

LCQ12: Measures to cope with the surge in demand for public hospital services

Following is a question by the Professor Hon Joseph Lee and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (November 7):

Question:

The Chief Executive announced on January 30 this year an additional allocation of \$500 million to the Hospital Authority (HA) for meeting the service demand during the winter surge and relieving the work pressure faced by frontline healthcare staff. The authorities indicated in March this year that the allocation would be deployed for implementing various measures targeted at specific situations (targeted measures), including the increase of healthcare manpower to meet the service demand during that period of time. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council if it knows:

(1) how the allocation has been used so far; in respect of each targeted measure, (i) the amount of expenditure incurred so far and (ii) the additional manpower provided in terms of numbers of man-days and man-hours (broken down by grade), with a breakdown by (a) hospital cluster, (b) public hospital, and (c) department;

(2) the average values of the following service figures of each public hospital from January to April this year: (i) the waiting time for patients of the various triage categories in the accident and emergency departments, (ii) the waiting time for such patients to be admitted to the wards, (iii) the inpatient bed occupancy rates of various departments, (iv) the respective numbers of temporary beds used by various departments and their percentages in the total numbers of beds, and (v) the nurse-to-patient ratios;

(3) whether HA has assessed the effectiveness of the various targeted measures; if HA has assessed, of the outcome; whether HA has consulted the healthcare professionals on the effectiveness of the various targeted measures; if HA has, of the outcome; if not, the reasons for that; and

(4) whether HA will, whenever there is an upsurge in the demand for hospital services (e.g. during influenza surges), (i) increase the amount of special honorarium, (ii) extend the scope of the Special Honorarium Scheme, (iii) lower the threshold for providing allowances under the Continuous Night Shift Scheme, and (iv) recruit part-time nurses in advance, so as to ensure that there is sufficient manpower to cope with such situations; if HA will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the various parts of the question raised by the Professor Hon Joseph Lee is as follows:

(1) To meet the service demand during the winter surge in 2017-18, the Hospital Authority (HA) put in place a response plan which included the following measures:

(i) opening of time-limited beds;

(ii) enhancing virology services to facilitate and expedite patient management decision;

(iii) enhancing ward rounds of senior clinicians and related supporting services in the evenings, at weekends and on public holidays so as to facilitate early discharge of patients;

(iv) enhancing discharge support (e.g. non-emergency ambulance transfer service, pharmacy, portering services);

(v) increasing the service quotas of general out-patient clinics; and

(vi) enhancing geriatrics support to Accident and Emergency (A&E) departments.

In response to the upsurge in service demand, the Government announced in January 2018 an additional one-off allocation of \$500 million for the HA to implement various additional measures to alleviate the manpower shortage. The measures are as follows:

(i) extending the use of the Special Honorarium Scheme (SHS) to provide extra manpower of clerical and supporting staff to support healthcare staff so that the latter could focus more on clinical work;

(ii) further relaxing and streamlining the approval for the SHS arrangement to a minimum operation need of one hour to cover all grades of staff to meet increasing needs for greater flexibility in the use of SHS under exceptional circumstances;

(iii) providing SHS jobs at Advanced Practice Nurse level to work on night-shift duties at both acute general, convalescent and rehabilitation wards/services to enhance senior coverage and supervision to ward staff;

(iv) relaxing the criteria for the implementation of the Continuous Night Shift Scheme (CNSS) by suspending the required night shift frequency for triggering the CNSS with a view to increasing flexibility in manpower deployment; and

(v) increasing the rate of SHS allowance by 10 percent under a special one-off arrangement to encourage more staff to work during the surge period with significant anticipated increase in workload.

The expenditure incurred in meeting the service demand during the winter surge in 2017-18, including that for implementing the measures (items (i) to (vi)) under the response plan and the additional measures (items (i) to (v)) above, in each HA cluster is set out at Annex 1. The number of man-hours of HA staff participating in the SHS and that of part-time staff for the same period are set out at Annex 2 with breakdowns by grade. The HA does not keep statistics on the number of man-days of additional manpower.

