

Government releases and responds to Final Report of Commission of Inquiry into the Construction Works at and near the Hung Hom Station Extension under the Shatin to Central Link Project

The Government released today (May 12) the Final Report of Commission of Inquiry into the Construction Works at and near the Hung Hom Station Extension under the Shatin to Central Link (SCL) Project (the Final Report), which was submitted by the Commission to the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, on March 27.

The Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, expressed his deep appreciation to the Chairman and Commissioner of the Commission, Mr Michael Hartmann, and the Commissioner of the Commission, Professor Peter Hansford, for completing the inquiry under its extended terms of reference and preparing the Final Report.

After considering the views of all the independent engineering experts, the Commission was fully satisfied with the consensus that with the "suitable measures" proposed in the Final Report on Holistic Assessment Strategy for the Hung Hom Station Extension and the Final Verification Study Report on As-constructed Conditions of the North Approach Tunnels (NAT), South Approach Tunnels (SAT) and Hung Hom Stabling Sidings (HHS) in place, the station box structure and NAT, SAT and HHS structures will be safe and also fit for purpose.

The Government welcomes the Commission's conclusion on structural safety. The "suitable measures" were accepted by the Government upon scrutiny by the Expert Adviser Team for the SCL Project of the Transport and Housing Bureau, the Highways Department and the Buildings Department. The MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) has been implementing the "suitable measures" in parallel with the inquiry and the works are expected to complete by mid-2020.

On project management systems, the Commission recognised that there were unacceptable incidents in a number of respects of the construction works, including poor workmanship on-site compounded by lax supervision, and that management of the construction endeavour fell below the standards of reasonable competence. On this, the Commission has put forward a series of recommendations.

The Government attaches great importance to the Commission's recommendations on project management systems. The majority of those

recommendations to be followed up by the Government have been implemented through its enhancement measures since the discovery of the issues at the Hung Hom Station Extension and follow-up actions in response to the Interim Report. This includes closer monitoring of the MTRCL's project management processes, deploying in-house inspectorate staff members of the Government to be stationed on sites, conducting surprise checks, and engaging audit sampling for the progress, procedures and quality of the works.

For future railway projects, the Commission recommended the establishment of a dedicated department on railway matters. The Government agrees with the recommendation and is studying the roles, responsibilities, staffing and structure of the new department in depth, with a view to enhancing the Government's ability in monitoring and controlling the planning and delivery of new railway projects.

The Government will pay close attention to the progress of the above measures to ensure that the new monitoring strategy will be implemented when the new railway projects under the Railway Development Strategy 2014 enter the construction stage, so as to enhance the public's confidence on the quality of railway projects.

The Government's redaction of parts of the Final Report is based on legal considerations to avoid any prejudice (actual or perceived) to relevant criminal investigations and any potential prosecutions of any criminal offences in the future (if so decided to be justified after the relevant investigations). The Government understands that the public would like to see the Final Report in full, and the redactions to the Final Report have been kept to a minimum as permitted by law. The Government will release the Final Report in full after the relevant criminal investigations and criminal prosecutions (if any) have been concluded. This is to safeguard the fairness of the criminal justice system, in accordance with the public interest.

The Final Report in redacted form has been uploaded to the GovHK website (www.gov.hk/en/theme/coi-hh/).

BFAC appreciates Government's efforts in launching further relief measures to support enterprises, employees and the public

The following is issued on behalf of the Business Facilitation Advisory Committee Secretariat:

The Business Facilitation Advisory Committee held its 42nd meeting today

(May 12). At the meeting, members received briefings on three major relief measures under the second round of the Anti-epidemic Fund, namely the Employment Support Scheme (ESS) of the Labour and Welfare Bureau, further enhancements to the SME Financing Guarantee Scheme (SFGS) of the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau (CEDB), and the Catering Business (Social Distancing) Subsidy Scheme (CBSS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD).

The Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, briefed members on the ESS which will be launched soon. The ESS, with a total commitment of \$81 billion under the second round of the Anti-epidemic Fund, aims to provide time-limited financial support to employers to retain their employees who will otherwise be made redundant due to the downturn in business. Except for organisations with employees' salaries not affected by the epidemic (including the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government, statutory bodies and subvented staff in government-funded organisations), all employers who have been making Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF) contributions or have set up Occupational Retirement Schemes will be eligible for the ESS. Employers joining the ESS are required to provide an undertaking not to implement redundancies during the subsidy period and to spend all wage subsidies from the Government in paying wages to their employees. The ESS is expected to benefit about 270 000 employers who have been making MPF contributions or have set up Occupational Retirement Schemes for over 1.77 million employees, and about 215 000 self-employed persons.

At the meeting, the CEDB and the HKMC Insurance Limited briefed members on a concessionary low-interest loan with 100 per cent Government guarantee and various enhancements under the SFGS to help ease the cash flow problem of Hong Kong enterprises which have been severely affected. For the Special 100 per cent Guarantee Product, the total guarantee commitment has increased from \$20 billion to \$50 billion while the maximum loan amount per enterprise has increased from \$2 million to \$4 million. Moreover, the application period has been extended from six months to 12 months, and the option for the principal moratorium is provided for the first 12 months instead of the first six months. The Special 100 per cent Guarantee Product started receiving applications from April 20, 2020.

The FEHD also briefed members on the CBSS. The scheme provides subsidies ranging from \$250,000 to \$2,200,000 to eligible licence holders of general restaurants, light refreshment restaurants, marine restaurants and factory canteens in operation according to the licensed area of the premises as specified in the licence. Not less than 80 per cent of the subsidy should be used to support the payment of salaries of employees working in the licensed premises from May to October. Moreover, under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F), each eligible catering outlet directed to close the whole of its licensed premises under the Regulation, including karaoke establishments, nightclubs and bars or pubs, is eligible for a further one-off subsidy of \$50,000. This subsidy scheme is open for application from May 5 to June 5, 2020. It is estimated that the Scheme will benefit about 16 000 catering outlets and their employees.

The Committee expressed appreciation of the efforts made by the Government in launching further relief measures to support enterprises, employees and the public. The Chairman of the BFAC, Mr Wong Ting-kwong, believed that the relief measures could help businesses stay afloat, keep workers in employment and relieve their financial burden under the COVID-19 epidemic. He hoped that the measures could provide help to enterprises and various trades as soon as possible to tide them over this difficult time. He also hoped that the economy of Hong Kong could recover very soon.

The Committee also noted that 145 new business facilitation measures have been developed in 2019-20 under the "Be the Smart Regulator" Programme to reduce compliance costs to trades and further improve the regulatory environment for business. Among them, 107 measures have been completed in 2019-20. These completed measures have been published on the Business Facilitation Initiatives website for viewing by the business community and the public. The Committee expressed appreciation of the commitment and achievements of the bureaux and departments in further enhancing their business licensing services under the "Be the Smart Regulator" Programme.

Papers for the Committee meeting are available at www.gov.hk/en/business/supportenterprises/bf/advisory/index.htm for public access.

Public hospitals daily update on COVID-19 cases

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

As at noon today (May 12), in the past 24 hours six COVID-19 confirmed patients (case numbers: 538, 646, 669, 723, 838 and 877) were discharged from hospitals. So far, a total of 991 confirmed and suspected patients have been discharged.

At present, there are 673 negative pressure rooms in public hospitals with 1 251 negative pressure beds activated. A total of 53 confirmed patients are currently hospitalised in 12 hospitals, among which one patient is in critical condition (case number: 595), three patients are in serious condition (case numbers: 338, 461 and 713), and the remaining 49 patients are in stable condition.

The Hospital Authority will maintain close contact with the Centre for Health Protection to monitor the latest developments and to inform the public and healthcare workers on the latest information in a timely manner.

