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From : Clerk to the Legislative Council

To : All Members of the Legislative Council

Council meeting of 3 February 2021

Questions approved by the President

I attach for Members' information the questions approved by the President to be asked at the above meeting.

(Lolita SHEK)
for Clerk to the Legislative Council

Encl.

21 questions to be asked at the Council meeting of 3 February 2021

Subject matters

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Note: Six oral questions and 15 (instead of 16) written questions are scheduled for this meeting, as the relevant Member did not give notice of his written question before the deadline.

Question 1
(For oral reply)

(Translation)

Provision of assistance for the unemployed

Hon Vincent CHENG to ask:

The latest seasonally adjusted unemployment rate is 6.6%, hitting a record high in 16 years, with the numbers of unemployed and underemployed persons reaching as high as 240 000 and 130 000 respectively. As shown in the findings of a survey, over 60% of the respondents indicated that amid the epidemic, their income had decreased and that they might lose their jobs. With the Lunar New Year approaching, waves of businesses closing down and layoffs may spark off anytime. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) as some political parties have projected that the introduction of an unemployment assistance scheme offering a monthly subsidy of \$6,000 or \$9,000 to each unemployed person for a period of six months will involve public money in the amount of \$8.8 billion or \$13 billion respectively, which is far lower than the amount of \$80-odd billion spent on the Employment Support Scheme, what justifications the Government's refusal to introduce an unemployment assistance scheme on the grounds that it will spend a huge sum of public money;
- (2) given the fluctuating epidemic situation and the worsening employment situation, some academics have anticipated that the unemployment rate will rise to 7% within a short period of time, whether the Government will consider afresh introducing a time-limited unemployment assistance scheme or new assistance schemes; if not, what new measures it will put in place to help members of the public face up to the imminent waves of layoffs; and
- (3) whether it will, by drawing reference from the earlier practice of redeploying resources from the Beat Drugs Fund to uses which aimed at raising the awareness of mental health among members of the public, redeploy resources from other funds to provide assistance to the unemployed and underemployed; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Question 2
(For oral reply)

(Translation)

Supporting the cross-boundary passenger service sector

Hon Frankie YICK to ask:

Since February last year, the Government has closed most of the boundary control points one after another to cope with the epidemic, resulting in the number of cross-boundary travellers plunging and cross-boundary passenger service business coming to a standstill. Some cross-boundary passenger service operators (“operators”) have pointed out that while the Government did provide operators with a one-off subsidy based on the number of conveyances under the first-round relief measures, the subsidy was just a drop in the bucket. As the various operators had to meet overheads despite having zero income during the past year, they have used up their reserves and have no way to borrow money, and are at the end of their tether. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) given that even though the various boundary control points will hopefully reopen following the launch of relevant vaccination programmes, the various operators are now on the brink of closing down as the Government is watching with folded arms, what measures the Government has put in place to ensure that when the various boundary control points reopen, the cross-boundary passenger services provided by operators which have not yet closed down will be adequate to meet the demand;
- (2) given that conveyances which have been left idle in the open air for a long time need to have quite a number of their parts repaired or replaced before they can travel safely again, whether the Government will consider providing operators with a “business resumption allowance” to facilitate their preparation for resuming operation; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (3) whether it will consider including cross-boundary passenger service practitioners as a priority group for administration of the vaccines for Coronavirus Disease 2019, so as to reduce their risk and cross-boundary travellers’ risk of contracting the disease, thereby enhancing the protection for the cross-boundary passenger service sector?

Question 3
(For oral reply)

(Translation)

Land use planning

Hon Jeffrey LAM to ask:

At present, the implementation programmes for public facilities depend on the priority of individual projects in the Government's public works programme. The relevant factors for consideration include the population of the districts concerned, provision of and demand for existing facilities, as well as the policies of and allocation of resources to individual bureau and government department, etc. Owing to the aforesaid circumstances, the provision of public facilities in new development areas often lags behind population growth. As a result, those residents who are the first to move into these areas become "trailblazers". In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it will change the current situation where it can only catch up after falling behind in the provision of public facilities, and construct public facilities as early as possible when taking forward the development of new development areas; if not, what difficulties and obstacles are involved;
- (2) whether it will adopt a "public facility first" approach in the development of the Lok Ma Chau Loop; how it ensures that the development of the Loop and that of the surrounding sites will complement each other and produce a synergy effect; and
- (3) whether it has explored ways to improve the consultation efforts relating to land use planning, such as strengthening consultation with owners of the surrounding lands, and including persons waiting to move into the residential buildings under construction nearby and students of the schools nearby as consultation targets with a view to earning the support of stakeholders for land use planning, thereby shortening the time taken from planning to completion of public facilities?

