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FS' transcript

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Following is the transcript (English part) of the stand-up media briefing by the Financial Secretary, Mr Antony Leung, at the Legislative Council today (April 17):

Question: (about whether Hong Kong is being led to a centralised economy planning and the meaning of the Government's role as a market enabler)

Financial Secretary: Obviously it is really not true if you watch and actually see exactly what I have proposed in the Budget. I am trying to reduce the role of the Government in the economy by giving it a lot more room and reducing the size of the Government from 23% to 20% of the GDP. I am proposing, as Donald (Donald Tsang, the Chief Secretary for Administration) and C.H. (Tung Chee Hwa, the Chief Executive) have mentioned before, to re-engineer, re-prioritise as well as reorganise the Government, and to work together with the private sector so that we provide better service to the community as well as provide a lot more room in the private sector to operate. In the period that we are running the record budget deficit, I choose not to increase tax but rather to cut expenditure so that we can maintain a low tax and a simple tax regime. All of these would illustrate that I am a believer of the market. However, since the world is changing so fast, the Government does have a role in enabling the market and I mention a few examples. Say, for example, in the establishment of a common data sharing standard in the logistics area, unless the Government would proactively work with the private sector to establish the standard, we'll not be able to enable the market, meaning the market will not develop by itself because there will be a lot of conflicting interests and the Government should establish these standards. The Government's effort in getting the Central Government to allow more tourists to come to Hong Kong is again another proactive enabling measure. So all of these, we are trying to enable the market. We are not trying to enable a specified firm or corporation. So I hope that the commentators would actually look at what we have exactly said, and that is proactive market enabler.

Question: (about the neutrality of the civil service under the new system and whether powers would be concentrated in the hands of the Chief Executive)



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Financial Secretary: First, the Administration is here to serve the people. So we are not here to just so-called gather all the power and then ignore the people. This is exactly what we are trying to do: by having an accountability system, by having politically appointed officials to have more time and to have the mechanism to listen to the views of the public. So it's clearly not intended to so-called concentrate power and not listen to the public. Now, I believe that with the new system, we'll be able actually to work better with the legislators because legislators are also representatives of public opinion. But clearly, there is no monopoly in public opinion. The officials can listen to the public opinion just as well. But I believe that since the legislators have a very useful role to play as stipulated in the Basic Law, legislators are here to provide the check and balance for the Administration, I believe that under the new system, the political appointees will actually work closer with the legislators and together, both sides will listen a lot more to the views of the public. So we can actually formulate the correct policies for Hong Kong. I actually think it's a system that is the right one and it's a natural development. If you look at all the democracies around the world, all democracies, be it the United States, UK and actually almost any systems that you can think of, these systems all would have the likes of ministers and the likes of permanent secretaries. So I hope that the public would see that we are just following what the other democracies are doing and this is something that is suitable for Hong Kong at the current stage of political development.

(Please also refer to the Chinese part.)

End/Wednesday, April 17, 2002

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