

立法會 *Legislative Council*

LC Paper No. CB(2)2623/10-11

Ref : CB2/PL/FE

Paper for the House Committee

Proposal of the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene to conduct a duty visit to Japan in response to an invitation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan

Purpose

This paper seeks the approval of the House Committee for the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene ("the Panel") to conduct a duty visit to Japan in response to an invitation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan.

Background

2. The earthquake and the subsequent tsunami which hit Japan on 11 March 2011 had damaged the Daiichi nuclear power plant in Fukushima prefecture, leading to release of radioactive substances in the environment. It was reported by the Japanese authorities that the release of these radioactive substances had contaminated certain foods in the prefectures in the vicinity of the nuclear power plant, including Fukushima, Ibaraki, Tochigi and Gunma.

3. On 23 March 2011, tests conducted by the Hong Kong Centre for Food Safety ("CFS") indicated that three vegetable samples imported from Chiba prefecture of Japan had been contaminated with radioactive substances at such a level hazardous to human health. The Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene made an order with effect from noon on 24 March 2011 under section 78B of the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132) to prohibit from importing into and supplying within Hong Kong certain food products from five prefectures of Japan, namely, Fukushima, Ibaraki, Tochigi, Gunma and Chiba ("the five prefectures").

4. In response to wide public concern over the safety of food products imported from Japan, the Panel took various actions. The Panel conducted a

visit to the Airport Food Inspection Office at the Hong Kong International Airport on 8 April 2011 to observe demonstrations of radioactivity screening of food by hand-held survey meters and operation of Contamination Monitoring System. Pursuant to the visit, the Panel held a meeting on 17 May 2011 to follow up on the monitoring of radiation contamination of food products imported from Japan. Members had been advised that, among other measures, CFS would closely monitor the situation in Japan through close liaison with the Consulate-General of Japan in Hong Kong.

Invitation to visit Japan

5. The Chairman of the Panel, Hon Tommy CHEUNG, received an invitation dated 18 July 2011 from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan via the Consulate-General of Japan in Hong Kong for three members of the Panel including its Chairman to visit Japan under a programme sponsored by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The purpose of the visit is to enable Panel members to obtain a better understanding of the up-to-date situation in Japan following its earthquake in March this year and to exchange views with the relevant Japanese authorities. The visit is expected to last for one week. Apart from Tokyo, the Panel may propose one other place in Japan to be included in the visit. The Japanese Government will cover the costs of airfare, accommodation, meals, local transport and insurance for the three Panel members.

Acceptance of the invitation

6. The Panel decided at its special meeting on 1 August 2011 to accept the invitation to conduct a duty visit to Japan in late September 2011 to obtain first-hand information on the latest situation in Japan following its earthquake in March 2011. The duty visit aims to study the following areas -

- (a) the food safety measures taken by the relevant authorities in Japan in response to the Daiichi nuclear power plant incident;
- (b) the surveillance and testing of food in particular on the radiation levels for export from Japan and the resources deployed for the purpose;
- (c) the mechanism adopted by the Japanese authorities for certifying that the radiation levels of food exported from five prefectures of Japan to Hong Kong do not exceed the standards laid down by the Guideline Levels for Radionuclides in Foods Contaminated Following a Nuclear or Radiological Emergency; and

- (d) the impact of the Daiichi nuclear power plant incident on food exporters and the assistance provided by the Japanese Government.

The delegation

7. Six Panel members (including its Chairman) had indicated interest in taking part in the visit. The Panel noted that the Chairman of the Panel, Hon Tommy CHEUNG, was invited by the host as one of the three members of the delegation for the visit. The Panel decided at a special meeting held for the purpose that the other two members of the delegation for the visit should be determined by lot drawing. According to the result of lot drawing, the two other delegates for the visit are Hon Fred LI and Hon WONG Yuk-man.

Visit programme

8. After discussion with the Consulate-General of Japan, the Panel proposes that the delegation will visit Tokyo, Kumamoto and Miyazaki in Japan from 25 to 30 September 2011. Kumamoto and Miyazaki are the two cities in Japan with the greatest volume of exports of tomatoes and beef to Hong Kong respectively. Subject to confirmation with the relevant authorities in Japan, the delegation will meet with the relevant government officials and representatives of relevant organizations, including the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare; the Department of Food Safety of the Pharmaceutical, Food Safety Bureau; the Food Safety Commission; the Pharmaceutical Affairs and Food Sanitation Council; and the Prefectural/Municipal government departments of the two cities responsible for food safety matters.

Funding arrangements

9. As approved by The Legislative Council Commission, each Member is provided with an overseas duty visit account ("ODV") of \$55,000 for the purpose of duty visits outside Hong Kong organized by committees of the Council. The fund in the account is for use by the Member in a four-year term. Any expenditure incurred in excess of the available balance in a four-year term has to be paid by the Member personally.

10. As the Japanese Government will cover the costs of the visit for the three Panel members including airfare, accommodation, meals, local transport and insurance, the expenditure for the visit will include mainly miscellaneous expenses. An estimate of the expenditure to be incurred by each participating member is about \$ 2,300.

Advice sought

11. Under Rule 29A(d) of the House Rules, the approval of the House Committee is required for any visit conducted under the name of the Council or its committee outside Hong Kong in response to an invitation, and the funding of which is to be charged to individual Members' ODV accounts.

12. The House Committee's approval is sought for the Panel to conduct the duty visit to Japan and the expenditure of which to be charged to the ODV accounts of the respective Members.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
15 September 2011