

Jakarta ET0 supports Zuni Icosahedron's Asia tour to promote cultural exchange (with photos)

The Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office, Jakarta (HKETO Jakarta) supported the Asia tour of Hong Kong theatre group Zuni Icosahedron in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, to promote cultural and artistic exchange between Hong Kong and Malaysia.

The featured programme of the Asia tour, titled "Left Unsaid", is a Cantonese dark drama adapted from the original play by the Artistic Director of the Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre, Nick Yu. The play starred Hong Kong veteran actors Cecilia Yip and Kenny Wong and featured the adaptation, direction, and stage design by Co-Artistic Director of the theatre group Mathias Woo. The performance integrated theatre with art technology, showcasing a blend of theatrical aesthetics and multimedia innovation.

Speaking at the opening ceremony today (May 9), the Director-General of the HKETO Jakarta, Miss Libera Cheng, said that under the National 14th Five-Year Plan, Hong Kong is strategically positioned as an East-meets-West centre for international cultural exchange. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government has been promoting cultural and arts development. The Blueprint for Arts and Culture and Creative Industries Development promulgated last year sets out a clear vision, principles and strategic directions for the future development of the arts, culture and creative industries in Hong Kong.

"Zuni Icosahedron has actively fostered cross-city, cross-field, and cross-culture exchanges. 'Left Unsaid' premiered in Hong Kong in November last year and has received enthusiastic reception. The Kuala Lumpur stop marks its first overseas performance, and next week it will take part in the 5th Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Chinese Theatre Cultural Festival in Guangzhou, further promoting regional cultural exchange," she said.

Miss Cheng added that the HKETO Jakarta will continue to support Hong Kong performing arts groups and local cultural and creative industries in showcasing their work on the international stage, with a view to exploring wider development opportunities.



ESFA Update: 26 March 2025

Latest information and actions from the Education and Skills Funding Agency for academies, schools, colleges, local authorities and further education providers.

LCQ6: Land grant policy

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Wendy Hong and a reply by the Secretary for Development, Ms Bernadette Linn, in the Legislative Council today (March 26):

Question:

Regarding the land grant policy, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the current number of sites granted by the Government under short-term tenancies (STTs), the area of the sites involved and their utilisation (including their uses and actual tenancy periods);
- (2) as it is learnt that the Government will resume and re-tender sites with expired STTs, or renew such tenancies with the same tenants on a quarterly basis, and that about 40 per cent of the STT tenants have rented the relevant sites for over 20 years after repeated renewals of tenancies, with the longest period being 55 years, and there are views pointing out that the continuous renewal of tenancies with the same tenants has turned STTs into long-term tenancies, whether the Government will rationalise the current STT policy to reduce instances of constantly re-tendering existing sites or continuously renewing their tenancies on a quarterly basis, and provide medium to long-term land tenancies of, for example, 10 to 20 years for industries with demand, large investments and long payback periods, so as to facilitate enterprises' long-term planning and investments, and increase the Government rent revenue and potential tax revenue for the Government; and
- (3) given that the Government will grant land by way of private treaty for specified use for a longer term in justified circumstances to meet Hong Kong's economic, social and community needs, and in the light of the current objective of promoting the diversification of industries and re-industrialisation, whether the Government will grant more land by such way, so as to provide operating sites with more certainty for the development of the industries concerned?

Reply:

President,

The Government grants land in different ways to support economic development.

In particular, the Government will normally grant leases with a 50-year tenure for commercial or industrial sites which are suitable for long-term development by way of open tender. Another way is private treaty grant (PTG) whereby, under the premise of facilitating implementation of individual policy and social development, land is directly granted to designated

enterprises or institutions without tender for specified use with policy support. PTGs are mostly for special purpose leases and, subject to policy consideration, the lease tenure may be shorter than 50 years. Whether the land is granted by way of tender or PTG, both methods involve granting land in the form of land lease, which bring greater certainty for leaseholders and is conducive to long-term planning and investment. With the benefit of lease certainty, leaseholders are required to make a one-off upfront payment for land premium before execution of the leases.

On the other hand, the Government also grants short term tendencies (STTs) by way of tender or direct grant. STTs support various social and economic activities and bring regular rental revenue for the Government. According to the land policy implemented for years, the fixed term of STT normally does not exceed seven years, and the tenancy may continue subject to the circumstances upon expiry of the fixed term. While the fixed term of STT is normally shorter than the tenure of a land lease, it provides greater flexibility for the Government in terms of land use and is particularly suitable for Government land not yet needed for long-term development or in respect of which the long-term planned use has yet to be determined. Tenants are also not required to pay an upfront lump sum of land premium, but only need to make regular rent payment and accept periodic market rental adjustment by the Government within the tenancy period, which is also a merit to tenants.

