

Additional performance of Spanish acrobatic show “Esencial” to address overwhelming response (with photos)

In view of the overwhelming response to the Spanish circus company Vaivén Circo's acrobatic show "Esencial", which is part of the summer festival International Arts Carnival (IAC), an additional performance will be arranged and details are as follows:

Date and time: July 30 (Sunday), 7.30pm

Venue: Hong Kong Cultural Centre Studio Theatre

Prices: \$180, \$260 and \$300

Vaivén Circo will offer an amazing acrobatic performance for audiences of all ages. Five agile members of the team will turn life-sized building blocks upside down and form different building structures instantly by different combinations of pillars and arches before the eyes of the audiences. The team will also perform complicated hand stands and splits on seesaws and ropes, providing a feast for the eyes.

Tickets for the additional performance will be available at URBTIX (www.urbtix.hk) from tomorrow (May 25). For telephone bookings, please call 3166 1288, or use the mobile ticketing app "URBTIX".

The IAC, organised by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, will run from July 14 to August 13. Overseas and local art groups will present a splendid array of interesting and creative programmes, offering families and children a fun-filled summer party.

For programme enquiries and concessionary schemes, please call 2370 1044 or visit www.hkiac.gov.hk.



Enforcement actions against illegal hillside burial cases

The Home Affairs Department, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) and the Lands Department (LandsD) today (May 24) launched a joint enforcement action in the Permitted Burial Grounds (PBGs) of Sam Mun Tsai (TP/E7) and Tong Kai Tseng (TP/E13) in Tai Po against illegal hillside burials. It is anticipated that 20 illegal graves/urn houses/urns will be removed in about three days and the human remains therein will be reburied at the Sandy Ridge Cemetery.

The FEHD and the LandsD posted notices on 37 unauthorised graves/urn houses/urns located within the PBGs of Sam Mun Tsai and Tong Kai Tseng on March 15 this year, and required the related persons of the graves/urn houses/urns concerned to cease occupation of the government land and to contact relevant government departments before April 17 this year, or else the human remains therein would be reburied at the Sandy Ridge Cemetery. Upon expiration of the period, 20 graves/urn houses/urns remained unclaimed. The Government thus commenced the clearance operation today.

The Government has been implementing a pilot scheme on the management of PBGs in individual PBGs since 2016. Taking into account the actual circumstances of each PBG, the Government has been implementing appropriate improvement measures, including erecting boundary pillars for the PBGs, conducting record surveys of existing graves/urn houses/urns, imposing restrictions on the size of burial sites and demarcating available spaces in PBGs for new applications of burial sites, in order to ensure that the places of burials are within PBGs. The pilot scheme has now been extended to 15 PBGs, covering all nine administrative districts in the New Territories.

The Government has examined the data obtained from the pilot scheme earlier and decided to commence follow-up actions against illegal burials in the PBGs in phases from July 2021 onwards. The Government will commence actions next month against illegal burials in the PBG of Tai Tau Chau in Sai Kung (SK/52), and further its follow-up actions in other PBGs, including planning to post notices on other unauthorised graves/urn houses/urns before the coming Chung Yeung Festival and expediting the enforcement procedures, with a view to removing unclaimed graves/urn houses/urns as soon as possible after the expiration of the notice period.

A Government spokesman reiterated that, according to the Land (Miscellaneous Provisions) Ordinance (Cap. 28), it is an offence when any person occupying government land, otherwise than under permission from the Authority, does not cease the occupation as required by a notice prescribed by the Ordinance. Any property or structure on the occupied government land may be demolished and removed by the Government, and the occupier may be prosecuted. Furthermore, according to the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132), it is an offence to bury human remains without permission in writing of the Authority. Offenders are liable to prosecution,

and the human remains inside the graves concerned will be removed.

