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Panel on Economic Development
Meeting on 26 November 2012

Background brief on Scheme of Control Agreements with the power companies

Purpose

This paper sets out the background of the Scheme of Control Agreements ("SCAs") which regulate electricity supply in Hong Kong and summarizes Members' concerns on related issues.

Scheme of Control Agreements

2. Electricity supply in Hong Kong is regulated through the SCAs signed between the Government and individual power companies, namely, The Hongkong Electric Company Ltd. ("HEC")[1] which supplies electricity to customers on the Hong Kong Island, Ap Lei Chau and Lamma Island, and CLP Power Hong Kong Ltd. and Castle Peak Power Company Ltd. ("CAPCO")[2] (referred to collectively as "CLP" hereafter) which jointly supply electricity to customers in Kowloon and the New Territories including Lantau, Cheung Chau and some outlying islands. The SCAs set out the rights and obligations of the power companies and provide a framework for the Government to monitor the power companies' financial affairs and technical performance. To achieve the policy objective of providing reliable, safe and efficient electricity supply at reasonable prices, the SCAs include the following key features –

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1 HEC is a subsidiary of Power Assets Holdings Limited.

2 CLP Power Hong Kong Ltd. is a subsidiary of the CLP Holdings Limited. CAPCO is a joint venture electricity generating company established between CLP Power (40%) and ExxonMobil Energy Limited (60%).

(a) an obligation for the power companies to provide sufficient facilities to meet present and future electricity demand;

(b) an obligation for the power companies to supply electricity at lowest possible cost; and

(c) provision for periodic financial review and annual tariff review, and for annual audit of the technical and financial performances of the power companies.

3. Before the previous SCAs with the two power companies expired in 2008[3], the Administration conducted a two-stage public consultation on the "Future Development of the Electricity Market in Hong Kong" in 2005 and 2006 in order to gauge public views on the electricity market in Hong Kong. According to the Administration, the general public expressed support in the two rounds of public consultation for the Government's stance on the core terms of reducing the permitted rate of return of the power companies to lower the electricity tariffs charged to customers, shortening the duration of the SCAs from 15 years to ten years to allow for the introduction of competition, and linking the permitted rate of return of the power companies to their meeting the emission caps stipulated under the Air Pollution Control Ordinance (Cap. 311) so as to provide the companies with further incentive to reduce emissions and to improve the air quality.

4. The existing SCAs were entered into between the Government and individual power companies on 7 January 2008. The following changes to the previous SCAs were made –

(a) the duration of the SCAs was shortened to ten years, with an option exercisable by the Government to extend for five years, i.e. until 2023, after a review of the prevailing market conditions including whether new supply sources were available;

(b) the annual permitted rate of return was reduced from 13.5% - 15% to 9.99% on the average net fixed assets ("ANFA");

(c) a linkage mechanism between the permitted rate of return and the emission performance of the power companies was introduced. The penalty level was set at 0.4 and 0.2 percentage points reduction of return on all non-renewable energy fixed assets for exceeding any of the emission caps of ≥30% and

[3] The previous SCAs with CLP and HEC expired on 30 September 2008 and 31 December 2008 respectively.

≥10% respectively. A smaller financial incentive was provided for over-achievement of the emission caps (i.e. 0.1 and 0.05 percentage points increase of rate of return for over-achievement of ≥30% and ≥10% respectively);

(d) financial incentives were provided to encourage more usage of renewable energy;

(e) the portion of the net asset value on machinery and electrical equipment relating to new generating facility found to be excessive upon commissioning to meet the latest electricity demand for exclusion from the companies' ANFA would be set at 50% for both power companies (previously 40% for CLP and 50% for HEC);

(f) the threshold above which the Executive Council's approval was required for adjustment of the Basic Tariff was lowered from 7% to 5%, limiting the room for the powers companies to adjust their tariffs;

(g) a Tariff Stabilization Fund ("TSF") was maintained for the retention of net revenue in excess of the agreed return for the power companies and the cap on TSF balance was reduced to 8% of annual local sales from 12.5% under the previous SCAs;