My reply to the various parts of the question raised by Dr the Hon Hong is as follows:

(1) As of end-February 2025, the Lands Department (LandsD) managed over 5 800 STTs (involving a total of around 3 000 hectares of land), covering many different uses. STTs for uses related to people's daily lives take up around 60 per cent, which include public fee-paying carparks, education, social welfare, religion, leisure and recreation, etc.; while STTs for commercial and economic activities take up around 40 per cent, which include shops, workshops, cargo container handling, open or indoor storage, shipyards, etc.

(2) Upon expiry of the STT fixed term, if the site is still not needed for long-term development in the coming few years, the LandsD will normally re-tender the site so as to give other interested operators in the market fair opportunities of bidding the site and maintain healthy competition. That said, many direct grant STTs related to commercial or economic activities may, with policy support or owing to special historical reasons, continue quarterly for a relatively long period upon expiry of the fixed term. According to the statistics of LandsD, among the direct grant STTs, there are some 1 600 cases with cumulative tenancy period exceeding 10 years after multiple renewals. Each of these cases has its specific reasons, with the majority of which (over 1 400 cases) belong to a few major categories, including STTs granted for relocation of businesses affected by public works (such as shipyards in earlier years); STTs gradually converted from Government land licences in the early years (usually for shops or workshops); and some sites for public utilities or franchise operation (such as franchised bus depots).

Currently, the main options under our land grant policy are land leases with tenure as long as 50 years or STTs with a fixed term of at most seven years. We agree that there is room to review whether STTs with a fixed term longer than seven years could be granted to encourage long-term planning and investment by industries and to meet the diversified demand for economic land. In this regard, the Development Bureau (DEVB) will approach different policy bureaux to understand the nature and needs of various industries and economic activities, and study whether there may be a more flexible arrangement in terms of granting STTs. As mentioned above, while tenants of STTs do not need to pay an upfront land premium under tenancies, they will need to face the uncertainty during the longer tenancy period arising from periodic rental adjustment due to the longer tenure. Therefore, different operators may have different views on this issue. On the other hand, if the Government grants land via tenancies with longer period without adopting the mode of land lease that charges an upfront land premium, we will also need to consider the financial implications to the Government. Nevertheless, we are willing to tap the views of Members and the trade during the review.

(3) To tie in with the policy goal of developing innovation and technology and other emerging industries, as well as the "industry-driven" land planning approach emphasised in the Northern Metropolis, the DEVB will, from the perspective of land administration policy, support the relevant bureaux in exploring and adopting different modes of land grant, including considering the granting of sites for industries by way of open tender, restricted tender, or PTG so as to attract leading Mainland and overseas enterprises to come to Hong Kong for bringing in new capital and technology and generating job opportunities as well as creating new growth areas for our economy. We believe that the relevant bureaux will make announcement at suitable juncture on the appropriate arrangement for the industries under their policy purview.

Hong Kong Customs raids suspected illicit cigarette storage centre in Kwai Chung industrial building (with photo)

Hong Kong Customs yesterday (February 27) raided a suspected illicit cigarette storage centre in Kwai Chung and seized about 300 000 suspected illicit cigarettes with an estimated market value of about \$1.4 million and a duty potential of about \$1 million.

During an anti-illicit cigarette operation conducted in Kwai Chung yesterday afternoon, Customs officers intercepted a suspicious local woman

outside an industrial building unit on Castle Peak Road. About 37 000 suspected illicit cigarettes were seized from her trolley, and the woman, aged 71 and claiming to be unemployed, was immediately arrested. Later, Customs officers escorted the woman to the industrial building unit for a search and further seized about 270 000 suspected illicit cigarettes.

Customs will continue to trace the source of the illicit cigarettes, and the likelihood of further arrests is not ruled out.

The arrested woman has been charged with "dealing with goods to which the Dutiable Commodities Ordinance applies" and will appear at the West Kowloon Magistrates' Courts on March 21.

Customs will also continue its risk assessment and intelligence analysis for interception at the source, as well as through its multipronged enforcement strategy targeting storage, distribution and peddling, to spare no effort in combating illicit cigarette activities.

Customs stresses that it is an offence to buy or sell illicit cigarettes. Under the Dutiable Commodities Ordinance, anyone involved in dealing with, possession of, selling or buying illicit cigarettes commits an offence. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$1 million and imprisonment for two years.

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Members of the public may report any suspected illicit cigarette activities to Customs' 24-hour hotline 182 8080 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk) or online form (eform.cefs.gov.hk/form/ced002/en).



