

LCQ5: Plan of the Japanese Government to discharge nuclear wastewater into the sea

â€‹Following is a question by the Hon Steven Ho and a reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (May 12):

Question:

The Japanese Government announced last month that it would start discharging nuclear wastewater from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant into the sea in two years' time. Some experts have pointed out that the nuclear wastewater containing radioactive substances will disperse across more than half of the Pacific Ocean within 57 days from the day of discharge, and spread over to all waters around the world in ten years' time. As a result, the marine ecosystem and fisheries industry around the world (including Hong Kong) will inevitably be affected. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as the Deputy Prime Minister of Japan has indicated that the diluted nuclear wastewater is safe to drink, whether the Government has requested the Japanese authorities to provide the relevant information to ascertain if the nuclear wastewater is suitable for drinking;

(2) as the Government has indicated that it will request the Japanese authorities to provide information so that it may assess the food safety risks posed to Hong Kong by the discharge of nuclear wastewater, but the United States Food and Drug Administration published the Import Alert #99-33 soon after the occurrence of the nuclear incident in Japan, authorising the relevant departments to detain without examination food shipments imported to the United States from Japan, and such import alert is still in force, whether the Government has assessed if the approach to sit back and wait for the Japanese authorities' provision of information lags far behind the prevailing circumstances; and

(3) as it has been reported that last year, Hong Kong was the largest export destination for Japanese agricultural, forestry and fisheries products, whether, in light of the food safety risks posed by the discharge of nuclear wastewater, the Government will take measures to adjust the structures of the imported food and food industries and explore replacement food sources, so as to reduce reliance on Japanese food; of the measures it will take to alleviate the impacts of the discharged nuclear wastewater on the fisheries industry of Hong Kong?

Reply:

President,

The Japanese Government announced earlier the decision to discharge the wastewater generated in the cooling process of the reactors at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Station into the ocean in about two years' time (i.e. 2023). The plan has aroused international and public concern. According to the announcement, the nuclear wastewater will be purified and diluted to meet relevant international standards before discharge.

Since the wastewater contains various radionuclides, we understand that many organisations, fishery operators and members of the public are concerned that the discharge of wastewater from the Fukushima Nuclear Power Station into the ocean would have serious impact on marine ecosystem, the food chain and food safety. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government has expressed grave concern about the impact of the discharge plan on food safety, and has strongly requested the Japanese authorities to provide data on various aspects and information on control and surveillance, including the method and actual location of the wastewater discharge, the list and the concentration of the radionuclides in the wastewater, the frequency and volume of discharge, as well as the monitoring programme on the wastewater treatment and the surrounding environment. We have made it clear to the Japanese authorities that they shall provide all relevant information, formulate and promulgate a highly transparent and robust surveillance programme covering the measures and locations of monitoring at source, the radionuclides and types of food under surveillance, ways for release of surveillance results and contingency mechanisms, etc., and should not discharge the nuclear wastewater unilaterally without the consensus of the international community.

As regards the Import Alert #99-33 mentioned in the Member's question, as far as we understand, it was issued after the nuclear accident in Fukushima and has been updated from time to time by the Food and Drug Administration of the United States (US). The list of food products prohibited from import to the US as set out in the Alert (the US list) is basically the same as the list of food products prohibited from export from Japan. The US list is updated from time to time in accordance with the revision to the list of food products prohibited from export by the Japanese Government.

As for Hong Kong, the import control measures are extra control on top of the list of food products prohibited from export from Japan. Currently, apart from the food products that are prohibited from export by the Japanese authorities, all vegetables, fruits, milk, milk beverages and dried milk from Fukushima are prohibited from import to Hong Kong. Radiation certificate and exporter certificate are required for the import of all vegetables, fruits, milk, milk beverages and dried milk from the four neighbouring prefectures (i.e. Ibaraki, Tochigi, Chiba and Gunma). In addition, the import of all chilled or frozen game, meat and poultry, poultry eggs and all live, chilled or frozen aquatic products from the above five prefectures is prohibited, unless the food products are accompanied by radiation certificate issued by the competent authority of Japan certifying that their radiation levels do

not exceed the guideline levels of the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