(2) to (4) The average waiting time for patients of the various triage categories in the A&E departments of the HA and that for in-patient admission via A&E departments at hospitals providing A&E services between January 1 and April 30, 2018 are set out at Annexes 3 and 4 respectively. During the same period, the HA provided an average of about 1 500 additional time-limited and ad hoc beds per day to meet the service demand. The HA flexibly deploys hospital beds and provides ad hoc beds according to operational and clinical service needs, and thus individual wards may receive patients from different specialties. Moreover, beds are provided for more than one specialty in mixed specialty wards. Hence, the HA is unable to provide a breakdown of the number of additional beds by department. The numbers of nurses and hospital beds (as at March 31, 2018), the in-patient bed occupancy rates, the numbers of in-patient and day in-patient discharges and deaths, as well as the number of patient days, in the major specialties in each cluster between January 1 and April 30, 2018 are set out at Annex 5.

The HA has been listening to and collecting, through different staff group consultative committees (including doctors, nurses and allied health professionals) and nurse forums held in clusters, staff's views on the effectiveness of various measures implemented during the surge period. In general, they considered that the measures implemented during the winter surge in 2017-18 were effective in supporting their work.

After considering staff's feedback and reviewing the manpower of the nursing and supporting grades, the HA has regularised the following three additional measures to meet the increasing service demand:

- (i) extending the use of the SHS to provide extra manpower of clerical and supporting staff to support healthcare staff so that the latter could focus more on clinical work;
- (ii) providing SHS jobs at Advanced Practice Nurse level for work on night-shift duties at both acute general, convalescent and rehabilitation wards/services to enhance senior coverage and supervision to ward staff; and
- (iii) relaxing the criteria for the implementation of the CNSS by suspending the required night shift frequency for triggering CNSS with a view to increasing flexibility in manpower deployment.

To cope with the surge in service demand in 2018-19, the HA will continue to implement a series of measures to retain talent, including recruiting non-local doctors through limited registration, implementing the

Special Retired and Rehire Scheme, increasing training and promotion opportunities, employing additional ward clerks and assistants to share out the clerical work and assist nurses in taking care of patients, and improving the work environment.

Phishing email related to Standard Chartered Bank (Hong Kong) Limited

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority:

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) wishes to alert members of the public to a press release issued by Standard Chartered Bank (Hong Kong) Limited on phishing email, which has been reported to the HKMA. Hyperlink to the press release is available on the [HKMA website](#) for ease of reference by members of the public.

Anyone who has provided his or her personal information to the email concerned or has conducted any financial transactions through the email should contact the bank concerned using the contact information provided in the press release, and report to the Police or contact the Cyber Security and Technology Crime Bureau of the Hong Kong Police Force at 2860 5012.

LCQ6: Public rental housing units for rehousing in urban renewal projects

Following is a question by the Hon Shiu Ka-chun and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (Nov 7):

Question:

At present, the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) has set aside a number of public rental housing (PRH) units for the Urban Renewal Authority (URA) to re-house eligible domestic tenants who are affected by URA's redevelopment projects. It is learnt that URA generally allocates to such tenants the smallest PRH units which meet the minimum standard on per-person internal

floor area, while HA adopts the lower limit of the household size for a unit as the benchmark for allocation of PRH units to PRH applicants. For example, a 3-person household will be allocated a 2-to-3-person unit by URA but a 3-to-4-person unit by HA. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of PRH units allocated by HA in each year from 2013 to 2017 (set out the figures for each year in tables of the same format as the table below);

Year: ____

Household size	Types of PRH units							
	1-to-2-person unit		2-to-3-person unit		One-bedroom unit for three to four persons		Two-bedroom unit for four persons or more	
	Newly completed	Refurbished	Newly completed	Refurbished	Newly completed	Refurbished	Newly completed	Refurbished
One person								
Two persons								
Three persons								
Four persons								
Five persons								
Six persons or more								
Total number of units								

(2) of the number of PRH units allocated by URA in each year from 2013 to 2017 (set out the figures for each year in tables of the same format as the table above); and

(3) whether it has compiled statistics to ascertain if there is a difference in the per-person internal floor area in respect of the PRH units allocated by URA and those allocated by HA; if it has compiled such statistics and the result is in the affirmative, of the reasons for that and the measures put in place to ensure fair treatment for the members of the public concerned?

Reply:

President,

My consolidated reply to various parts of the question raised by Hon Shiu Ka-chun is as follows:

According to the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) and the Urban Renewal Authority (URA), the URA

has been requesting the HA to reserve Public Rental Housing (PRH) units for rehousing eligible households affected by its redevelopment projects every year. Subject to availability of PRH resources, HA will reserve some PRH units for rehousing purpose of the URA.

