

HKETO Berlin highlights Hong Kong's success in fighting COVID-19 crisis (with photo)

The Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office, Berlin (HKETO Berlin) held its first-ever webinar on June 9 (Berlin time) to discuss Hong Kong's success story in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic with members of the business communities, academic and government in Central and Eastern Europe.

The panel consisted of speakers from Hong Kong and Central and Eastern European countries, including the Director of HKETO Berlin, Mr Bill Li; the Head of Investment Promotion of HKETO Berlin, Dr Chung Wing-hin; and Senior Director of the Austria-based Innovation in Politics Institute and former Austrian Ambassador to Slovakia Mr Helfried Carl.

Despite Hong Kong being an international hub for passenger transport with a high level of connectivity with the Asia-Pacific region as well as the rest of the world, the figures of about 1 100 registered COVID-19 cases and four deaths out of these cases are remarkably low. Moreover, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government has rolled out targeted measures to minimise the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on various fronts.

In his presentation to the audience, Mr Li highlighted that the HKSAR Government has adopted a comprehensive and co-ordinated approach to contain the spread of COVID-19 and protect the health of the community, with actions that are guided by three key principles: responding promptly, staying alert to the situation, and working in an open and transparent manner. "With the lessons learnt during the times of SARS, avian flu and swine flu in the past, I dare to say that Hong Kong is one of the places in the world which is most prepared for epidemics," he continued.

"The Government has pledged HK\$287.5 billion – about 10 per cent of GDP – to help offset the economic fallout from COVID-19," Mr Li said. The Government's focus is on upholding the vitality of the economy, retaining jobs and easing the financial burdens of citizens. More than 70 measures to support various business sectors including aviation, tourism and transport have been implemented and one-off grants or subsidies for eligible businesses ranging from HK\$6,000 to HK\$3 million have already been handed out since April.

The support is not only limited to businesses, as every Hong Kong permanent resident aged 18 or above will receive a HK\$10,000 cash payout to encourage local consumption and relieve financial burdens. A 100 per cent profits tax reduction for 2019-20, waiving of business registration fees for 2020-21, a 75 per cent electricity charges subsidy for non-residential accounts for eight months and a waiver of 75 per cent of water and sewage charges for non-domestic accounts for 12 months are further steps to give relief.

With these measures in place, Hong Kong is well prepared to remain an attractive location for Central and Eastern European companies to expand to the Mainland of China and Asia at large. They will benefit from the city's entrepreneurial spirit, rich international business experience, versatile and multilingual talents, and dynamic business environment.

About HKETO Berlin

HKETO Berlin is the official HKSAR Government representative in commercial relations and other economic and trade matters in Poland as well as Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia and Switzerland.



LegCo meeting to continue tomorrow

The following is issued on behalf of the Legislative Council Secretariat:

As the business on the agenda of the Legislative Council (LegCo) meeting cannot be finished today (June 10), the President of LegCo has, in accordance with Rule 14(4) of the Rules of Procedure, decided that the Council meeting will resume tomorrow (June 11) at 9am.

Latest arrangements for LCSD public services

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) announced today (June 10) that, in view of the latest situation of COVID-19, more public

swimming pools, gazetted beaches, libraries and museums will reopen on June 13 and 15 (Saturday and Monday). In addition, booking applications for some land recreation and sports facilities and wedding venues will resume on June 13 and the arrangement of opening alternate courts/tables of badminton courts, billiard/American pool rooms and table tennis rooms will be relaxed on June 15.

Among the leisure venues, three public swimming pools will be reopened on June 13. They are Sun Yat Sen Memorial Park Swimming Pool on Hong Kong Island and Kowloon Park Swimming Pool (indoor L2 training pool only) and Lam Tin Swimming Pool (training pool only) in Kowloon. Details are at www.lcsd.gov.hk/en/beach/common/documents/reopen_annex1_613.pdf. For details of facilities in swimming pools to be reopened, please refer to notices displayed at the venues. The reopened swimming pools will operate from 6.30am to 10pm for three sessions daily with two breaks.