Statistics Advisory Board discusses developments of official statistics work

The Statistics Advisory Board held a meeting today (May 12) to discuss official statistics work and its recent developments.

Members were briefed on the summary results of the 2017 round of the International Comparison Program (ICP) for the Asia-Pacific region, of which Hong Kong was one of the 22 participating economies. The ICP is a major global statistical initiative led by the World Bank with the main objective of providing a set of Purchasing Power Parities to enable a better comparison of the Gross Domestic Product and some other important economic aggregates across economies.

Members also noted that the enumeration of households living in subdivided units would be enhanced in the 2021 Population Census (21C), with a view to improving the success rate of enumeration and data quality. At the meeting, members discussed possible enhancement measures in various aspects, including frame updating, questionnaire design, publicity and data collection.

The Commissioner for Census and Statistics and Chairperson of the Statistics Advisory Board, Ms Marion Chan, said, "The Census and Statistics Department will make every effort to ensure that the 21C will provide accurate data on a wide spectrum of socio-economic characteristics of Hong Kong, which are crucial inputs to shaping Hong Kong's future."

Furthermore, the Board noted the major statistical developments depicted in the 2020 Edition of An Outline of Statistical Development which was published on April 24, 2020.

The Statistics Advisory Board is a non-statutory advisory body which advises the Commissioner for Census and Statistics on matters pertaining to government statistical work. Its membership consists of professionals from the business sector, the academia and the community, providing a wide representation to assist the Commissioner in integrating views of data users, data suppliers and statisticians. The terms of reference and composition of the Board can be found on the website of the Census and Statistics Department (www.censtatd.gov.hk/about_us/our_advisory_board/index.jsp).

UK design studio opens first international outlet in Hong Kong (with photo)

â€‹UK design studio, Bompas and Parr, announced today (May 12) that it has opened its first international studio in Hong Kong to capitalise on the city's dynamic cultural and creative industries to expand its business in Asia.

The new Hong Kong studio is situated in the city's Central business district, a convenient location for the company to connect to existing clients and reach out to new ones, according to the studios Director, Mr Sam Bompas. The company already has realised projects across Asia, notably in Hong Kong, Singapore, Seoul, Kuala Lumpur, Beijing, Taipei, Tokyo and Bangkok.

He said, "Bompas and Parr recognises Hong Kong as a premier business hub in Asia. The new studio aims to capitalise on the dynamism of the cultural and creative industries in the city. Given the strong commercial and cultural ties between London and Hong Kong it was determined that the city would be the ideal platform for Bompas and Parr to establish new projects and an ongoing presence in the region."

He added, "While the creative industries in both London and Hong Kong have faced a dynamic time of late, we treat this as a goad to creativity. Bompas and Parr was forged in the early days of the 2008 financial crisis and this shaped and honed our practice, giving it the vigour it has today. We are enormously excited about opening in Hong Kong in 2020 and look forward to realising the most swashbuckling and ambitious projects."

Associate Director-General of Investment Promotion, Dr Jimmy Chiang, said, "We are happy to see that Bompas and Parr has chosen Hong Kong as its first international outlet to expand its business in Asia. With the city's status as a creative hub in Asia, as well as its strategic location, it is the ideal place for Bompas and Parr to manage its business in the region."

About Bompas and Parr

Founded in 2007, Bompas and Parr is a London-based design studio, operating globally, to experiment, develop, produce, and install projects, artworks and exhibitions. It works with commercial brands, artistic institutions, private clients and governments to deliver emotionally compelling experiences to a wide variety of audiences. The company has grown from just Sam Bompas and Harry Parr into a team of 20 skilled and ambitious people eager to generate a wide range of projects. For more information, please visit bompasandparr.com.

About Invest Hong Kong

Invest Hong Kong is the department of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government responsible for attracting foreign direct investment and supporting overseas and Mainland businesses to set up or expand in Hong Kong. It provides free advice and customised services for overseas and Mainland companies. For more information, please visit www.investhk.gov.hk.

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