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LCQ15: Computer network facilities in Hong Kong

Following is a question by the Hon Tsang Yok-sing and a written reply by the Secretary for Commerce, Industry and Technology, Mr Joseph WP Wong, in the Legislative Council today (February 7):

Question:

It has been reported that during the International Telecommunication Union TELECOM WORLD 2006 held in Hong Kong in December last year, some representatives of the exhibitors criticised that the computer network facilities in Hong Kong were lagging behind those in other places. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) of the number of hotspots for wireless Internet access throughout the territory and, among them, the respective numbers of those providing free Internet access which were set up by the Government and by others, together with a breakdown of such figures by districts; and

(b) as the Government has indicated that it will proactively consider facilitating operators in setting up hotspots and it will, subject to the principle of not intervening in the market, adopt certain measures to promote wireless Internet access service, whether the Government has formulated specific targets in this regard, and of its plans to achieve such targets?

Reply:

Madam President,

At present, 98% of households in Hong Kong can access broadband networks. The penetration rate of our broadband service reaches 68%, which is among the highest in the world. We have four third-generation (3G) mobile service networks which are capable of providing high-speed data transmission and wireless Internet access services. The number of 3G mobile service users has exceeded 1.2 million, and the overall penetration rate of our mobile services is 133% (i.e. more than 9 million mobile users for 7 million population), which is also among the highest globally. Hence, overall speaking, we do not agree to the remarks that the computer network facilities in Hong Kong are lagging behind those in other places.

As regards the question raised by Hon TSANG Yok-sing, my reply is as follows:

(a) As at February 1, 2007, a total of 27 companies have registered as class licensees for provision of public wireless local area network services in Hong Kong. Altogether, they have set up 1 071 hotspots for wireless Internet access in various districts, with their distribution as follows:

District	Number of hotspots
Central and Western	226

Wan Chai	106
Eastern	126
Southern	33
Sham Shui Po	36
Kowloon City	64
Wong Tai Sin	30
Yau Tsim Mong	199
Kwun Tong	64
Islands	32
Kwai Tsing	37
North	2
Sai Kung	14
Sha Tin	27
Tai Po	7
Tsuen Wan	22
Tuen Mun	28
Yuen Long	18

All these hotspots for wireless Internet access are operated by the industry on a commercial basis. We understand that the hotspots in the Passenger Terminal Building of the Hong Kong International Airport are providing service free of charge. For other hotspots, we have no information as to whether they are providing paid or free services.

(b) The Government believes that market forces and consumer demand will provide impetus for the industry to make commercial investments. In fact, one of the local fixed telecommunications network service operators announced its plan last week that it would boost the number of hotspots for wireless Internet access to 3 000. The Office of the Telecommunications Authority (OFTA) has streamlined the licensing procedures. The Government would also consider proactively making available government facilities, such as lamp poles, at nominal rents to facilitate operators to install equipment for provision of wireless Internet access services in public places. The OFTA will also launch another round of public consultation exercise on the licensing arrangements for broadband wireless access services as early as possible. Subject to the principle of not intervening in the market, the Government is exploring further initiatives to promote wireless Internet access service to support the community to make use of the latest developments in telecommunications technologies and to bring more convenience to Internet users.

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