

## SCED attends 7th ASEAN Economic Ministers – Hong Kong, China Consultation (with photos)

The Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Algernon Yau, and the Minister of Trade of Indonesia, Dr Zulkifli Hasan, co-chaired the seventh Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Economic Ministers – Hong Kong, China (HKC) Consultation in Semarang, Indonesia, today (August 20) to discuss issues relating to the implementation of the ASEAN-HKC Free Trade Agreement (AHKFTA) and the Investment Agreement (IA), and exchange views on the recent regional and global economic development.

Speaking at the meeting, Mr Yau noted that the theme for ASEAN meeting this year – "ASEAN Matters: Epicentrum of Growth" cannot be more fitting, as ASEAN is one of the most vibrant and rapidly growing regions in the world, and Hong Kong is also fully committed to further bolstering the already very close relationship between Hong Kong and ASEAN.

Since the signing of the AHKFTA and the IA in 2017, trade in goods between Hong Kong and ASEAN has increased by 38 per cent to reach an all-time high at US\$165 billion in 2022. Meanwhile, Hong Kong's outward direct investment in ASEAN has also increased by 38 per cent to reach US\$77 billion in end 2021.

Noting that Hong Kong is widely-recognised as an advocate of free and open trade, Mr Yau called on ASEAN member states' (AMS) continued support for Hong Kong's early accession to the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), the world's largest and one of the most open and inclusive free trade agreements.

"We hope to see the early adoption of procedures for accession by the RCEP Joint Committee to facilitate the launch and early conclusion of substantive discussions with Hong Kong on our accession," he added.

Mr Yau also shared with AMS Hong Kong's experience in supporting small and medium enterprises to navigate the ever-changing regional and global economic development by administering various funding schemes to assist them in obtaining finance, exploring markets and enhancing competitiveness.

"The challenges facing us are imminent, but we can mitigate the effects when we work together. The co-operation between ASEAN and Hong Kong are multi-faceted as evidenced by the successful implementation of the AHKFTA and the IA as well as the 33 memorandums of understanding and agreements signed in the recent ASEAN's visit led by the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region," he said.

"Hong Kong is committed to working with ASEAN to develop creative,

feasible and sustainable solutions to address some of the global challenges that we are facing. I firmly believe that we can turn adversity into opportunity and emerge stronger from all the challenges," Mr Yau stressed.

Mr Yau and the economic ministers of the AMS also announced the finalisation of the First Protocol to Amend the AHKFTA (Protocol). The Protocol serves to incorporate the new product specific rules of origin into the AHKFTA. Looking forward to the signing of the Protocol as soon as possible, the meeting agreed to work towards the goal of bringing about its early implementation to further facilitate seamless trade between ASEAN and HKC.

On the sidelines of the meeting, Mr Yau held bilateral meetings with Dr Zulkifli Hasan; the Minister of Industry and Commerce of Laos, Mr Malaithong Kommasith; and the ASEAN Secretary-General, Dr Kao Kim Hourn, to discuss various trade and economic issues, and update them on Hong Kong's preparatory work in seeking early accession to RCEP. He also met with the Secretary of Trade and Industry of the Philippines, Mr Alfredo E. Pascual, to exchange views on issues of mutual interest.

Mr Yau will return to Hong Kong tomorrow evening (August 21).





