subsidy, bringing more business opportunities to local exhibitors and enterprises and creating an atmosphere for consumption.

In sum, the Government will continue to monitor the pandemic development and the economic situation, and keep in close contact with various sectors. We will also provide timely support for different industries and sectors to revive Hong Kong's economy.

Thank you, President.

LCQ12: Police officers' law enforcement actions involving the opposite sex

Following is a question by Dr Hon Helena Wong and a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr John Lee, in the Legislative Council today (July 8):

Question:

It has been reported that in November last year and May this year, a number of male police officers entered the female public toilets at Chatham Road South in Tsim Sha Tsui and at Fa Yuen Street in Mong Kok respectively, and arrested several women therein. In addition, quite a number of demonstrators and arrestees, who had participated in the movement of opposition to the proposed legislative amendments, alleged that they had been sexually harassed or sexually assaulted by police officers. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether the guidelines issued by the Police to police officers have stipulated the circumstances under which they may enter toilets for the use of the opposite sex to enforce the law; if so, of the details, including whether it has been provided that they must be in the company of police officers of the opposite sex;

(2) as it is stipulated in section 7 of the Public Conveniences (Conduct and Behaviour) Regulation (Cap. 132 sub. leg. BL) that no male person shall enter any part of any public convenience which is allocated for the use of female persons, and no female person shall enter any part of any public convenience which is allocated for the use of male persons, whether such requirement is applicable to those police officers who are enforcing the law; if so, whether the Police will take disciplinary actions against the aforesaid police officers; if not applicable, of the reasons for that;

(3) of the number of incidents last year in which police officers entered public toilets for the use of the opposite sex to enforce the law, and the following details of each incident: (i) the date and time, (ii) the law enforcement action involved, (iii) the number of police officers involved, and the rank(s) and police district(s) to which they belonged, and (iv) whether the Police conducted any internal investigation subsequently (if so, of the latest progress);

(4) of the number of complaints received by the Police last year about police officers' committing acts of sexual harassment and sexual assault when enforcing the law, as well as the following details of each case: (i) the nature of the complaint, (ii) the number of police officers involved, and the rank(s) and police district(s) to which they belonged, and (iii) the number of victims involved; and

(5) whether it knows the number of complaints received by the Equal Opportunities Commission last year about police officers' committing acts of sexual harassment and sexual assault when enforcing the law, as well as the following details of each case: (i) the nature of the complaint, (ii) the number of police officers involved, and (iii) the number of victims involved?

Reply:

President,

Section 10 of the Police Force Ordinance (Cap 232) stipulates that the duties of the police force include taking lawful measures for preserving public safety, preventing and detecting crimes and offences, as well as preventing injuries to life and property. The Hong Kong law applies to all places in the territory and nowhere is above the law. Therefore, if anyone contravenes the law anywhere in Hong Kong, it is the statutory duty of the Police to take actions.

My reply to various parts of Dr Hon Helena Wong's question is as follows:

(1) to (3) If a person is suspected to have committed a criminal offence or breached social peace in public or private premises (including areas in public toilets), the Police have the power to enter into such premises to take appropriate actions (and is not confined to arrest operations) to prevent a breach of social peace. Police officers will consider the actual situation at scene and purpose of the action, and take legal measures to save lives, protect the safety of citizens and police officers, prevent and detect crimes, arrest suspects or perform other duties. As in the past, the Police will ensure actions taken to be appropriate, legal and justifiable, and will strike a balance between privacy protection and law enforcement. For example, in general, it would be for female police officers to take enforcement actions in female public toilets. Female officers may, in striking a balance between privacy protection and law enforcement, seek assistance from other police officers.

Anyone who is dissatisfied with the enforcement actions of the Police can lodge a complaint with the Complaints Against Police Office (CAPO). CAPO will investigate and handle the complaint in a fair and just manner. The Police do not maintain the information requested in the question.

(4) Sexual violence is a serious allegation. The complainant should formally provide the Police with the information, so that the Police may conduct a full investigation. This would not only protect the interests of the victim but also ensure that the complainee will not be falsely accused, which is fair to both the complainant and the complainee. Both parties shall bear the legal responsibilities and be protected.