LCQ18: Combating fraud of Comprehensive Social Security

Assistance

Following is a question by the Hon Dominic Lee and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (February 19):

Question:

It has been reported that the number of fraud cases involving the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) has been on the rise in recent years, and quite a number of them involve the concealment of assets or income outside Hong Kong. Such a situation has aroused concerns. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the respective numbers of reports of suspected CSSA fraud received by the Government and established fraud cases, as well as the amount of overpayment successfully recovered in each of the past five years; among those established fraud cases, of the proportion of cases involving the concealment of assets or income outside Hong Kong;
- (2) whether it has assessed if the existing 120 officers under the six special investigation teams of the Social Welfare Department are sufficient to cope with the large number of reported cases, and whether it has plans to increase the manpower for conducting investigations and upgrade the investigation techniques; if it has, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (3) whether the Government has adopted technologies (e.g. artificial intelligence or big data analysis methods) to proactively identify and strengthen the monitoring of CSSA cases with high fraud risks; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (4) how the Government currently verifies the CSSA applicants' asset and income profile in the Mainland or overseas; whether it has plans to enhance the mechanism for sharing the relevant information with the Mainland and other regions; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (5) apart from the existing measures in place, whether the Government will consider introducing other measures to combat CSSA fraud, such as increasing penalties, strengthening interdepartmental cooperation within the Government and enhancing the information verification mechanism?

Reply:

President,

As part of Hong Kong's social security system, the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme provides a safety net of last resort for people who cannot support themselves financially due to old age, ill health,

disability, single parenthood, unemployment, low earnings or for other reasons to help them meet their basic needs. There are stringent means tests in place under the CSSA Scheme to ensure that finite public resources are targeted at needy persons.

The CSSA applicants and their household members must truthfully declare relevant information including income and assets in and outside Hong Kong when submitting their applications. In processing the applications, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) will interview the applicants, conduct home visits and, where necessary, verify the information submitted by the applicants and/or their household members with their employers, ex-employers or landlords.

The SWD adopts a risk-based approach to processing CSSA cases. This includes regular review of all approved cases through various means (such as interviews, home visits or in writing), whereby recipients will be required to re-declare income and assets such that their continued eligibility for CSSA can be verified; adopting different review cycles for approved cases according to their risk levels; and conducting spot-checks on CSSA cases with appointees or agents to ensure that they have properly managed the cash assistance. In addition, the SWD conducts data-matching with other government departments and organisations (such as the the Immigration Department, Treasury, Land Registry and Companies Registry) periodically and on a need basis for information verification and analysis, so as to identify suspicious cases for in-depth investigation.

In case the SWD suspects that an applicant or a recipient has not truthfully declared income or assets, or has even placed assets outside Hong Kong to circumvent the means tests, the SWD will proactively conduct in-depth investigation and take follow-up actions, and refer more serious cases to enforcement agencies for investigation. Where necessary, the SWD will also proactively communicate and verify with government departments or organisations (such as banks) of the places where assets are allegedly concealed.

If a recipient is no longer eligible for CSSA, the SWD will demand him/her to repay the overpayment (if any) as soon as possible. Anyone who knowingly or wilfully provides false statements or withholds any information to obtain CSSA by deception commits an offence. Apart from being disqualified from CSSA, he/she may even be prosecuted under the Theft Ordinance (Cap. 210), liable to a maximum penalty of 14 years of imprisonment upon conviction.

CSSA fraud is not common. In recent years, the number of substantiated fraud cases only accounted for about 0.1 per cent to 0.3 per cent of the total number of cases. The relevant figures from 2020-21 to 2024-25 are set out at Annex. The SWD does not maintain a breakdown of CSSA fraud cases with successfully recovered overpayment or involving concealment of assets or income outside Hong Kong.

Staff of the SWD's Social Security Field Units (SSFUs) across districts

and its Special Investigation Teams (SITs) vet and review CSSA applications and approved cases as well as investigate suspected CSSA fraud cases according to their respective duties. The SITs underwent a re-structuring in July 2019 and hired an additional Chief Social Security Officer to enhance the monitoring of data-matching and spot checks of cases amongst other duties. In September 2021, the SITs were further staffed up to strengthen the work of case investigation. At present, more than 1 400 Social Security Grade officers in the SWD's SSFUs across districts are involved in vetting applications, reviewing approved cases and investigating suspected cases, while the six SITs comprise about 120 Social Security Grade officers. The SWD also employs three former disciplined forces officers as investigation advisers to assist in handling more complex or serious cases.

To ensure proper use of public monies, the SWD will continue its efforts in counteracting CSSA fraud, and continue to review and optimise the effectiveness of relevant measures, including investigation manpower and methods.