The HA's current PRH allocation standard is no less than seven square metres internal floor area per person. The HA will allocate PRH units to eligible households in accordance with this allocation standard (as well as the maximum limit on the number of persons for each flat type). This allocation standard applies both to PRH applicants and clearerees affected by the URA's redevelopment projects.

At present, there are mainly four types of newly completed PRH units of HA:

Type of Units	Internal Floor Area	Allocation Standard (limit on number of persons)
A	About 14 sq m	1 to 2 persons
B	About 21 sq m	2 to 3 persons
C	About 31 sq m	3 to 4 persons
D	About 35 sq m	4 to 5 persons

As for those PRH units which were recovered and refurbished, the HA had in the past set different allocation standards for different types of units completed at different times, with reference to their varied designs and sizes. The Housing Department has not maintained information and data on number of allocated units with breakdowns by family size and flat type.

For the past five years (i.e. from 2013-14 to 2017-18), the numbers of PRH allocations in relation to PRH applications and URA's redevelopment projects are set out in Annex.

LCQ10: North Lantau traffic

Following is a question by the Hon Holden Chow and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (November 7):

Question:

The Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB) opened to traffic on the 24th of last month. However, the Government estimated last month that due to construction delays, the section of the Southern Connection of the Tuen Mun-

Chek Lap Kok Link (a road connecting North Lantau and the HZMB Hong Kong Port) which will connect North Lantau Highway (Tung Chung-bound direction) would not be completed until the first half of next year at the earliest. As such, during the initial stage of commissioning of HZMB, the traffic between Tung Chung and HZMB Hong Kong Port are required to route through North Lantau Highway and the roads on the Airport Island. Some residents on Lantau Island are worried that the commissioning of HZMB may aggravate the traffic congestion on those roads, seriously affecting their daily lives. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether the Government will implement traffic mitigation measures (such as requesting the MTR Corporation Limited to increase the train frequencies of the Tung Chung Line and the Airport Express) and encourage travellers who come to Hong Kong through HZMB to take the Airport Express to ply the urban areas, so as to ease the traffic load on the section of North Lantau Highway near Tung Chung and the roads on the Airport Island;

(2) as the Government has indicated that if both roads and railway lines are obstructed, it will, where necessary and practicable, consider using the SkyPier for providing emergency ferry services plying between Central Pier and Tuen Mun Ferry Pier, how the Government determines if it is "necessary and practicable" to do so; whether it will study the feasibility of opening up the SkyPier on a regular basis; and

(3) in order to enhance the public transport system connecting the artificial islands of HZMB and Tung Chung Town Centre, whether the Government will study afresh my suggestions below: constructing a regional elevated monorail system with stops to be built at places such as Tung Chung, the Airport Island and the artificial islands, exploring the extension of the terminus of the Tung Chung Line to the Airport Island, and building an additional HZMB Hong Kong Port Station for the Tung Chung Line?

Reply:

President,

The Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB) was commissioned smoothly on October 24, 2018. With the simultaneous opening of the mainline of the Southern Connection of the Tuen Mun-Chek Lap Kok Link (i.e. the section between the Hong Kong Port and the North Lantau Highway (urban bound)), the pressure on the roads in Tung Chung and the Airport Island has been eased. Since the commissioning of the HZMB, the traffic at and in the vicinity of the HZMB Hong Kong Port, the airport and Tung Chung has generally been smooth.

My reply to the various parts of the Hon Holden Chow's question is as follows:

(1) To ensure smooth traffic at the HZMB Hong Kong Port, the airport and Tung Chung during the initial period upon the commissioning of the HZMB, the Transport Department (TD) has implemented special traffic arrangements on a temporary basis. For example, Hong Kong/Guangdong cross-boundary private

cars with regular quota for using other boundary crossings (including Shenzhen Bay, Lok Ma Chau (Huanggang), Sha Tau Kok and Man Kam To) are not allowed to travel to and from the Zhuhai Port via the HZMB at this stage. Also, some of the local construction vehicles going to the Hong Kong Port and the airport for major works projects are restricted to use the connecting roads in the vicinity of the airport and Lantau Island during non-peak hours only. The TD will continue to closely monitor the traffic at the HZMB and its neighbouring areas, and adjust the temporary traffic arrangements in a timely manner having regard to the capacity of the Hong Kong Port and the connecting roads, thereby optimising the benefits of the HZMB. In addition, the TD will make continuous publicity efforts to encourage visitors to use public transport to go to the Hong Kong Port.

