

EDB's clarifications regarding inaccurate media report on university exchange

â€‹Regarding the report of a non-local media organisation on the Government's plan to prohibit local universities' academic exchange with universities in Taiwan, the Education Bureau (EDB) today (December 22) clarified that such claim is unfounded and expressed regret over the inaccurate report.

A spokesman for the EDB said, "Academic freedom is an important social value treasured by Hong Kong and a cornerstone of our higher education sector's success and renown in the world. Moreover, the Government has all along upheld academic freedom and institutional autonomy, which are protected by the Basic Law. All post-secondary institutions in Hong Kong are independent and autonomous bodies that enjoy autonomy in managing their institutional affairs. The Government does not interfere with academic exchanges between the institutions and local or overseas academic organisations. As a matter of course, the institutions are responsible for ensuring that their operations meet the requirements of the law, and the interests of their students and the community as a whole."

He reiterated that the National Security Law aims to prevent, suppress and impose punishment for offences that endanger national security. The National Security Law does not affect the legitimate rights and freedoms enjoyed by the residents of Hong Kong under the Basic Law. The specific safeguards of academic freedom and institutional autonomy enshrined in Articles 34 and 137 of the Basic Law remain in full force. The National Security Law does not affect normal exchange activities between academics or post-secondary education institutions and their counterparts outside Hong Kong.

Disbursement of subsidies under subsidy scheme for promotion of contactless payment in public markets in progress

â€‹The spokesman of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) today (December 22) announced that the application period for the subsidy

scheme for promotion of contactless payment in public markets under the third round of the Anti-epidemic Fund expired yesterday (December 21). Applicants have to submit the relevant contracts and complete the installation by January 21, 2021. The FEHD will disburse the subsidies as soon as practicable after inspections are conducted to ensure completion of installation.

The spokesman said, "The FEHD received over 3 500 applications during the application period. Together with the stalls of public markets that have already been provided with contactless payment means and do not intend to apply for the subsidies, it is expected that the number of public market stalls with contactless payment means available will account for about 30 per cent of the let-out stalls of FEHD markets."

"The Government launched the subsidy scheme for promotion of contactless payment in public markets on October 15, with a view to reducing the risk of virus transmission in markets. A one-off subsidy is provided to tenants of FEHD market stalls (including cooked food stalls) at a flat rate of \$5,000 per stall for use to meet the initial set-up costs as well as service and other fees in relation to the provision of at least one contactless payment means. In order to allow more time for eligible tenants of public markets to prepare their applications, the FEHD has previously extended the deadline for application to December 21."

In addition, with approaching of Christmas and New Year, the FEHD reminded again catering business and scheduled premises operators to strictly comply with the requirements and directions under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F) (Regulation). Members of the public should also strictly comply with the restrictions in relation to group gatherings and mask wearing to reduce the risk of virus transmission. During the coming long Christmas holidays, the FEHD will continue to step up law enforcement and publicity efforts to ensure that responsible parties comply with relevant anti-epidemic regulations and measures, and will deploy additional manpower to conduct joint operations with the Police. Stringent enforcement actions will be taken against offenders to ensure compliance of relevant regulations. The FEHD also urged catering business and scheduled premises operators and the public to abide by the law.

The spokesman said that the latest directions issued by the Secretary for Food and Health in relation to social distancing measures in catering business and scheduled premises under the Regulation will extend till January 6, 2021.

The spokesman said, "Catering business operators must strictly comply with a series of requirements and restrictions, which include requirements that a person responsible for carrying on a catering business must cease selling or supplying food or drink for consumption on the premises of the business from 6pm to 4.59am of the subsequent day; and the number of people participating in a banquet in catering premises is limited to 20; no more than two persons may be seated together at one table within any catering premises, the total number of customers allowed in catering premises must not exceed 50 per cent of the normal seating capacity; no live performance and

dancing is allowed; a mask must be worn within the premises except when the person is consuming food or drink at a table therein; tables must be arranged in a way to ensure there is a distance of at least 1.5 metres or some form of partition which could serve as an effective buffer between one table and another table; body temperature screening must be conducted before the person is allowed to enter the catering premises; and hand sanitisers must be provided, etc. In addition, a person responsible for carrying on a catering business must display the poster containing the "LeaveHomeSafe" venue QR code at the entrance of the premises or at a conspicuous location."

The spokesman reminds catering business operators and the public to exercise self-discipline and co-operate to fight the virus together. He also appeals to catering business operators to comply with relevant regulations on prevention and control of disease in a concerted and persistent manner, with a view to keeping their staff, customers and the public safe. Members of the public also have to comply with the related regulations and directions on group gatherings and mask wearing at catering premises.

[Mainland and HK experts exchange views on COVID-19 epidemic situation](#)

The Chief Secretary for Administration of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, today (December 22) led expert advisors and government officials to attend a meeting in Shenzhen to exchange views with Mainland experts and officials on the COVID-19 epidemic situation.

HKSAR experts participating in the meeting include the Dean of Li Ka Shing Faculty of Medicine of the University of Hong Kong (HKU), Professor Gabriel Leung; the Chair of Infectious Diseases, Department of Microbiology, Li Ka Shing Faculty of Medicine of HKU, Professor Yuen Kwok-yung; and the Stanley Ho Professor of Respiratory Medicine of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Professor David Hui.