(h) the Government would have unfettered discretion to introduce changes to the electricity regulatory framework, starting 1 October 2018 for CLP and 1 January 2019 for HEC, after taking into consideration market readiness and other relevant factors. The changes may include the introduction of legislation to replace the SCAs regime;

(i) with the Administration's stated intention to introduce competition to the electricity market in as early as 2018 and in line with international practices, the Administration had discussed with the power companies on the mechanism to allow the power companies to recoup the costs for the assets that would become stranded after the opening of the market. Both parties agreed that in the event of a change implemented by the Government to the electricity supply market structure that caused material impact to the power companies, the companies should recover from the market stranded costs that could not be mitigated by measures required by the Government. The amount of stranded costs that could be recovered from the market and the mechanism were to be agreed between the Government and the power companies;

(j) recognizing that the relatively longer period of time to recoup investments in the power sector was a genuine concern, CLP and HEC would be allowed to earn the same permitted rates of return on their ANFA (including those incurred or invested in the eleventh year to the fifteenth year if approved by the Government), as mutually agreed for the SCAs, up to 2023; and

(k) the Government and the power companies would discuss the market readiness, potential changes to the electricity regulatory framework and transition issues before 1 January 2016.

Interim review of the SCAs

5. Similar to the arrangement for previous SCAs, an interim review will be carried out five years after the commencement of the present SCAs, i.e. in 2013, to consider all matters under the SCAs including the permitted rate of return. Any changes are to be mutually agreed by the Administration and the power companies.

Council deliberations

6. On 18 January 2012, the Council passed a motion urging the Government to, among others, take the following actions so as to create a sustainable and open electricity market –

(a) establish an energy management authority to explore Hong Kong's long-term energy demand, formulate and execute an energy policy, as well as monitor power companies, gas companies, liquefied petroleum gas companies and fuel supply companies;

(b) review the permitted returns of the two power companies;

(c) immediately activate the mechanism for interim reviews, and make public the relevant information and accounts, so as to facilitate public participation;

(d) study the computation mode based on linking permitted returns to fixed assets;

(e) raise the transparency of the processes for the formulation of SCAs and tariff adjustments, so as to facilitate public monitoring and ensure fair and reasonable tariff adjustment rates; and

(f) launch a review of the two power companies' development plans in accordance with the provisions of SCAs, increase the transparency of the development plans, and require the two power companies to revise their investment plans, revalue their assets, compress costs and rationalize their accounts.

Discussions held by the Panel on Economic Development

<u>Members' views on the SCAs</u>

7. When the Panel on Economic Development[4] ("the Panel") was briefed on the SCAs agreed with the two power companies at the meeting on 8 January 2008, members expressed the following views and concerns –

(a) members were concerned that the use of the ANFA as the base for determining the permitted return might encourage over-investment by the power companies so as to increase their returns. The Government was urged to exercise effective control over the capital investments of the two power companies and ensure that the power companies' capital investments were related to electricity businesses in Hong Kong in order to prevent cross subsidies by local consumers for other markets. The Government and the power companies were also requested to enhance the transparency on disclosure of the relevant information. A member expressed disappointment that notwithstanding the motion passed by the Council on 15 February 2006 urging the government to, inter alia, reset electricity tariffs at a reasonable level by lowering the permitted rate of return to 7% or below, the permitted rate of return in the SCAs was set at 9.99%;

(b) on the emission linkage mechanism and use of renewable energy in power generation, members expressed concern about the basis for setting the emission caps, and the methodology to be adopted in working out the emission caps for power plants, in particular the types of pollutants to be covered and the period during which

4 The Panel on Economic Development was named as the Panel on Economic Services prior to the 2007-2008 session.

the emissions levels would be taken. A member pointed out that according to reports by international media, CLP's power plant in Castle Peak Power Station was among the bottom three rankings in the world in respect of emission performance of carbon dioxide, whereas the emission performance of HEC was also below average. A member was of the view that the financial incentive for the power companies to increase the usage of renewable energy in power generation was inadequate taking into consideration the high investment cost in renewable energy facilities. Members also considered it unreasonable that, under the emission performance linkage arrangement, the incentive levels were lower than the penalty levels;