As regards public transport, the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) has been paying close attention to the services and passenger demand of Tung Chung Line, and will make appropriate adjustments where necessary with particular attention to the morning peak hours on weekdays. At present, the Tung Chung Line train services are operating at a headway of about four minutes (Hong Kong to Tsing Yi) and six to eight minutes (Hong Kong to Tung Chung) on average during the morning peak hours. As advised by the MTRCL, the train services are operating smoothly and can meet passenger needs. At Tung Chung Station, the terminus of Tung Chung Line, passengers are usually able to board the first arriving train. As there is usually a large number of passengers at both Tsing Yi Station and Nam Cheong Station heading to Hong Kong Station, the MTRCL deployed two additional special departures from Tsing Yi Station directly to Hong Kong Station early this year to alleviate the crowdedness of Tung Chung Line trains. To enhance the convenience of passengers in using train services when boarding at Tung Chung Station, the MTRCL installed a new passenger information display system at the concourse of the station in January 2018 to show passengers the arrival times of the next four trains. Passengers may also obtain the same information through the MTRCL's mobile phone application "Next Train".

The Airport Express is mainly targeted for business and travelers. Since 2012, the headway of the line has been shortened from 12 minutes to 10 minutes. In 2017, the loading for busy sections during the busiest one hour of morning peaks was 46 per cent, able to meet the needs of passengers.

(2) When North Lantau Highway or Lantau Link and railway lines are obstructed, the TD will mobilise ferries to provide transport services. The Emergency Transport Co-ordination Centre (ETCC) under the TD will liaise with public transport service operators and the Airport Authority Hong Kong (AAHK) for co-ordination. Subject to actual circumstances, the ETCC will request ferry operators to endeavour to enhance ferry services (including the "Tuen Mun-Tung Chung", "Central-Discovery Bay" and "Central-Mui Wo" routes). The frequencies of feeder bus services serving the piers of the above routes will also be increased to facilitate travel to and from the airport, Lantau Island and urban areas for those switching to existing ferry services and feeder bus services.

Additionally, the TD has signed an emergency ferry services agreement with the Hong Kong & Kowloon Motor Boats & Tug Boats Association Ltd (MBTA).

In case of a serious incident on North Lantau Highway or Tsing Ma Bridge, or full closure of either of the two causing prolonged obstruction to road traffic, the MBTA will provide emergency ferry services between Tung Chung Development Pier and Tsuen Wan West Pier / Disneyland Resort Pier. The Government, together with the MTRCL and the AAHK, will take into account the gravity, timing and duration of the incident; as well as the feasibility and mobilisation of resources by operators, in considering to use the SkyPier for providing emergency ferry services plying to and from Central Pier and Tuen Mun Ferry Terminal to ease the flow of passengers travelling to/from the airport. However, since the external transport link of Lantau Island and the airport has mainly been provided by two land-based mass transit carriers, namely the railway and franchised buses, the role of waterborne transport as an alternative in case of full closure of land links is rather limited given the constraints of capacity and speed of ferries. Notwithstanding that, the Government will continue to co-operate closely with all relevant emergency units with a view to minimising the inconvenience caused to passengers and other members of the public.

Located at the Restricted Area of the airport, the SkyPier provides convenient and speedy ferry services for air-to-sea/sea-to-air transit passengers travelling between Hong Kong and the Pearl River Delta (PRD). The AAHK shall operate the SkyPier in accordance with the Deed of Security signed with the Government and meet the security requirements for transit passengers and baggage. Currently, the SkyPier is not open for use by non-transit passengers. As the SkyPier's capacity is limited, and there are already a number of existing public transport services plying between the airport and various districts across the territory, the AAHK will not provide local ferry service to and from the airport. Moreover, the financial viability of such ferry service is also in doubt. Any operators interested in providing local ferry services at other location in Lantau can make such an application to the TD.

(3) According to the information from the Development Bureau (DEVB), the Civil Engineering and Development Department (CEDD) is conducting the "Study on Traffic, Transport and Capacity to Receive Visitors for Lantau" to examine the need and feasible options of transport connections amongst North Lantau, the Airport Island and the Hong Kong Boundary Crossing Facilities Island from the overall planning perspective for Lantau. Moreover, CEDD and the Planning Department are jointly carrying out the "Planning, Engineering and Architectural Study for Topside Development at Hong Kong Boundary Crossing Facilities Island of Hong Kong – Zhuhai – Macao Bridge", which includes the feasibility study on transport options (including Environmentally Friendly Linkage System) amongst Hong Kong Boundary Crossing Facilities Island, North Lantau and the Airport Island.