Six gazetted beaches will be reopened, namely Big Wave Bay Beach on Hong Kong Island and Ting Kau Beach, Cafeteria New Beach, Castle Peak Beach, Silverstrand Beach and Trio Beach in the New Territories. Please refer to www.lcsd.gov.hk/en/beach/common/documents/reopen_annex2_613.pdf for details of beaches to be reopened. Lifeguard services will be provided daily at the reopened gazetted beaches from 9am to 6pm. The services will be extended from 8am to 7pm on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays during the peak period from June to August.

The LCSD appeals to beach-goers to comply with the Prevention and Control of Disease (Prohibition on Group Gathering) Regulation (Cap 599G) on the prohibition of group gatherings of more than eight people. To ensure appropriate distance between shower facilities users, only alternate shower cubicles and shower heads will be open. Apart from the previously reopened gazetted beaches and the beaches to be reopened as mentioned above, all other beaches will remain closed with lifeguard services suspended. The public should neither swim nor gather at the closed beaches for social distancing reasons and to avoid accidents.

Acceptance of individual and block booking applications for use of the reopened non-fee-charging land recreation and sports facilities (such as roller skating rinks and model car play areas) in August or afterwards, as well as block booking applications for the reopened fee-charging land recreation and sports facilities (such as tennis courts, bowling greens, activity rooms, dance rooms and squash courts in sports centres) in August or afterwards, will resume starting from June 13. Please refer to the LCSD's website (www.lcsd.gov.hk/en/facilities/facilitiesbooking/procedure/feeorganisation.html and www.lcsd.gov.hk/en/facilities/facilitiesbooking/procedure/nonfee.html) for details. Acceptance of applications for holding wedding ceremonies at LCSD designated venues, including Repulse Bay Beach, Kowloon Walled City Park, Kowloon Tsai Park, Tai Po Waterfront Park and Sai Kung Waterfront Park will be resumed starting from June 13. Please refer to the LCSD's website (www.lcsd.gov.hk/en/wedding/index.html) for details.

The arrangement of opening alternate courts/tables of badminton courts, billiard/American pool rooms and table tennis rooms will be relaxed from June 15 (the arrangement will be maintained for individual facilities with a distance of less than 1.5 metres).

Processing and acceptance of booking applications for indoor multi-purpose arenas, other facilities that remain closed, amphitheatres and non-fee charging leisure venues for non-designated use/sales activities are suspended until further notice.

Regarding cultural venues, the adult and children's libraries of a further 19 district libraries will reopen on June 15. They are North Point Public Library, Quarry Bay Public Library, Shek Tong Tsui Public Library, Fa Yuen Street Public Library, Ngau Tau Kok Public Library, To Kwa Wan Public Library, Po On Road Public Library, San Po Kong Public Library, Shui Wo Street Public Library, South Kwai Chung Public Library, North Kwai Chung Public Library, Yuen Chau Kok Public Library, Ma On Shan Public Library, Tseung Kwan O Public Library, Sheung Shui Public Library, Sai Kung Public Library, Tai Hing Public Library, Yuen Long Public Library and Cheung Chau Public Library. To avoid people gathering, admission slips will be distributed on a first-come, first-served basis for entry to each session. The students' study rooms of the above-mentioned district libraries (not applicable to North Point and Tai Hing Public Libraries) will resume service on the same day. The study rooms will implement the same special opening hours as the libraries. Admission will be arranged by sessions with each lasting about three hours and the number of users limited.

Reference libraries in the reopened Hong Kong Central Library and six other major public libraries, namely City Hall Public Library, Kowloon Public Library, Tsuen Wan Public Library, Sha Tin Public Library, Tuen Mun Public Library and Ping Shan Tin Shui Wai Public Library, will reopen on June 15 with reference enquiry services resumed.

From June 15, all reopened public libraries will implement special opening hours. The opening hours of these libraries will be 1pm to 8pm from Mondays to Saturdays and 9am to 5pm on Sundays and public holidays. The duration of admission sessions will be adjusted from June 15 to meet readers' needs, with an extension from about one hour to 1.5 hours from Mondays to Saturdays and an extension from about one hour to 1.5 to two hours on Sundays and public holidays. Children under 12 will only be allowed to enter when accompanied by an adult. Limited services including lending and returning of library materials and picking up reserved library materials will be offered. Some of the computer facilities will resume service and be open for telephone booking. From June 15, the newspaper and periodical areas will be reopened with reduced seating capacity to maintain social distance and minimise the risk of virus spreading. Please visit www.hkpl.gov.hk/en/index.html for details.