(c) regarding the mechanism for treatment of excess generating capacity, there was concern as to whether the mechanism was fair to consumers since the consumers were held responsible for mistakes in the forecasts of generating capacity made by the power companies. As the investment was made based on the power companies' own assessment, the companies should bear a large portion of the responsibility; and

(d) noting that the SCAs had been shortened to ten years with an option exercisable by the Government to extend for five more years, members were concerned about the lead time required and the implementation schedule in the event of opening the electricity market in Hong Kong. Members urged the Government to draw up a clear time-table for opening the electricity market with concrete measures and targets, including the arrangements to facilitate the separation of electricity generation from transmission and distribution services. Members also requested that sufficient time should be given for conducting public consultation on the proposal and the detailed arrangements for opening the electricity market.

<u>Members' views on annual tariff reviews</u>

8. Under the SCAs, the Government conducts tariff reviews with the two power companies annually. Details of the views of Panel members on the annual tariff reviews held in the past, in particular the 2012 tariff, are given in **Appendix I**.

9. Controversies surrounding the 2012 tariff review had caused the Panel to feel all the more a need to enhance the tariff adjustment mechanism for the benefit of the general public. Members considered the SCAs unfair

and undesirable for leaving the general public with no say on tariff increase because of the permitted rate of return thereunder. Apart from urging the Government to perform its monitoring role to ensure reasonable tariff adjustment, members also stressed the need for the Government to take the opportunity of the expiry of the two power companies' SCAs in 2018 to reduce their permitted rates of return and to take tighter control measures against them. Some members further opined that in the long run, the only way to contain tariff increase might be to improve the basis for the calculation of the Basic Tariff [5].

10. In response to members' concerns, the Administration undertook to play its gate-keeping role in order to ensure that electricity supply in Hong Kong could achieve the policy objective of striking a balance amongst reliability, safety, environmental protection and affordability, and to continue to listen to members' views. The Administration indicated that it would conduct a public consultation exercise on whether to renew the SCAs. Before renewing the SCAs, it would also consider introducing new terms as necessary in light of the views solicited, such as lowering the two power companies' maximum permitted rates of return, imposing new environment requirements, and making new arrangements regarding investment caps.

Latest developments

Impact of fuel cost on electricity tariffs

11. At its annual general meeting on 8 May 2012, CLP Holdings Limited made a statement on the impact of fuel cost on electricity tariff, forewarning significant tariff increases in the years to come. Referring to that statement, Hon Fred LI and Hon Emily LAU proposed at the Panel meeting on 28 May 2012 that the Panel should discuss "Power supply and impact of fuel cost on electricity tariffs" to examine the following issues –

(a) transparency of the mechanism of including the cost of natural gas in the adjustment of electricty tariffs;

(b) the planned increase in the ratio of natural gas for power generation;

(c) adequacy of the natural gas supply;

(d) changes in the carbon emissions standards which the two power

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5 Electricity tariff is made up of two parts, namely, the Basic Tariff and the fuel clause charge.

companies had to meet; and

(e) changes in the investment and development plans of the power companies and the Government's role in this regard.

12. At the Panel meeting on 11 July 2012, Hon Emily LAU further proposed that the wider issue of power supply should be jointly examined by all relevant Panels instead of being separately discussed by different Panels each focusing on their respective concerns. This approach could ensure that all associated factors, including the impact of air pollution associated with power generation on health, would be examined holistically.

Mid-term Review for SCAs in 2013

13. Under the existing SCAs, the Administration and the two power companies have the right to request modification of any part of the current SCAs in 2013, and mutual agreement is needed for the implementation of any proposed modification. The Administration will consult the Panel at the meeting on 26 November 2012 before the mid-term review of the SCAs formally commences in 2013.

References

14. A list of the relevant papers is in **Appendix II**.

Council Business Division 1
Legislative Council Secretariat
22 November 2012

Appendix I

Discussion on the annual tariff reviews held by the Panel on Economic Development

The Administration and individual power companies, namely, The Hongkong Electric Company Ltd. ("HEC"), and CLP Power Hong Kong Ltd. and Castle Peak Power Company Ltd. ("CAPCO") (referred to collectively as "CLP" hereafter), have briefed the Panel on Economic Development ("the Panel") in December each year since 2000 on the tariff adjustment for the following year. Members' views expressed at these briefings are summarized in paragraphs 4 to 14 below.