The Government attaches importance to combating cases involving sexual offences. The Police have been handling all sexual violence cases with a serious and sensitive professional attitude and have formulated a series of relevant procedures and guidelines to ensure that the rights and safety of

the victims are fully safeguarded, as well as to alleviate the stress and psychological trauma faced by the victims when assisting in the investigation.

When receiving reports of sexual harassment, the Police will examine whether there is any criminal element involved. If yes, the case will be handled as criminal investigation. If no criminal element is revealed, the Police will recommend the complainant to file a complaint with the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC).

The Police do not have the figures as requested in the question.

(5) The EOC works towards the elimination of sexual harassment in accordance with the Sex Discrimination Ordinance (Cap. 480). Handling of criminal cases concerning sexual offences falls outside the scope of the EOC's statutory functions. After consulting the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau, according to the information provided by the EOC, the EOC received two sexual harassment complaints involving police officers last year. The two complaints were lodged by the same female complainant and after investigation, the EOC has confirmed both cases to be "lacking in substance" and the investigation had been discontinued. The two cases were handled by the EOC and the case details fall outwith the purview of the Security Bureau.

LCQ5: Revitalising tourism industry

Following is a question by the Hon Yiu Si-wing and a reply by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau, in the Legislative Council today (July 8):

Question:

As the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) epidemic has subsided recently, the authorities of Macao and Zhuhai have, since May this year, implemented a system for mutual recognition of health codes to facilitate residents' commuting between the two places. Meanwhile, the governments of some Southeast Asian countries, such as Thailand, have relaxed or planned to gradually relax the compulsory quarantine measures imposed on arrivals. On revitalising the tourism industry, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has studied the ways to relax the entry restrictions imposed on Mainland and overseas residents, so as to permit the entry of residents from regions adjacent to Hong Kong where the epidemic has been brought under control; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) of the Government's latest strategies to revitalise inbound and outbound tourism, and the timetable for the relevant work; and

(3) given that the current fees payable by residents of Macao, Zhuhai and Shenzhen for undertaking the nucleic acid tests on COVID-19 are only \$180, \$75 and \$160 (in local currencies), of the Government's measures to lower the test fees in Hong Kong which are over \$1,000, so as to avoid the high fees impeding the re-activation of Hong Kong's inbound and outbound tourism?

Reply:

President,

The local social incidents last year and the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak this year have taken an unprecedented heavy toll on the tourism sector of Hong Kong and the number of visitor arrivals of Hong Kong plummeted. In May 2020, the number of visitor arrivals plunged by 99.9 per cent year-on-year, with an average daily arrivals of only about 260.

In the past six months, through the concerted effort of the Government and the community, the epidemic situation in Hong Kong is relatively stable. Nonetheless, as stated by the Secretary for Food and Health yesterday at the media session, with new local cases reported in Hong Kong in the past few days, we should not let down our guard in facing the epidemic. Hence, in exploring and implementing the relaxation of quarantine arrangement, the Government must strike a balance between the considerations for enhanced disease prevention and control and the considerations for economic recovery; and be guided by science and objective evidence in maintaining various anti-epidemic measures on the one hand while allowing room and be prepared for gradual resumption of normal operation and activities in society when the situation permits on the other hand.

Having consulted the Food and Health Bureau and the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau, my reply to the question raised by the Hon Yiu Si-wing is as follows:

(1) In view of the close connection among Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao and the development of the epidemic situation, we are adopting the "suppress and lift" strategy in controlling the epidemic. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) Government is in active discussion with the governments of Guangdong Province and Macao SAR under the framework of joint prevention and control, to explore arrangement of exempting cross-boundary travellers from compulsory quarantine within certain limits, subject to specific conditions on a pilot scheme basis so as to facilitate people who need to travel between Guangdong and Hong Kong or between Hong Kong and Macao. The preparatory work has been ongoing and has reached its final stage and subject to the epidemic situation, we will implement and announce the details in due course.