LCQ6: Prevention of school and cyber bullying

Following is a question by the Hon Lam So-wai and a reply by the Secretary for Education, Dr Choi Yuk-lin, in the Legislative Council today (May 24):

Question:

According to the report of the Programme for International Student Assessment 2018 published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the prevalence of Hong Kong students being bullied at school is as high as 29.3 per cent. Moreover, with students becoming increasingly reliant on the Internet for learning, cyber bullying incidents have also increased. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of requests for assistance, complaints and reports about school bullying received by the authorities since January 2020; whether they have studied the underlying causes for the occurrence of such cases and formulated corresponding plans, such as strengthening investigation and punishment, setting up a dedicated 24-hour reporting hotline, as well as stepping up efforts in holding teachers and school authorities accountable; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) focusing specifically on cyber bullying, whether the Government will, in response to the call of society, consider afresh the establishment of a "commissioner for online safety for teenagers" to follow up on cases of cyber bullying in collaboration with the School Liaison Officers of the Police; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) given that some jurisdictions such as Singapore, the United Kingdom and the United States have made cyber bullying a criminal offence, whether the Government will enact the relevant legislation in the light of the worsening situation of cyber bullying locally; if so, of the details; if not, the new measures in place to address the problem of cyber bullying and prevent young people from becoming the victims of cyber bullying?

Reply:

President,

All along, the Government has been adopting a zero tolerance policy on bullying in schools. The Education Bureau (EDB) has provided schools with

clear guidelines to facilitate them to adopt the Whole School Approach in formulating and implementing school-based anti-bullying policies, as well as handling school bullying incidents in an appropriate manner. We also nurture students' positive values including respect for others as well as inclusion and friendship through the curricula, learning and teaching resources, diversified activities and teacher training. The EDB has also collaborated with different government departments to cultivate a harmonious and caring school environment. With regard to a study on bullying among students in the report of the Programme for International Student Assessment 2018, we noted that the findings were mainly based on students' perception and, as stated in the report, may be affected by cultural and social norms in different regions as well as students' ability in distinguishing bullying. When compared with their counterparts in other regions, a higher proportion of students in Hong Kong indicated that "other students made fun of them". This may include innocent jokes among peers. Therefore, only with a thorough understanding and careful analysis can we find the right remedies to the problem.

Our reply to the Hon Lam So-wai's question is as follows:

(1) According to the information collected from the EDB's annual questionnaire survey on guidance and discipline cases in public sector primary and secondary schools, the number of student cases handled by schools related to school bullying in the past three school years was about 380 on average per year.

In fact, schools have all along been responsible for maintaining a harmonious environment in schools and handling incidents of bullying at schools. With reference to the School Administration Guide, the Guidelines on Teachers' Professional Conduct and related circulars issued by the EDB, schools are required to formulate school-based anti-bullying policies and handle school bullying incidents properly with education, guidance and protection of their students as the prime concern. Schools would refer to relevant guidelines of EDB for immediate intervention, mediation, in-depth investigation and follow-up, handle school bullying actively and seriously and provide appropriate guidance and education for the students involved. For cases of a more serious nature, schools are required to report to the EDB. If child maltreatment or illegal act is involved, schools should consult the Social Welfare Department (SWD) or report to the Police for assistance immediately.

Schools have all along been handling bullying incidents properly and explaining the incidents to parents in accordance with the school-based policies. Parents and other people may also seek assistance from the EDB as necessary. From 2020 to 2022, the EDB had received a total of 35 requests for assistance, complaints and reports in relation to school bullying, and all were followed up and handled seriously.

The occurrence of school bullying can often be attributed to factors such as the personalities and social skills of the students involved, as well as the awareness towards bullying and tolerance. To resolve the problem at root, we must start with values education. As such, the EDB has encouraged schools to build a caring school culture, continuously organised programmes

and activities on students' growth to develop students' positive values and good moral character, launched the resource packages on prevention of school bullying and promoted the "Harmonious School – Anti-bullying" Campaign, with a view to helping schools further strengthen their anti-bullying work. In respect of cyber-bullying, we have provided schools with the "Information Literacy for Hong Kong Students" learning framework, teacher training, information kits and video series to support them in undertaking relevant education. In addition, we have co-operated with other government departments and non-government organisations (NGO) to arrange student activities and parents' talks for teaching students not to initiate and participate in cyber-bullying. An NGO has also been commissioned to provide one-stop telephone and online support and counselling services to help teachers, students and parents of all primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong deal with various problems including cyber-bullying. We believe that with the efforts of different stakeholders and co-operation among various sectors in the community, we can surely build a more harmonious and caring school environment where our students can grow up healthily.