The tariff adjustment mechanism

2. Electricity tariff is made up of two parts, namely, the Basic Tariff and the fuel clause charge. To ensure that tariff adjustment is reasonable, the Administration would play a gate-keeping role in which cost relating to the Basic Tariff is controlled by way of ensuring that any necessary developments and service improvements of the power companies would proceed within the scope of their five-year development plans approved by the Government, and by vetting in the context of the annual tariff review individual expenditure items, including capital investment, of the two companies to screen out items that are excessive, premature or unnecessary. As to the fuel clause charge, the Administration would urge the two power companies to, as far as practicable, use the Fuel Clause Recovery Account ("FCA")[1] and Tariff Stabilization Fund ("TSF")[2] as buffers to mitigate the cost impact of any switch from old fuel contracts to new contracts, and any significant fuel price fluctuations in the international market. It would also examine whether any special income of the two companies can be used to offset cost increase.

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[1] FCA is operated on a rolling basis. It is an account maintained by the two power companies through which the difference between the standard fuel cost (as reflected in the Basic Tariff) and the actual fuel cost is captured and passed on to consumers by way of rebates or charges.

[2] The purpose of TSF is to accumulate the excess of net revenues of the power companies over the permitted return, so as to provide funding, where necessary, to ameliorate the impacts of tariff increases on consumers.

Tariff adjustments since 2004

3. The Government conducted tariff reviews with the two power companies annually and the average net tariffs charged by HEC and CLP since 2004 are set out below –

Year	HEC (cents/kWh)	CLP (cents/kWh)
2004	103.3	87.2
2005	110.0 (+6.5%)	87.3
2006	117.4 (+6.7%)	87.1
2007	120.2 (+2.4%)	87.2
2008	127.4 (+6.0%)	91.1 [a] (+4.5%)
2009	119.9 (-5.9%)	88.4 [b] (-3%)/89.2 [b]
2010	119.9	91.5 (+2.6%)
2011	123.3 (+2.8%)	94.1 (+2.8%)
2012	131.1 (+6.3%)	98.7 (+4.9%)

Note: [a] from January to September 2008
[b] from October 2008 to December 2009 during which the Rate Reduction Reserve rebate of 0.8 cents/kWh ceased from 6 May 2009 with the depletion of the Rate Reduction Reserve.

Views expressed by the Panel

4. Electricity tariff has all along been a matter of contention and Panel members have expressed views and concerns over a range of issues at the annual briefings on tariff reviews, including the following –

(a) disappointment at decisions of HEC and CLP to raise tariff despite the companies' substantial earnings;

(b) HEC's customers were paying tariff at a much higher rate than those of CLP;

(c) suggestion of setting up a tariff determination mechanism;

(d) introduction of electricity suppliers from the Mainland to enhance competition and lower the tariff;

(e) implementation of increased interconnection between the two power companies to minimize investment on new generating units;

(f) the Government should enhance monitoring of the power companies' investment on generation facilities, treatment of excessive generating capacity, and sales of surplus electricity to the Mainland;

(g) the Government should enhance transparency by urging the two power companies to disclose financial information related to the tariff reviews;

(h) separation of power production and transmission to facilitate market entry;

(i) the power companies should exercise greater versatility in handling the coal procurement contracts in the interests of customers;

(j) the Government should monitor the timing of the adjustment of fuel clause charges made by the power companies;

(k) the need to strike a balance between commitment to environmental protection and cost control; and

(l) the power companies should use the reserve in TSF to offset the fuel cost increase, or opt not to achieve a maximum rate of return.

Contentions with the 2012 tariff review

<u>Reduction of the rates of tariff increase</u>

5. The 2012 tariff review was controversial. Not only did the issue entailed deliberations at five Panel meetings but it was also the first time that the Government could not come to terms with the two power companies on the extent of tariff increase. The matter also attracted grave concerns of the Legislative Council and the general public. The two power companies subsequently revised their original tariff proposals by reducing the tariff increase and improving the tariff structure. Details of the relevant deliberations are elaborated in the ensuing paragraphs.