In view that the Government has invited the AAHK to submit a proposal for the topside development at the Hong Kong Boundary Crossing Facilities Island, the Government will comprehensively review the needs of transport connection and facilities amongst North Lantau, the Airport Island and the Hong Kong Boundary Crossing Facilities Island after the AAHK submits the development proposal.

LCQ1: Problems in economic development of Hong Kong

Following is a question by the Hon Paul Tse and a written reply by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau, in the Legislative Council today (November 7):

Question:

Recently, several think tanks and economists have coincidentally pointed out that with dark clouds of a trade war between China and the United States (US) hovering, there are concerns about the way forward for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) in the context of national development strategies and international politics. In the event that the US authorities take any targeted measures, Hong Kong may lose the tariff exemption arrangement for its exports to US. They are also worried that the reclamation works for the construction of artificial islands under the "Lantau Tomorrow Vision" announced in this year's Policy Address may cost hundreds of billions, or even trillions, of dollars (i.e. the bulk of the fiscal reserves), which may undermine the confidence of foreign investors in, and cause depreciation in the value of, the Hong Kong dollar and induce attacks on the Linked Exchange Rate (LER) System by foreign exchange speculators. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has studied how Hong Kong should position itself while it is caught in the long-standing political arm-wrestling and trade war between China and US, so as to align itself with the national strategic initiatives on the one hand and strive for the continuation of the various types of preferential treatments on tariffs, visas, etc. that Hong Kong has been enjoying for many years on the other;

(2) of the mechanisms put in place, and the officials and policy bureaux tasked, by the SAR Government to study matters relating to the positioning of Hong Kong's development; the corresponding policy bureaux, officials or mechanisms in the SAR Government to conduct appropriate discussion and consultation with the various think tanks and academics regarding the findings of their studies and their recommendations on the positioning of Hong Kong's development in the context of national policies and international politics;

(3) given that the detention of a former Hong Kong senior official by the US authorities for an alleged offence of brokering arms transactions, the inclusion of five locally registered companies in the sanctions list by the US authorities for their alleged role in aiding North Korea in evading international embargoes, and the SAR Government's refusal to renew the work visa of a journalist of the Financial Times, have aroused international

concerns, whether the Government has assessed how the ongoing development of those incidents will affect Hong Kong's economy, including whether such incidents will trigger the US authorities to take targeted measures by imposing punitive tariffs on SAR's exports, and made a truthful report of the assessment results to the Central Authorities as soon as possible; and

(4) whether it has studied if spending a substantial amount of the fiscal reserves on implementing the "Lantau Tomorrow Vision" will undermine the confidence of foreign investors in, and cause depreciation in the value of, the Hong Kong dollar and induce attacks on the LER System by foreign exchange speculators, as well as the corresponding countermeasures?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the Development Bureau and the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau, our consolidated reply for the four parts of the question is as follows:

Hong Kong enjoys unique status and advantages under the Basic Law and "one country, two systems". According to Article 116 of the Basic Law, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region is a separate customs territory. Article 151 of the Basic Law provides that Hong Kong may participate in international organisations, including participation in the World Trade Organization (WTO) as a separate member and maintaining economic and trade relationships with the other 163 members of the WTO.

We have been promoting Hong Kong's unique advantages to the world and promoting bilateral and multilateral ties through various channels, such as overseas visits of government officials and overseas Economic and Trade Offices (ETOs). Since taking office in July last year, the Chief Executive has attended a number of international conferences and paid visits to more than ten countries. Similarly, the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development has also actively participated in international conferences and paid visits to a number of countries, including his visit to Washington DC, the United States (US), in September 2018, during which he met with government officials, members of the Congress, think tanks as well as the business community, and explained clearly Hong Kong's unique status under the Basic Law.

Hong Kong's unique status under the Basic Law is well recognised and respected by the international community. Building on this foundation, Hong Kong's trading partners around the world have been conducting trade, commerce and investment with us. This is evident from the setting up of regional headquarters by international companies in Hong Kong. We provide a level playing field for all companies. Together with our competitive and the most free and open business environment, Hong Kong has always been commended by the international community.