(2) The Hong Kong Police Force (the Police) attach great importance to the problem of school and cyber bullying, and have been actively adopting a multi-agency approach to closely liaise with young people by working with stakeholders such as schools, parents and NGOs through the School Liaison Officers in various police districts. To prevent youth crime, the Police have organised crime prevention talks and diversified youth activities in various districts to raise the law-abiding awareness of youngsters. Furthermore, a large-scale educational publicity campaign "Child Protection Campaign" was launched by the Police in 2021 and 2022 to promote, among other things, the messages of preventing school and cyber bullying. The Police arranged for mobile publicity vehicles to visit schools in various districts to provide virtual reality scenarios on bullying for young people to experience the harm of bullying. There were also anti-bullying animations to remind children and adolescents that school bullying may involve illegal acts, as well as to show them where they could seek help. Art workshops for children were also organised to remind children to say no to bullying through creative activities and encourage them to help victims of bullying with empathy. The Police plan to organise the "Child Protection Campaign" again in 2023.

The Police have been striving to strengthen the liaison and co-operation with primary and secondary schools, the EDB and the SWD through the Police School Liaison Programme to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency in tackling juvenile delinquency. Through inter-departmental and cross-sector co-operation, the Police establish good relationships with students, teachers and parents and instil a sense of discipline and positive values in students. In 2022, the School Liaison Officers of the Police paid more than 10 700 visits to primary and secondary schools and organised over 1 400 school talks.

In addition, the Police has continuously disseminated the latest information on anti-crime and related legislation to the general public and our youths through online social platforms and the "One-stop Child Protection Web Application", which was launched last year, with a view to enhancing the

anti-crime awareness in the community on an on-going basis.

(3) The Internet is not an unreal world that is beyond the law. As far as the existing legislation in Hong Kong is concerned, most of the laws enacted to prevent crimes in the real world are applicable to the online world. All bullying activities, cyber or not, are governed by relevant legislation if they involve criminal offences. If a bullying incident involves a criminal offence, such as criminal intimidation or blackmail, the Police will follow up and investigate.

In view of the potential for information technology, the computer and the Internet to be exploited for carrying out criminal activities, a sub-committee under the Law Reform Commission (LRC) has initiated a study on cybercrime to review existing legislation and other relevant measures, examine relevant developments in other jurisdictions, and recommend possible law reforms in accordance with the findings. The Government will pay close attention to the progress of the LRC's study.

Thank you, President.

LCQ3: Weekend bazaars

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Hok-fung and a reply by the Acting Secretary for Environment and Ecology, Miss Diane Wong, in the Legislative Council today (May 24):

Question:

It is learnt that the Government will allocate resources to the organisation of "weekend bazaars" in collaboration with local groups in different districts this year, so as to foster diversified local economic activities. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will compile an "operating manual for weekend bazaars" to publish information on suitable sites in various districts for leasing to operators of weekend bazaars; if so, of the details;

(2) given that there are views that the operation mode of "Zibo barbecue" stalls in Zibo City of Shandong Province is of valuable reference to Hong Kong, whether the Government will, by drawing reference from the experience of Zibo City, incorporate elements of "low spending and no ripping off customers" into weekend bazaars, so that they can stimulate the local economy; and

(3) whether it will draw reference from the experience of organising "Gourmet Marketplaces", such as simplifying the requirements for applying for temporary food factory licences and including the element of gourmet, so as

to attract members of the public and tourists to visit weekend bazaars, thereby building Hong Kong as a visitor-friendly city where tourists feel at home?

Reply:

President,

Bazaars generally refer to venues set up on a temporary basis for buying and selling goods within a specific time period. The purpose of organising bazaars varies, some are for promoting local economy and tourism, some for providing opportunities to the grassroots and young people to start short-term businesses, while some for celebrating festival events etc. They may take different forms to serve their respective purposes.