6. At the Panel meeting on 13 December 2011, HEC and CLP announced a tariff increase for 2012 of 6.3% and 9.2% respectively. Members expressed great discontent with the tariff increase which exceeded the inflation rate and requested both HEC and CLP to lower

their increase. In particular, members considered it undesirable that the two power companies should, after making huge profits over the years, still seek to earn the maximum annual permitted rate of return of 9.99% under their current SCAs despite the chain effect of tariff increase on people's livelihood. The majority of members also considered that they had not been given sufficient information to assess whether the tariff increase proposals were justified. Members therefore questioned whether the Administration had properly played its gate-keeping role in vetting the rationale provided by the two companies for their tariff increase proposals.

7. The Administration advised that it had already urged the two companies to reduce their rates of increase, particularly with regard to CLP over the following aspects –

(a) calculation of the Basic Tariff, in particular the increase in the operating expenditure, which was significantly higher than inflation, and the inclusion of a capital expenditure item which the Administration considered pre-mature, namely, the inclusion of capital investments in preparatory and early stage of works for additional generation capacity projects;

(b) the level of balances in FCA and TSF respectively; and

(c) the Government rent and rates anticipated to be refunded to the two companies as a result of relevant court cases ("the rent and rates refund").

8. Following the Panel discussion on 13 December 2011, HEC announced on 16 December 2011 improvement to its progressive tariff structure and the reduction of the rate of tariff increase to 4.97% or less for 90% of its domestic consumers. On 21 December 2011, the Council held an adjournment debate on the impact of electricity tariff increase on the general public and enterprises, as well as the Government's corresponding measures. On the same date, CLP revised downwards its tariff increase to 7.4%.

9. In view of the grave public concern about the tariff increases, the Panel held a further meeting on 23 December 2011 to discuss the issue with the Administration and the two power companies. At the meeting, the Panel passed a motion opposing to the tariff increase, and another motion urging the two companies to defer the tariff increase by two months, as well as demanding the Government and the two companies to submit to the Panel before 1 January 2012 the financial information relating to the capital investment of the two companies in the coming five

years as well as their operating expenditures. CLP was also urged to lower the tariff increase by reducing the operating costs, taking out the capital investment projects not agreed by the Administration and making use of TSF, and to lower the tariff immediately upon receipt of the rent and rates refund. Hon Fred LI and Hon Emily LAU also jointly moved a motion requesting that the Panel be authorized to exercise the powers conferred by the Legislative Council (Powers and Privileges) Ordinance (Cap. 382) to order the Government to produce information. The motion was negatived.

10. CLP subsequently announced on 30 December 2011 a further reduction of the tariff increase from 7.4% to 4.9%. According to CLP, the reduction had been achieved by reducing operating costs, taking out premature capital investment for increasing generation capacity, reducing the projected TSF balance and providing a one-off Rent and Rates Rebate by returning the rent and rates refund to customers.

Measures to keep costs down

11. Concerned about the likely tariff increase in future due to escalating fuel prices, some members urged the Administration to begin the negotiation process of the 2013 tariff review early. They also called on the Administration and the two power companies to explore measures and practices in operations which could keep costs down. Other members considered the reserve margins of the generation capacity of the two companies way too excessive, and opined that the Administration should more stringently vet the capital investments in generation capacity in the two companies' five-year development plans. There were also views that to contain tariffs, other sources of electricity should be explored, and that efforts should be made to encourage energy saving to contain electricity demand and obviate the need to make further capital investments in this regard.

12. The Administration undertook to listen to the views of members and the public in formulating the five-year development plans and reviewing tariff adjustments, and to ensure that the electricity supply in Hong Kong could achieve the policy objective of striking a balance amongst reliability, safety, environmental protection and affordability.