As for the Hong Kong-US economic and trade relation, since Hong Kong's

return to the Motherland, the US has continued to maintain and expand economic and trade ties with Hong Kong based on our unique status. The US side also reiterated earlier that the US continues to have deep economic and cultural interests in Hong Kong. Counting on the basis of individual economies, the US is Hong Kong's 2nd largest merchandise trading partner in the world, while Hong Kong is the US' 9th largest export market. According to US statistics, the total merchandise and services trade between the US and Hong Kong in 2017 reached US\$69 billion. The US has been enjoying the highest trade surplus with Hong Kong among its global trading partners, valued at US\$34.5 billion in 2017, of which US\$32.5 billion was surplus in merchandise trade. In addition, Hong Kong and the US maintain close investment relations. In 2016, the US was the 6th major source of inward direct investment into Hong Kong while the US was the 8th major destination of outward direct investment from Hong Kong. It is in the US and Hong Kong's mutual interest to maintain and promote our bilateral relations. The Government will continue to enhance Hong Kong's economic and trade ties with the US.

Nevertheless, since the beginning of this year, the US has initiated conflicts in international trade, trade protectionism has risen, and the trade conflict between China and the US has been escalating. Apart from the direct impact on trade in goods, the impact on Hong Kong as a whole and on the global economy has begun to emerge. The uncertainties of the external environment have increased markedly, and the global economy as well as trade and investment sentiment have also deteriorated. Although the current economic data are still good, the outlook is not optimistic. Many institutions have lowered their forecasts for global economic growth next year and Hong Kong economy cannot stay immune.

The Government has been closely monitoring developments of the China-US trade conflict and their impact on Hong Kong economy, maintaining close communication and exchanging information with the trade, and responding promptly to their needs. In the short to medium term, the Government has announced and implemented a number of targeted measures in response to the trade's needs, including strengthening various SME funding schemes to assist the trade in market promotion and development of the Mainland and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) markets; enhancing the special concessionary measures of the SME Financing Guarantee Scheme operated by the HKMC Insurance Limited to further alleviate the financing burden of local enterprises; strengthening protection of Hong Kong exporters affected by the US tariff measures through the Hong Kong Export Credit Insurance Corporation; and assisting the trade to develop markets and transfer production base through the Hong Kong Trade Development Council.

In the medium to long term, as pointed out by the Chief Executive in her Policy Address, leveraging on our unique strength under "one country, two systems", we will continue to respect economic principles, uphold operation of the market and promote free trade. We will also strive to develop new areas of economic growth. The National 13th Five-Year Plan pledges support for Hong Kong to reinforce and enhance its status as an international financial, transportation and trade centre; develop its innovation and

technology industry; and establish itself as a centre for international legal and dispute resolution services in the Asia-Pacific region. The Belt and Road Initiative of our country as well as the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area development have brought enormous opportunities for the economic development of Hong Kong. The Government will do its best as a "facilitator" and "promotor", seizing opportunities to capitalise on Hong Kong's strengths to serve the country's needs, and seeking active liaison with the world to explore more business opportunities.

At the international level, the Government will continue to actively forge free trade agreements (FTAs) and investment agreements with our trading partners. We have already signed FTAs with ASEAN and Georgia respectively and have concluded negotiations with the Maldives. Our bilateral negotiations with Australia are ongoing, and we will explore FTAs with the United Kingdom and the Pacific Alliance and seek accession to the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership. We will also expand our network of ETOs, and we expect to set up the ETO in Bangkok early next year and the ETO in Dubai as soon as possible. We will continue our discussion with the respective governments on setting up the ETOs in Moscow, Mumbai and Seoul.

Regarding the "Lantau Tomorrow Vision" promulgated by the Government, the major consideration is the long-term development need of Hong Kong. The Government does not have an estimate of the relevant project cost at this stage. Since the proposed projects will be implemented in phases, the project cost will be spread over many years. In formulating the implementation strategy for the "Lantau Tomorrow Vision", the Government will take into account relevant factors like the fiscal sustainability and conduct detailed financial assessment to ensure that the project expenditure is fiscally affordable by the Government.

As for the Linked Exchange Rate System (LERS), it has served as a strong anchor for Hong Kong's monetary and financial stability. It has proved to be highly resilient in a series of regional and global financial crises. We will continue to uphold our firm commitment to ensuring the effective operation of the LERS in maintaining monetary and financial stability of Hong Kong.