The Government has all along been adopting an open attitude towards bazaars organised by organisations. When suitable sites are identified by interested organisations, relevant bureaux and departments will render facilitation so long as the bazaar proposals do not compromise the principles of maintaining public order, public safety, food safety and environmental hygiene etc, and are supported by local communities. In recent years, various organisations have organised bazaars of different forms and relevant government departments have also organised or supported the organisation of bazaars in relation to their respective policy objectives, such as the Lunar New Year fairs and FarmFest etc.

In the 2022 Policy Address, the Chief Executive announced that the Home Affairs Department (HAD) and the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) will each organise five weekend bazaars to foster diversified local economic activities. In addition, the Financial Secretary announced in his 2023-24 Budget Speech the launch of the "Happy Hong Kong" Campaign, which would feature the organisation of several Gourmet Marketplaces across the territory to be co-ordinated by the Home and Youth Affairs Bureau (HYAB) to enable public and tourists to enjoy local and overseas gourmet food.

On the questions raised by Hon Chan Hok-fung, after consulting with the HYAB and Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau, we would like to reply as follows:

(1) In order to facilitate organisations/individuals who are interested in organising a bazaar to have an easier grasp of the relevant procedures and process involved, relevant policy bureaux and departments are currently updating the "Resource Handbook for Bazaar Application" (the Handbook) to provide information on how to find suitable venues and apply for the use or lease of venues under the Housing Authority/Housing Department, Leisure and Cultural Services Department and Lands Department, including the relevant venue restrictions as well as enquiry and contact points etc; the licences and/or approval required for organising different forms of bazaars and the relevant application methods; how to assess the impact of the event on the local communities and the procedures for consulting them as needed.

As for venues, relevant departments are currently reviewing their respective venues with a view to identifying suitable locations for interested organisations/individuals to apply for organising bazaars on specific dates.

(2) The HYAB/HAD held five weekend markets last year and three "Happy Hong Kong" Gourmet Marketplaces this year without charging rent from the organisers. Admission tickets were distributed for free, and various offers were provided to the visiting public.

The FEHD will hold five weekend bazaars starting from this Thursday (May 25) adopting similar operating modes. It will not collect rent from the organisers or admission fees from public. At the same time, basic venue facilities and promotional assistance will be provided to stalls.

We hope that the above will allow the stalls to operate at a lower cost and encourage them to give back to the community.

(3) The FEHD will draw on the experience of the "Happy Hong Kong" Gourmet Marketplaces co-ordinated by the HYAB/HAD and incorporate gourmet food element in its three weekend bazaars to be held from May 25 to June. The three bazaars will have cooked food stalls to attract more public and visitors to visit and spend. As for the remaining two weekend bazaars to be held later, the FEHD is also actively discussing with co-organisers for the set-up of cooked food stalls thereat.

If heating-up/warming of pre-cooked food is involved at a temporary stall during a public function, such as a bazaar, the stall owner needs to apply for a temporary food factory licence from the FEHD, which will issue the concerned licence when the applicant meets the specified requirements. The FEHD has been providing assistance and support to temporary food factory licence applicants in relation to organising bazaars. For example, it provides one-stop service to applicants by referring the application information to relevant departments such as the Fire Services Department for processing in parallel, so that applicants do not have to make the same applications to multiple departments, and the processing time for applications can be shortened. At present, the FEHD usually completes the application process within 12 working days. So long as it does not affect food safety, environmental hygiene and the safety of the public at the venue, the FEHD will exercise the greatest flexibility in processing the temporary food factory licences. When necessary, the department will explain the licensing requirements in detail to the event organisers and stall owners to facilitate an accurate understanding of the relevant information, early planning of the class of businesses they will operate and compliance with the licence conditions. In the process of updating the Handbook, the FEHD will streamline procedures such as refining the application forms for bazaars stalls.

Thank you, President.