Enhancing the transparency of tariff adjustment

13. When the Panel discussed the 2012 tariff review, members repeatedly requested the Administration and the two power companies to provide detailed financial information relating to the capital investment of the two companies in the coming five years as well as their operating expenditures with a view to ascertaining whether the rates of tariff increase for 2012 were justified. Two special Panel meetings were subsequently scheduled for 3 and 7 February 2012 to examine the requested information. The two power companies, however, insisted that the requested information should be provided to the Panel on a confidential basis on grounds that disclosure of information related to contract requirements and projections of future business (e.g. capital expenditure and electricity sales) would enable suppliers to easily assess the budget estimates of certain projects, or know in advance the two companies' demand for services, and increase their bargaining power. This might cause an increase in the capital expenditure or costs of the two companies, affecting future tariff increases, and jeopardizing the interests of the public. The two companies further argued that if the information was not kept confidential, there might be a violation of the Hong Kong Listing Rules requirements and detriment to the interests of small shareholders, or a breach of the Securities and Futures Ordinance (Cap. 571).

14. Many members, however, considered it difficult to clearly explain to the public the basis of their views on the 2012 tariff adjustments if the requested information could not be quoted at Panel meetings which were held in the public. After further discussion at the special meeting on 3 February 2012, the two companies agreed to provide marked-up copies of their business-related confidential information, with the details that had to be kept strictly confidential duly highlighted to facilitate open discussion without worrying about inadvertent disclosure of confidential information. Consequently, at the Panel meeting on 7 February 2012, members discussed, with closed-door and relevant confidentiality arrangements in place, the requested supplementary information provided in the form of confidential documents.

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Appendix II

Scheme of Control Agreements with the power companies

List of relevant papers

Administration's paper on The Hong Kong Electric Company Limited 2009 to 2013 Development Plan issued by Environment Bureau (Legislative Council Brief)
http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/edev/papers/edev1216-enbcr2457608pt4-e.pdf

Administration's paper on CLP Power Hong Kong Limited and Castle Peak Power Company Limited 2008 Development Plan issued by Environment Bureau (Legislative Council Brief)
http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/edev/papers/edev1124-enbcr1457608pt6-e.pdf

Administration's paper on New Scheme of Control Agreements with the two power companies
http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr07-08/english/panels/es/papers/edevcb1-546-1-e.pdf

LegCo question at the Council meeting on 10 June 2009: Fuel clause charge (Page 8798)
http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/counmtg/hansard/cm0610-translate-e.pdf

LegCo question at the Council meeting on 28 October 2009: Electricity tariffs of the two power companies (Page 415)
http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/counmtg/hansard/cm1028-translate-e.pdf

LegCo question at the Council meeting on 13 January 2010: Impact of the use of natural gas and wind power in electricity generation on electricity tariff (Page 4050)
http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/counmtg/hansard/cm0113-translate-e.pdf

Motion debate at the Council meeting on 8 February 2012: Seeking papers, books, records or documents in relation to the 2012 tariff adjustments by CLP Power Hong Kong Limited and The Hongkong Electric Company Limited (Page 5395)
http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr11-12/english/counmtg/hansard/cm0208-translate-e.pdf

Papers for the Panel meetings on 13 December 2011, 23 December 2011, 3 February 2012, 7 February 2012 and 27 February 2012
http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr11-12/english/panels/edev/agenda/edev20111213.htm
http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr11-12/english/panels/edev/agenda/edev20111223.htm
http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr11-12/english/panels/edev/agenda/edev20120203.htm
http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr11-12/english/panels/edev/agenda/edev20120207.htm
http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr11-12/english/panels/edev/agenda/edev20120227.htm

Minutes of the Panel meetings on 19 December 2000, 21 December 2001, 10 December 2002, 16 December 2003, 16 December 2004, 23 December 2005, 21 December 2006, 21 December 2007, 24 November 2008, 16 December 2008, 8 December 2009, 14 December 2010, 13 December 2011, 23 December 2011, 3 February 2012, 7 February 2012 and 27 February 2012
http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr00-01/english/panels/es/minutes/es191200.pdf
http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr01-02/english/panels/es/minutes/es011221.pdf
http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr02-03/english/panels/es/minutes/es021210.pdf
http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr03-04/english/panels/es/minutes/es031216.pdf
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http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/edev/minutes/edev20081124.pdf
(briefed by CLP)
http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/edev/minutes/edev20081216a.pdf
(briefed by HEC)
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http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr11-12/english/panels/edev/minutes/edev20120207.pdf
http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr11-12/english/panels/edev/minutes/edev20120227.pdf

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