As compared to the US' food control list, Hong Kong's control measures on Japanese food products are, in fact, more stringent operationally, instead of lagging behind. For instance, vast majority of the fruits from Fukushima can be put on sale in Japan and the US currently. However for prudence sake, Hong Kong still prohibits their import. Moreover, chilled and frozen meat that can be put on sale in Fukushima and the neighbouring four prefectures must be accompanied by radiation certificate for import to Hong Kong, whereas such requirement is not necessary for import to the US. In fact, quite a number of countries have already ceased their radiation monitoring on Japanese food soon after the Fukushima nuclear accident while Hong Kong adopts a risk-based approach in handling and conducting radiation tests on food products imported from Japan all along. Over the past ten years, more than 750 000 samples of Japanese food imports had been tested. We shall continue to conduct radiation testing of imported food from Japan following a risk-based approach under the routine Food Surveillance Programme to safeguard public health and food safety.

According to the figures of the Census and Statistics Department, the import of basic foodstuff from Japan amounts to about 1.3 per cent of the total food supply in Hong Kong. Depending on the circumstances, we will not rule out increasing the tests on Japanese food imports and tightening import control on food products from Fukushima and its neighbouring areas, while maintaining communication with the relevant trade. We also understand many fishery operators are concerned that the discharge of wastewater from the Fukushima Nuclear Power Station into the ocean by the Japanese Government would have serious impacts on marine ecosystem, public confidence in seafood products and fishermen's livelihood. The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department will keep in view the radiation levels of local catches, including conducting regular sampling tests on cultured fish collected at fish culture zones in Hong Kong waters. We will keep track of the development and render appropriate support to local fishermen when necessary.

We have relayed clearly to the Japanese authorities that they should not discharge the nuclear wastewater into the ocean unilaterally without the consensus of the international community so as to avoid bringing about irreversible impacts on the environment. The Japanese authorities shall disseminate all information relating to the nuclear wastewater discharge plan of the Fukushima Nuclear Power Station to the international community and the public in a highly transparent manner. Or else, it will only lead to public's loss of confidence in the safety of the food imported from Japan. It was understood that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has proposed to set up a technical working group to follow up and monitor Japan's discharge of the nuclear wastewater. The China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs remarked that the IAEA has confirmed that it would invite experts from China to join the proposed technical working group. We will carefully examine the information provided by the Japanese authorities and the assessments made by international expert organisations, etc., and conduct risk assessments with the relevant Government departments as appropriate to determine the

corresponding measures to safeguard public health.

Thank you, President.

LCQ15: Prevention of child abuse

Following is a question by Dr Hon Chiang Lai-wan and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (May 12):

Question:

In recent years, a number of serious incidents of child abuse have occurred in Hong Kong, arousing public concern about the effectiveness of the existing mechanisms for preventing and identifying child abuse cases. On the prevention of child abuse, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the following information in each of the past five years and since January this year:

(i) a breakdown of the number of newly reported child abuse cases by the age group to which the abused children belonged and by case category, and
(ii) a breakdown of the number of newly reported child abuse cases by the relationship between the abusers and the abused children and by case category;

(2) of the number of child abuse crime cases received by the Police in each of the past five years and since January this year, with a breakdown by the age group to which the abused children belonged;

(3) of the respective numbers of persons (i) prosecuted and (ii) convicted for child abuse-related offences in each of the past five years and since January this year, as well as the maximum and minimum penalties imposed on those convicted;

(4) whether it will establish a mechanism under which professionals such as teachers and school social workers who are in frequent contact with children are obliged to report suspected child abuse cases to the specified authorities within a specified time period after they have uncovered such cases; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(5) of the new measures in place to step up public education on the prevention of child abuse, so that hidden child abuse cases may be uncovered early; and

(6) of the new measures in place to enhance parent education and support for parents, so as to prevent the occurrence of child abuse incidents?

Reply:

President,

At present, there are a number of legislation in place that protect children from harm and abuse. They include the Offences against the Person Ordinance (Cap. 212), the Crimes Ordinance (Cap. 200), the Prevention of Child Pornography Ordinance (Cap. 579) and the Protection of Children and Juveniles Ordinance (Cap. 213). In particular, the Offences against the Person Ordinance provides that ill-treatment or neglect by those in charge of children is a criminal offence.