LCQ14: Under-enrolled schools

Following is a question by the Hon Tang Fei and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Dr Choi Yuk-lin, in the Legislative Council today (May 24):

Question:

It is learnt that in the 2023/24 school year, several primary schools will not be granted subsidies for Primary One classes, thus facing "school closure". There are views that in response to the trend of declining school-age children population, consolidation of education resources is beyond reproach, but the Education Bureau (EDB) has been lacking transparency in the relevant work, which has seriously affected the development of schools and the planning of parents. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of secondary schools and primary schools which will face under-enrolment (i.e. not meeting the threshold requirement for operating a class), and the respective numbers of schools which will operate only one class and two classes, in the 2023/24 school year;

(2) as some frontline staff of schools have complained that some staff of EDB's Regional Education Offices have advised parents not to enrol their children in primary or secondary schools teetering on the edge of under-enrolment, resulting in these schools being closed down due to genuine under-enrolment, whether it has gained an understanding of the reasons why the EDB's staff concerned have given such advice; and

(3) of the specific measures put in place by the EDB to support the parents and students affected by school closure?

Reply:

President,

The continuous decline in school-age population brings certain impact and challenges to schools. Noting that the decline is not transient but structural, the Education Bureau (EDB) will adopt long-term measures in planning for public sector primary and secondary school places to ensure a healthy and sustainable education ecosystem. With top priority accorded to the interests of students and aiming for a "soft landing", the number of schools will be adjusted in a gradual and orderly manner to ensure education quality and optimal use of public resources.

Our reply to the Hon Tang Fei's question is as follows:

(1) According to the existing criteria for operation of classes, a public

sector primary school with a total intake of less than 16 students under the Primary One Admission (POA) System may not be allowed to operate subsidised Primary 1(P1) classes if there are still unfilled P1 places in other schools of the same school net. The EDB will provide various options for schools not being able to operate subsidised P1 classes, including operating P1 classes with private funding, merging with other schools, undergoing special review, and ceasing the operation of classes of all or certain levels early, so that the schools can adjust their future development directions where practicable. For schools where small class teaching has not yet been fully implemented in their respective school nets, they may apply for re-participation in the POA System in the following school year. In the 2023/24 school year, a total of five primary schools are not approved to operate subsidised P1 classes.

As regards public sector secondary schools, they are required to operate at least two classes in each level to ensure that students are provided with a broad, balanced and diversified senior secondary curriculum. For schools that are only able to operate one Secondary One (S1) class, the school sponsoring bodies and schools may still apply for different development options to continue operation. If a school does not apply for any development option or its application is not approved, it may still operate S1 to Secondary Three (S3) classes on the "per capita subvention mode".

The number of approved classes for schools in the 2023/24 school year is subject to the actual student enrolment in the student headcount in September 2023. Therefore, the number of schools operating one class or two classes at P1 and S1 levels is not available.

(2) Regarding P1 and S1 placement, under the existing mechanism, parents may apply for P1 or S1 places for their children through the POA System and the Secondary School Places Allocation System. The EDB will allocate P1 and S1 places to eligible school-age children in Hong Kong in accordance with the mechanism. Frontline staff will never interfere in parents' choices or advise parents "not to apply for a place".

As for the placement of other class levels, staff of the Regional Education Offices of the EDB are committed to providing assistance to parents upon receipt of their related enquiries, including answering parents' questions, providing lists of schools in the districts for parents' reference, and arranging interviews for students in schools as and when necessary. The EDB staff will never advise parents not to apply for a place for their children in particular schools.

(3) The EDB has kept reminding parents through different channels that when choosing a school for their children, they should first identify children's characteristics, personalities, abilities and interests, and then consider various factors such as the sponsoring body, history, location and religion of a school. Parents may obtain information of schools and be updated on the latest school news through the school websites and the Primary School Profiles or Secondary School Profiles in order to help them choose a suitable school for their children.

In respect of primary schools not being able to operate subsidised P1 classes in the 2023/24 school year, the EDB has already taken the initiative to contact the parents whose children have been offered a P1 place by these schools at the Discretionary Places Admission Stage to explain the situation and arrange an alternative P1 place for their children. Parents may select another school from the school lists provided by the EDB or participate in the Central Allocation for their children. During the process, the EDB has been maintaining close communication with the parents concerned and providing appropriate and timely assistance to cater for the special circumstances and needs of individual parents as far as practicable. At present, most of the students concerned have been offered an alternative P1 place in other schools or participated in Central Allocation.

When a public sector school ceases operation, the EDB will also provide placement service for current students to let them complete their primary or secondary education in other public sector schools. Students who have completed S3 could pursue senior secondary education in other subvented schools through participating in Central Placement.