

MISS CHOY SO-YUK (in Cantonese): *Madam President, the supplementary was on rent levels. May I know whether the Secretary is willing to answer this one?*

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): *Miss CHOY, the question lies not in whether the Secretary is willing to answer the supplementary question; the question remains that as President of the Council, I am obliged to not to allow you to raise it. (Laughter) So, the Secretary does not have to answer this one. If no other Members would like to follow up, question time ends here.*

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Alleged Breach of Land Grant Conditions by River Trade Terminal Company Limited

7. **MR ALBERT CHAN** (in Chinese): *Madam President, it has been reported that the River Trade Terminal Company Limited, which operates the Tuen Mun River Trade Terminal, is suspected of having breached the land grant conditions by conducting at the terminal a sideline business of cargo handling services for ocean-going vessels, and the Hong Kong Port and Maritime Board (PMB) has issued a final notice ordering the company to terminate such services. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (a) *of the deadline the PMB has set for the company to terminate such business and details of the notice;*
- (b) *whether the company has now terminated such business;*
- (c) *whether the Government will take legal actions against the company for breaching the land grant conditions; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;*
- (d) *whether the land grant conditions have set out penalty terms for breach of the provisions therein; if so, of the details of such penalty terms; if not, the reasons for that; and*

- (e) *whether the Government has assessed the impact of such business conducted by the company on the ocean cargo handling industry as a whole, and if such conduct is unfair to other lawful business operators?*

SECRETARY FOR ECONOMIC SERVICES (in Chinese): *Madam President, my reply to all five parts of the question asked by the Honourable Albert CHAN is as follows:*

The relevant authority has written to the Hong Kong River Trade Terminal Company Limited in early 2002. We are now seeking legal advice on the issue and are closely monitoring their operations. When we have the legal advice, we will consider how to treat this case.

Development of Broadband Internet Network

8. **MISS EMILY LAU** (in Chinese): *Madam President, will the executive authorities inform this Council whether they will regard broadband Internet network as an essential infrastructure and play a proactive role in constructing an advanced broadband network of high capacity and speed, with a view to enhancing the competitiveness of Hong Kong; if they will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?*

SECRETARY FOR INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND BROADCASTING (in Chinese): *Madam President, the Government considers broadband Internet network as an extremely important part of our infrastructure. The Government is committed to encouraging the roll-out of broadband network and promoting effective competition in the broadband Internet services market, which will lead to more choices for consumers.*

Under the liberalization policy, we now have four local wireless-based fixed telecommunications network services operators, and a cable television company to offer telecommunications service over its hybrid fibre coaxial cable network. Together with the existing four local wireline-based fixed telecommunications network services operators, we now have a total of nine local fixed telecommunications services operators which are capable of rolling

out broadband network. From 1 January 2003, the local fixed telecommunications network services market will be fully liberalized. At present, all commercial buildings and over 95% of residential households are already covered by broadband network.

For services, we have fully liberalized the telecommunications services market. Besides the above nine operators, other Internet service providers can also provide broadband service by leasing the network of those nine operators. At present, over 10 Internet service providers offer broadband services in the market at a minimum price of around \$100 to \$200 per month. The competitive prices of our broadband services compare favourably with the United States and Europe, and our neighbours in Asia. As a result, we see a significant boost in the use of broadband services. As at April 2002, the number of broadband customers doubled within one year, or increased by 14-fold in two years to 757 000. Among them, 701 555 are residential households, accounting for one third of the total residential households in Hong Kong. Our broadband penetration rate is one of the highest compared with developed countries or regions in the world.

We are of the view that allowing operators to invest freely in broadband Internet network on a commercial basis under our liberalization policy is the most effective and economical way to facilitate the development of broadband network. Market competition also ensures that quality services are available to consumers at competitive prices. This will in turn promote the use of broadband services in Hong Kong, and enhance our competitive edge in the development of broadband services and applications.

~~Colours of Noise Barriers~~

9. MR LAU KONG-WAH (in Chinese): *Madam President, will the Government inform this Council of the factors taken into account in deciding on the choice of colours for noise barriers erected on roads and flyovers, and whether it has considered using transparent noise barriers as far as possible in order to minimize their impact on the landscape and on drivers?*

SECRETARY FOR TRANSPORT (in Chinese): *Madam President, the choice of colours constitutes part of the design of noise barriers. Generally speaking,*

it is determined by two major factors: first, going with the surroundings to blend the noise barriers into the background; and second, highlighting the features in the design of the noise barriers.

As to the use of materials for noise barriers, while transparent materials can reduce the impact of these barriers on the landscape as well as drivers, they will produce the effect of bouncing off noise from their surface. Hence, these materials may not be suitable for noise barriers to be erected along roads with noise-sensitive buildings on both sides. Under such circumstances, we might have to use sound-absorbing materials, which are however invariably opaque. We will also take into account the findings of the relevant environmental impact assessment report in deciding on the materials to be used for any particular noise barriers.

Banks Hiring Debt-collection Agencies for Recovering Debts

10. MR ALBERT CHAN (in Chinese): *Madam President, nowadays, banks often hire debt-collection agencies to collect outstanding repayments for home mortgage loans, credit card loans and other debts. I have received quite a number of complaints from members of the public, alleging that they have been seriously distressed by the tactics employed by these debt-collection agencies and they have even contemplated suicide out of frustration. While it is legal for banks to hire debt-collection agencies or take legal actions to recover debts, such actions have put debtors under immense psychological pressure. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (a) *of the number of cases reported to the police about debt-collection agencies' harassment over the past two years;*
- (b) *whether it has specific measures to monitor debt-collection agencies and prohibit them from recovering debts by harassment, so as to reduce the nuisances caused to the debtors; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and*
- (c) *whether it has measures to encourage banks to discuss with their debtors as far as possible solutions to paying outstanding loans, such as restructuring the debts or extending the repayment periods, so as to avoid resorting to legal actions or hiring debt-collection agencies?*