In consultation with the Security Bureau (SB) and the Education Bureau (EDB), my reply to various parts of the Member's question is as follows:

(1) The numbers of newly registered child protection cases received by the Social Welfare Department (SWD), broken down by age group of abused children, type of abuse and perpetrator's relationship with abused children in the past five years are set out in Annex 1.

(2) The numbers of child abuse crime cases received by the Police, broken down by age group of abused children in the past five years are set out in Annex 2.

(3) Cases of "physical abuse against children" and "sexual abuse against children" can be prosecuted under various criminal offences. The number of persons prosecuted and convicted under section 26 (which targets specifically the abandoning of children) and section 27 (which targets specifically the ill-treatment and neglect of children) of the Offences against the Person Ordinance (Cap. 212), as well as the sentences for the persons convicted in the past five years are set out in Annex 3. The SB does not maintain statistics of other criminal offences involving child abuse.

(4) The Government has implemented a number of measures in recent years for early identification and appropriate intervention of cases of children suspected or found to be abused. These measures include implementation of the EDB's report mechanism for school absentees, under which kindergartens, primary and secondary schools are required to report students' non-attendance to the EDB on the seventh day of student's continuous absence regardless of the reasons. For suspected child abuse cases, even if the student concerned go to school normally, the school is required to report to the EDB. Besides, the SWD in collaboration with relevant government departments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and relevant professionals implemented in April 2020 a new procedural guide, which sets out clear procedures for identification, reporting, immediate protection actions and follow-up for suspected child abuse cases, for use by relevant professionals including social workers, teachers, medical personnel and the Police, with a view to enhancing inter-disciplinary effective collaboration. The EDB has also reviewed and updated relevant guidelines for schools, and has required schools to establish and enhance their internal mechanism, procedures and

measures according to the guidelines so as to strengthen schools' ability to prevent, identify, handle and support children suspected or found to be abused.

The Law Reform Commission (LRC) issued in 2019 a consultation paper making proposals of introducing the criminal liability of parents, carers and others when children or vulnerable adults die or are seriously harmed as a result of abuse or neglect while in their care. The person who has a duty of care would have a duty to protect under the proposed offence. Such duty would also include the duty to report by the professionals in close contact with children, mandatorily imposing of which is widely discussed in the community recently. The Government is preparing to explore the possibilities of legislation and, making reference to the final report to be published by the LRC, will seriously consider the proposals concerned and take appropriate follow-up actions as soon as possible.

(5) To raise public awareness of the importance of family cohesion and prevention of child abuse, as well as to encourage people in need to seek early assistance, the SWD launched a video in 2019-20 on the serious impact of witnessing parental conflict on child development to help the public understand the impact of family conflict on child development and to promote co-parenting amongst separated or divorced parents for the best interests of their children. In 2020-21, in addition to reinforcing the message on "cherish our families, stop domestic violence", the SWD also widely promoted the message that "child abuse is a crime" to remind parents, couples or family members to keep calm and think twice in every conflict and dispute so as to avoid resorting to violence.

Meanwhile, the Government has enhanced the training of front-line professionals to strengthen their capability in the early identification and support of child abuse victims. Since 2018, the EDB has organised annual briefings and seminars jointly with the SWD and the Police to enhance the capability of teachers of kindergartens, secondary and primary schools in the early identification, intervention and support of student victims of child abuse cases. In addition, the EDB has commissioned tertiary institutions to provide Certificate Courses on Student Guidance and Discipline for Teachers of Primary/Secondary Schools which cover modules relating to child abuse, domestic violence, etc.

Since 2019-20, the SWD has organised and subsidised training programmes for front-line professionals (e.g. social workers, teaching professionals, police officers, medical professionals and healthcare personnel) to enhance their capability in the early identification of suspected victims of child abuse and their alertness in handling the cases, including reporting of suspected cases, risk assessment, immediate protection actions, investigation and follow-up services, etc. through multi-disciplinary collaboration. For training courses organised by the EDB, the Hospital Authority (HA), the Department of Health (DH) and NGOs for their front-line personnel, the SWD provides support by deploying staff to speak on the topic of child protection.