The Hong Kong Science Museum and the Hong Kong Space Museum will partially reopen their exhibition facilities on June 15 and implement special opening hours. Public programmes will be temporarily suspended. Except on

regular closing days, the Hong Kong Science Museum will be open from 10am to 5pm while the Hong Kong Space Museum will be open from 12.30pm to 5pm. The Space Theatre of the Hong Kong Space Museum is now temporarily closed for refurbishment. Major work of the project consists of replacing the dome screen and installation of a new planetarium projection system. The Space Theatre is expected to reopen in July next year. During the period of closure, all of the Space Theatre's programmes are suspended. Those who have purchased tickets for the Space Theatre's programmes or exhibition halls but were affected by the pandemic should refer to the Space Museum website for refund arrangements and box office opening hours.

Among the above two museums and the 14 museums and cultural venues reopened earlier, the Hong Kong Science Museum, the Hong Kong Space Museum, the Hong Kong Museum of Art, the Hong Kong Heritage Museum and the Hong Kong Museum of History will arrange visits by sessions, each lasting two hours, with admission quotas to limit visitor flow. Visitors will be able to enter the museums on a first-come, first-served basis. Children aged under 12 must be accompanied by an adult. For details, please visit www.lcsd.gov.hk/en/facilities/facilitieslist/museums/lcsdmuseums.html.

Visitors to the public libraries and museums will need to use hand sanitiser and will be subject to temperature checks before admission. They are also advised to wear their own masks. Enhanced measures including cleaning and disinfection between sessions will be conducted.

Also, in view of the situation of COVID-19, the LCSD's museums were temporarily closed from January 29. Upon the full resumption of museum services at a later time, admission fees will be waived for affected Museum Pass holders. The number of days for the waiver will be based on the number of valid days of the respective Passes during the temporary closure period. The effective date of the waiver and details will be announced on museum webpages in due course.

The LCSD will continue to monitor the situation closely and review the arrangements in a timely manner.

Government welcomes passage of tax concessions bill

The Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury, Mr Christopher Hui, welcomed the passage of the Inland Revenue (Amendment) (Tax Concessions) Bill 2020 by the Legislative Council today (June 10). The new Ordinance gives effect to the tax concessions proposed by the Government in the 2020-21 Budget, i.e. reducing salaries tax, tax under personal assessment and profits tax for the year of assessment 2019/20 by 100 per cent, subject to a ceiling

of \$20,000 per case.

"The concessionary measure helps relieve the tax burden of taxpayers. The Inland Revenue Department will reflect the tax reductions in the tax demand notes to be issued; application is not required," Mr Hui said.

The concessionary measure will benefit 1.95 million taxpayers of salaries tax and tax under personal assessment, and 141 000 tax-paying corporations and unincorporated businesses. The government revenue in 2020-21 will be reduced by \$20.8 billion accordingly.

LCQ5: Internal review conducted by the Equal Opportunities Commission

Following is a question by the Hon James To and a written reply by the Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs, Mr Erick Tsang Kwok-wai, in the Legislative Council today (June 10):

Question:

A Review Panel under the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) conducted, between 2017 and 2019, a process review to examine EOC's governance, management structure and complaint handling process, with a view to improving the services of EOC. In parallel, a retired High Court Judge conducted, upon EOC's invitation, an independent review of EOC's complaint handling process and submitted an independent report thereon. The Review Panel subsequently submitted to EOC the Report on Review of the Equal Opportunities Commission Governance, Management Structure and Complaint Handling Process, setting out its responses to the various recommendations put forth in the independent report. The Report was endorsed and then published by EOC in December 2019. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it knows, among those recommendations set out in the Report in respect of which the Review Panel has indicated that it "agrees", it "agrees that this can be considered" and "EOC will study",

(i) the up-to-date number of recommendations that have been implemented;

(ii) the up-to-date number of recommendations that will be implemented and the implementation timetables; and

(iii) the up-to-date number of recommendations that EOC decided not to implement, and the reasons for that;

(2) whether it knows if EOC has implemented the following recommendations as set out in the Report; if EOC has not, when EOC will do so and the estimated amounts of resources involved:

(i) the victims of a discrimination case be given the opportunity early on in the complaint handling process to meet with a legal professional;

- (ii) EOC officers should regularly take part in capacity-building workshops and seminars;
 - (iii) serious consideration be given to the possibility of officers of the Legal Service Division of EOC providing specific legal advice to the complainants during the conciliation stage;
 - (iv) the Legal and Complaints Committee of EOC should be cautious that it is not appropriate to refuse granting legal assistance for court proceedings merely because a case has less than a 50% chance of success;
 - (v) a review be conducted on whether it is appropriate for a Complaint Services Division of EOC officer to be responsible for enquiry handling and conciliation work in the same case;
 - (vi) greater use be made of Rule 7, including the payment by EOC of taxi fares, to enable complainants and respondents to attend at EOC's premises for face-to-face conferences at mutually convenient times;
 - (vii) EOC's case management system should be upgraded and made more user-friendly;
 - (viii) the Legal and Complaints Committee of EOC should, in deciding whether to grant full legal assistance, bear in mind the financial situation of the respondent and the potential for moral hazards;
 - (ix) where conciliation has failed, the task of providing initial limited legal assistance may be undertaken by a team of officers drawn from the Complaint Services Division and the Legal Service Division of EOC;
 - (x) it should be ensured that Chinese walls are in place to prevent an officer of the Complaint Services Division of EOC who has acted as a conciliator on a complaint from later conducting the detailed investigation and legal assessment of that same complaint;
 - (xi) it should be a normal expectation that the Legal and Complaints Committee of EOC decides whether to grant full legal assistance within nine to 12 months of a complaint being made or of a specific enquiry being classified as a complaint; and
 - (xii) consideration be given to increasing the head count of EOC; and
- (3) of the resources provided to EOC in the current financial year for implementing the aforesaid recommendations?

Reply:

President,

In December 2019, the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) released its Report on Review of the Equal Opportunities Commission Governance, Management Structure and Complaint Handling Process (Report). The Review was conducted between 2017 and 2019 by a Review Panel of three EOC Members to examine EOC's governance, management structure and complaint-handling process. Moreover, the EOC invited Professor Anselmo Reyes, a retired High Court Judge, to conduct an independent review concerning EOC's complaint-handling process, and submit The EOC's Complaint Handling Process: External Report (Independent Report), such that the Review could be more comprehensive. The EOC found the Report's recommendations, particularly those in relation to a victim-centric approach, the holistic collection of facts and evidence in complaint handling, and the positioning of the Chairperson as a commanding role to be ably assisted by the EOC Members and a professional management team, etc.,

highly valuable and helpful for enhancing its work.

Chapter 7 of the Report featured response by the Review Panel and the EOC staff to Professor Reyes' recommendations in the Independent Report. Of the 25 recommendations in the Independent Report, the Review Panel noted that some have already been implemented under existing practice, the Review Panel also agreed that the EOC should duly consider some of the suggestions. To date, the EOC has implemented 11 of these recommendations, while following up another five items. For the remaining nine recommendations, the EOC believes that the desired effect can be achieved through alternative measures taken, or that it may revisit the suggestions as necessary when reviewing its operation in the future. Progress of EOC's follow-up to all 25 recommendations in the Independent Report (including items (i) to (xii) listed in sub-question (2)) can be found in the Annex.

In fact, the Review Panel had recommended that the EOC should put immediate focus on the key issues and improvement suggestion concerning its governance, management structure and complaint-handling process set out in the main body of the Report. To this end, the EOC has taken forward a series of measure to improve its complaint-handling process, and commenced re-organisation of its internal management structure in order to facilitate the fulfilment of long-term strategic objectives and enhance organisational effectiveness.

Regarding financial resources, government subvention to the EOC in 2020-21 has increased by \$9.1 million (7.3 per cent) over the revised estimate for the previous year, in addition to a sum of about \$5.6 million offset by time-limited funding injected during 2019-20, resulting in a total increase of about \$14.7 million. The additional funding is provided for enhancing the work of the EOC, mainly setting up two dedicated working groups and enhancing the organisational effectiveness of EOC's management structure. Breakdown of expenditure related to the implementation of recommendations set out in the Independent Report is not available as this is an integral part of EOC's daily complaints handling operations.