Mr Cheung expressed gratitude for the Central Government's staunch support all along to the HKSAR Government's anti-epidemic efforts, which include assistance rendered in the smooth implementation of the Universal Community Testing Programme, construction of community treatment facilities and a temporary hospital, as well as its agreement for reservation of a certain amount of the Mainland vaccines for use by Hong Kong people when necessary. He said that HKSAR accorded top priority to disease control and would continue to implement the policies on "preventing the importation of cases and the spreading of virus in the community" in full steam in a bid to curb the epidemic by an all-round approach. The meeting facilitated exchanges between experts from both sides and would be useful to Hong Kong in

implementing its strategy in preventing and fighting the virus.

During the meeting, the Mainland experts shared their views on the analysis and assessment of the current development of the pandemic around the world and on the Mainland, as well as the strategies, policies and measures for fighting the epidemic. In addition, experts from both sides exchanged views on various prevention and control measures, including preventing the importation of cases, virus testing, the usage and management of health codes, etc. The Mainland experts also introduced the research and development as well as use of COVID-19 vaccines on the Mainland and had useful exchanges on relevant issues with experts from Hong Kong.

The Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan; the Secretary for the Civil Service, Mr Patrick Nip; the Secretary for Innovation and Technology, Mr Alfred Sit; the Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs, Mr Erick Tsang Kwok-wai; the Director of the Chief Executive's Office, Mr Chan Kwok-ki; the Vice Minister of the National Health Commission, Mr Lei Haichao; the Deputy Director of the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council, Mr Huang Liuquan; and the Deputy Director of the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the HKSAR, Ms Qiu Hong also attended the meeting.

HKMA and HKAB online exchange with the Mainland financial regulators

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

Mr Eddie Yue, Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA), led the delegation of Hong Kong Association of Banks (HKAB) to have annual meetings with the Mainland financial regulators on December 17, 21 and 22. Owing to the COVID-19 situation, the meetings were held via video conference this year. The delegation met with Mr Yi Gang, the Governor of the People's Bank of China, Mr Zhou Liang, Vice Chairman of the China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission and Mr Fang Xinghai, Vice Chairman of the China Securities Regulatory Commission respectively to discuss the recent financial developments in Hong Kong and the Mainland, as well as issues on financial cooperation that are of interest to various parties.

Mr Yue briefed the Mainland regulators on the latest developments in Hong Kong's financial markets and expressed gratitude for their support in the development of Hong Kong's international financial centre which helps strengthen market confidence in Hong Kong's financial systems and its future development. He highlighted that notwithstanding the challenges brought by the COVID-19 and the external environment over the past year, Hong Kong's

banking system had remained robust, the Linked Exchange Rate System had been operating smoothly, and financial activities had stayed vibrant. All these showed the resilience of our financial system and the abundant business opportunities offered by our financial markets.

Mr Yue said, "I am pleased to meet with the Mainland financial regulators together with representatives from Hong Kong's banking industry. While the format of our meetings has changed because of the COVID-19 outbreak, the exchanges remained in-depth and interactive. The Mainland financial regulators recognise Hong Kong's role as a financial hub and our strength in providing a world connection, and have full confidence that Hong Kong will continue to play an active role in the Mainland's 'dual circulation' strategy."

The delegation discussed with the Mainland regulators different topics covering cross-boundary financial cooperation, fintech and green finance. Meeting parties agreed to maintain close communication and work further to pursue various cooperation initiatives.

Mr Zhuo Chengwen, Chairperson of the HKAB, said, "The meetings enabled representatives of the banking industry to have a deeper understanding of the Mainland's policy direction and the effort it has made to drive forward its financial reform and opening up. The further opening up of the Mainland's financial markets will create more opportunities for the banking industry in Hong Kong. The industry will stand ready to capture the great business opportunities in the new 'dual circulation' strategy."



[HKSAR and Hague Conference on Private International Law sign memorandum of understanding on secondment of legal professionals \(with photos\)](#)

The Secretary for Justice, Ms Teresa Cheng, SC, signed a memorandum of understanding with the Secretary General of the Hague Conference on Private

International Law (HCCH), Dr Christophe Bernasconi, for the technical and administrative arrangements relating to the secondment of legal professionals today (December 22) at a virtual signing ceremony.

Addressing the ceremony, Ms Cheng said that it was the Department of Justice's policy initiative to nurture legal talents through continuous provision of training opportunities including secondment arrangements with international organisations. Thanking the HCCH's strong support for this scheme, Ms Cheng said she was pleased to note that lawyers in both the public and private sectors have opportunities to gain experience at the HCCH under the secondment arrangement, which would expand their knowledge of the operation of international organisations, broaden their horizons through learning from international law experts, and inject a Hong Kong perspective into shaping the development of international law.

The virtual signing ceremony was held at the former French Mission Building, an important part of the Hong Kong Legal Hub where the HCCH's Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific in the HKSAR has recently been relocated. The technical support in hosting the ceremony was provided by the Technical Partner, eBRAM, by leveraging its online platform.