(6) The 65 Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs) and two Integrated

Service Centres (ISCs) of SWD have been providing support services to vulnerable or at-risk families with weakened parenting capabilities through counselling, therapeutic and support groups, and referring the needy families to appropriate community services, etc. In addition, the IFSCs and the ISCs will proactively reach out to families that are unmotivated to seek help. The EDB has also provided a wide range of information via the "Smart Parent Net", a one-stop parent education website, to assist parents in supporting children's learning at home, establishing a good parent-child relationship and nurturing children's physical and psychological development.

The Comprehensive Child Development Service (CCDS) jointly implemented by the EDB, the DH, the HA and the SWD aims to identify various health and social needs of children (aged 0 to 5) and their families at an early stage so that comprehensive and timely support and services can be provided to them. The CCDS identifies at-risk pregnant women, mothers with postnatal depression, families in need of psychological services (including families at risk of child abuse), and pre-primary children with health, developmental and behavioural problems through various platforms, including the Maternal and Child Health Centres of the DH, the hospitals under the HA and other relevant service units (e.g. the IFSCs, the ISCs and pre-primary institutions). Children and families identified will be referred to health and social service units for follow-up. To enhance inter-disciplinary communication and collaboration, the HA, the DH and the SWD have jointly developed the Parenting Capacity Assessment Framework (for children aged 0 to 36 months) for use by professionals to assess the capacity of parents or carers in childcare and parenting.

[CFS finds trace of malachite green in grass carp sample](#)

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department today (May 12) announced that a trace amount of malachite green was found in a grass carp sample. A follow-up investigation is in progress.

A CFS spokesman said, "The CFS collected the above-mentioned grass carp sample from a stall at Kowloon City Market for testing under its routine Food Surveillance Programme. The test result showed that the sample contained a trace amount of malachite green at a level of 1.6 parts per billion."

The spokesman said that the CFS has informed the vendor concerned of the irregularity and instructed the vendor to stop sale of the affected product. The CFS is also tracing the source and distribution of the product concerned. Should there be sufficient evidence, prosecution will be instituted.

Malachite green is a type of industrial dye and has been used for

treating infections in fish. Currently, malachite green has been prohibited for use in food-producing animals in many countries. According to the Harmful Substances in Food Regulations (Cap. 132AF), no food sold in Hong Kong is allowed to contain malachite green. Offenders will be prosecuted and will be liable to a fine of \$50,000 and to imprisonment for six months upon conviction.

The CFS will continue to follow up on the incident and take appropriate action. An investigation is ongoing.

Tender results of the re-opening of 10-year Government Bonds under the Institutional Bond Issuance Programme

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

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA), as representative of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government (HKSAR Government), announces that a tender of 5-year Government Bonds through the re-opening of existing 10-year Government Bond issue 10GB2601 under the Institutional Bond Issuance Programme was held today (May 12).

A total of HK\$2.5 billion 5-year Government Bonds were offered today. A total of HK\$10.2 billion tender applications were received. The bid-to-cover ratio, i.e. the ratio of bonds applied for to bonds issued, is 4.08. The average price accepted is 104.65, implying an annualised yield of 0.674 per cent.

HKSAR Government Institutional Bond Issuance Programme Government Bond tender results

Tender results of re-opening of 10-year Government Bonds under the Institutional Bond Issuance Programme:

Tender Date	: May 12, 2021
Issue Number	: 10GB2601 (Re-open)
Stock Code	: 4230 (HKGB 1.68 2601)
Issue and Settlement Date	: May 13, 2021
Tenor	: 5-year
Maturity Date	: January 21, 2026
Coupon Rate	: 1.68%

Amount Applied	: HK\$10.2 billion
Amount Allotted	: HK\$2.5 billion
Bid-to-Cover Ratio*	: 4.08
Average Price Accepted (Yield)	: 104.65 (0.674%)
Lowest Price Accepted (Yield)	: 104.52 (0.701%)
Pro-rata Ratio	: About 88%
Average Tender Price (Yield)	: 104.35 (0.736%)

*Calculated as the amount of bonds applied for over the amount of bonds issued.