For overseas, we are now exploring with places which have stabilised their epidemic situation on how to resume cross-border travel in a gradual manner and establish the mutual arrangement as soon as possible. We have already had some initial discussion with various governments, among them, the

government of Thailand is going to commence discussion with Hong Kong on the ways of relaxing border control. An inter-departmental team established and led by the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau will follow up with the Government of Thailand.

(2) In reviving Hong Kong's tourism sector, we will start with local tourism with the aim of energising the local community in order to send a positive message worldwide and enhance visitors' confidence in visiting Hong Kong. The two theme parks in Hong Kong have reopened in June and provided a range of concessionary packages which received positive response from the community. As mentioned in my reply to the Question four, the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTb) has launched the Holiday at Home campaign to encourage Hong Kong people to take initiatives and be tourists in our own city. With the support of the tourism, retail, catering and other industries, the campaign provides different offers to boost the economy. Moreover, once individual source markets have the conditions for resuming travelling to Hong Kong, the HKTb will also team up with the Government and different partners to create a travel platform to welcome back visitors with enticing offers and exciting experiences.

Furthermore, the Government enhanced in June the Green Lifestyle Local Tour Incentive Scheme, which was announced late last year, increasing the incentive for travel agent in organising local tours, and benefiting sectors such as food and beverage and transport.

(3) To dovetail the pilot scheme among Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao, the Hong Kong SAR Government has been encouraging and helping local private laboratories to enhance their testing capabilities for COVID-19. At present, there are already 15 private laboratories in Hong Kong which can provide the relevant service and the cost has been dropping gradually. We believe as demand surges and with market competition, the quality and the cost of testing would also improve.

Thank you, President.

Managers and operators fined for illegal club operations

Two men, a woman and a company were fined \$1,800 to \$2,500 at the Kowloon City Magistrates' Courts today (July 8) for contravening the Clubs (Safety of Premises) Ordinance.

The courts heard that in July and December last year, officers from the Office of the Licensing Authority (OLA) of the Home Affairs Department conducted inspections at two clubs on Portland Street in Mong Kok and on Tak

Ku Ling Road in Kowloon City, which had been operating with certificates of compliance (CoCs).

During the investigation in the club on Portland Street, the OLA officers posed as customers and patronised the club for food and drinks without being asked to show their membership status or being invited to join the club as members. Condition 12 of the CoC was breached. The man, being the manager of the club and the woman, being the CoC holder of the club, were charged with contravening section 21(1) (a) and section 21(2) of the Ordinance respectively.

The staff of the club on Tak Ku Ling Road failed to show the registered drawing upon the OLA officers' request. Condition 10 of the CoC was breached. The man, being the manager of the club and the company, being the CoC holder of the club, were charged with contravening section 21(1) (a) and section 21(2) of the Ordinance respectively.

A spokesman for the department reminded all CoC holders to comply with the conditions as stipulated therein. Enforcement actions will continue to be taken against illegal club operations.

Manager of unlicensed guesthouse fined

A man was fined \$2,000 at the Kowloon City Magistrates' Courts today (July 8) for contravening the Hotel and Guesthouse Accommodation Ordinance.

The courts heard that in April last year, officers of the Office of the Licensing Authority (OLA), the Home Affairs Department, inspected a suspected unlicensed guesthouse on Shanghai Street in Mong Kok. During the inspection, the OLA officers posed as lodgers and successfully rented a room in the guesthouse on a daily basis.

According to the OLA's records, the guesthouse did not possess a licence under the Ordinance on the day of inspection. The man responsible for managing the premises was charged with contravening section 5(1) of the Ordinance.

A department spokesman stressed that operating or managing an unlicensed guesthouse is a criminal offence and can lead to a criminal record. Upon conviction, the offender is liable to a maximum fine of \$200,000 and two years' imprisonment.

The spokesman appealed to anyone with information about suspected unlicensed guesthouses to report it to the OLA through the hotline (Tel: 2881 7498), by email (hadlaenq@had.gov.hk), by fax (2504 5805) using the report form downloaded from the OLA website (www.hadla.gov.hk), or through the

mobile application "Hong Kong Licensed Hotels and Guesthouses".