LCQ3: Development of topside properties at new railway stations

Following is a question by the Hon Mrs Regina Ip and a reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (May 12):

Question:

Last year, the Government entrusted the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) to take forward the development of two new railways, namely Tuen Mun South Extension and Northern Link. Under the "ownership" approach and the "Rail-plus-Property development" model, the MTRCL is responsible for the construction and operation of the two new railways, and it will be granted the development rights of the topside properties at the railway stations by the Government to subsidise the railway construction costs. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the respective expected numbers of residential units to be built atop the stations of the aforesaid two new railways; and
- (2) whether it will discuss with the MTRCL the allocation of at least half of such residential units for sale as Home Ownership Scheme units; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

My consolidated reply to the Hon Mrs Regina Ip's question is as follows:

The Railway Development Strategy 2014 (RDS-2014) recommends seven new railway schemes. Having examined the proposals submitted by the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) and considered the urgency of various projects together with the land development potential that may be brought about, while allowing a continuous development of Hong Kong's railway network with phased implementation of the railway projects in an orderly manner, the Transport and Housing Bureau (THB) invited the MTRCL to commence the detailed planning and design for the Tuen Mun South (TMS) Extension and Northern Link (NOL) last year and will carry out negotiation with the MTRCL on the financing arrangement of the above-mentioned projects respectively on the basis of the "ownership" approach for funding the projects.

Under the "ownership" approach, the MTRCL will be responsible for the financing, design, construction, operation and maintenance of the new railway, and ultimately owns the railway. A railway project is considered "not financially viable" if the present value of all its revenues net of expenditures fall short of the expected return on capital. This funding gap will need to be filled. Upon receipt of the funding support from the Government to bridge the funding gap, the MTRCL would bear all the commercial risks associated with the design, construction, operation and maintenance of the new railway. The Government has no obligation to provide any further funding support to the MTRCL even if the future revenue of the new railway turns out to be lower than expected. The Government had adopted different methods to bridge the funding gap in the past, including capital grant for the West Island Line and the "Railway-plus-Property (R+P)" model adopted in most other projects. Since each railway project has its own uniqueness, the form of funding support will depend on the individual project. The Government will consider the most appropriate method for funding each individual project.

The Government will carry out negotiation with the MTRCL on the financing arrangement of the TMS Extension and the NOL respectively. The negotiation will be conducted concurrently with the detailed planning and design process of the projects.

In respect of the TMS Extension and the NOL, the detailed planning and design for both projects is in progress. We will, with the support of independent consultants, examine the estimated project costs and revenue prepared by the MTRCL carefully and rigorously. We will endeavour to bring down the project expenditure and increase the estimated revenue so as to narrow down the funding gap to be bridged, and verify the valuation of the R+P site(s). Assuming that the Government will provide funding support for the relevant projects using the R+P model, we will need to determine the funding gap of the relevant project first and complete the relevant procedures for change of land use if necessary before confirming the scale of the relevant property development.

Given that the primary purpose of granting property development right is to bridge the funding gap of a railway project, the R+P sites were generally

used for development of private housing in the past to maximise the value of the sites. If the R+P site is used for the construction of Subsidised Sale Flats, it will reduce the profit that can be brought about by the property development. The feasibility of such recommendation depends on whether there are sufficient sites along the proposed railway for public and private housing development while generating sufficient profit to bridge the funding gap. As the TMS Extension is only about 2.4 kilometers in length, the availability of R+P site(s) along the railway alignment is relatively limited. For the 10.7-kilometer long NOL, we will review whether there is room for adopting such recommendation in light of the circumstances of the project.

In fact, the Government has been exploring the development potential of sites adjoining railways to increase public housing supply. For instance, the Government has drawn up the Outline Zoning Plan for the about 30-hectare Siu Ho Wan Depot site. It is expected that this development project would provide about 20 000 units in the medium to long term, of which around half would be public housing which are mainly Subsidised Sale Flats under current planning. In addition, the Government had reserved some sites in the vicinity of Tung Chung East Station for public housing development when planning the Tung Chung East extension area, which includes around 10 000 public housing units in Tung Chung Areas 99 and 100 currently under construction.

Under the current shortage of the public housing supply, we will make our best endeavour to utilise sites for housing purpose to meet the demand of the grassroots.

Thank you, President.