Question 4
(For oral reply)

(Translation)

Measures to safeguard the legitimate rights and
interests of Hong Kong people

Hon WONG Ting-kwong to ask:

In recent months, the United States Government has, on a number of occasions, imposed sanctions on certain officials, organizations and enterprises of the Mainland and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. In response to some countries pursuing unilateralism, the Ministry of Commerce of China promulgated on the 9th of last month and implemented on the same day the Rules on Counteracting Unjustified Extra-territorial Application of Foreign Legislation and Other Measures, which provide, among others, that if there are foreign legislation and other measures prohibiting or restricting the citizens or organizations of China from engaging in normal economic, trade and related activities with a third State and its citizens or organizations, and it has been confirmed that there exists “unjustified extra-territorial application” of such legislation and measures, the Ministry of Commerce may issue a prohibition order to the effect that the relevant foreign legislation and measures are not to be accepted, executed or observed; a citizen or organization of China whose legitimate rights and interests are infringed upon by those legislation and measures may institute legal proceedings in a people’s court, and claim compensations from the persons who have enforced those legislation and measures. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether any legislation is currently in place in Hong Kong to require Hong Kong residents as well as enterprises and organizations operating in Hong Kong not to accept foreign legislation and measures which undermine the legitimate rights and interests of the residents, enterprises and organizations of Hong Kong; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (2) whether it will establish a mechanism whereby the residents, enterprises and organizations of Hong Kong may institute legal proceedings when their legitimate rights and interests are infringed upon by foreign legislation and measures; if so, of the details and timetable; if not, the reasons for that?

Question 5
(For oral reply)

(Translation)

Combating job-hopping of foreign domestic helpers

Dr Hon Priscilla LEUNG to ask:

At present, employers have to bear high expenses for employing foreign domestic helpers (“FDHs”), which include the board and lodging expenses for 21-day compulsory quarantine in a hotel upon FDHs’ arrival in Hong Kong. In the event that FDHs prematurely terminate their employment contracts or deliberately perform badly to force their employers to fire them so as to change employers (commonly known as “job-hopping”), the employers concerned will suffer great financial losses. Moreover, for the purpose of cutting expenses and reducing the risk of being infected with epidemic diseases, quite a number of prospective employers do not hesitate to pay higher salaries for employing those FDHs already in Hong Kong, thereby aggravating the situation of job-hopping. In respect of combating FDHs’ job-hopping, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the number of employment visa applications received from FDHs in each of the past three years; among such applications, the respective numbers of those involving applicants whose original employment contracts had been prematurely terminated within 12 months preceding the submission of the applications and those rejected because the applicants concerned were considered as job-hopping; whether it has reviewed the effectiveness of the measures for combating FDHs’ job-hopping;
- (2) whether the Government will consider requiring that FDHs must come directly from their places of origin to take up the job in Hong Kong, and that FDHs who have completed or terminated their employment contracts must return to their places of origin within two weeks; whether it will establish a mechanism whereby former employers of FDHs may monitor if the FDHs concerned have actually returned to their places of origin; and
- (3) as there are employment agencies abetting FDHs to job-hop, whether the Government will amend the legislation to allow employers of FDHs to recover related losses from such agencies, so as to enhance the protection for employers?

Question 6
(For oral reply)

(Translation)

Combating illegal fishing in Hong Kong

Hon Steven HO to ask:

Some local fishermen have complained that some people have been engaging in illegal fishing within Hong Kong waters from time to time in recent years. Such people use means forbidden in Hong Kong to catch fish, which has not only caused destruction to Hong Kong's fisheries resources and marine ecosystem as well as affected local fishermen's livelihood, but also rendered Hong Kong's legislation on trawl ban, limitation on the number of fishing vessels, protection of marine parks, etc. virtually non-existent. Those fishermen have pointed out that government departments' perfunctory law enforcement and inability to enforce the law across the boundary have resulted in the problem of illegal fishing becoming increasingly rampant. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) as I have learnt that it is difficult to identify the vessels engaged in illegal fishing because their licence numbers are covered, whether the Government will explore other means (e.g. using paintballs) and apply new technologies to enhance the efficiency in law enforcement;
- (2) whether it has plans to conduct joint law enforcement operations with Mainland authorities to combat illegal fishing; if so, of the details of and the difficulties involved in such law enforcement operations; whether it will set up a notification mechanism on cross-boundary illegal fishing activities with Mainland authorities; and
- (3) whether it has assessed if the current legislation and law enforcement efforts can effectively combat cross-boundary illegal fishing activities; if it has assessed and the outcome is in the affirmative, of the justifications; if the assessment outcome is in the negative, whether the Government will amend the law to raise the relevant penalties and allocate additional resources to step up law enforcement efforts?

Question 7
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Assistance for the food business industry amid the epidemic

Hon Tommy CHEUNG to ask:

Since March last year, the Government has implemented a number of anti-epidemic measures to cope with the epidemic, dealing a heavy blow to the businesses of the food business industry (especially the food and beverage services sector). To assist the trades in tiding over the difficult times, the Government has launched several subsidy schemes under the Anti-epidemic Fund. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) as the Government launched the Food Licence Holders Subsidy Scheme last year to provide eight types of food business licence holders with a one-off subsidy of \$80,000 or \$200,000, of the respective numbers of applications received, approved and rejected by the Government, with a breakdown by licence type; the total amount of subsidies disbursed under the Scheme, and the average processing time of each application;
- (2) of the number of applications submitted by employers of the food and beverage services sector under the Employment Support Scheme (“ESS”) which were approved by the Government, and the total amount of wage subsidies disbursed;
- (3) as ESS stipulates that employers who have been disbursed wage subsidies are required to undertake not to lay off their employees during the relevant period and to spend the full amount of the subsidies on paying for employees’ wages, and employers in breach of the undertaking will be fined, of the number of employers of the food and beverage services sector who were fined for breaching the undertaking, and the total amount of fines involved;
- (4) given that the Government launched the Catering Business (Social Distancing) Subsidy Scheme and the Enhanced Catering Business (Social Distancing) Subsidy Scheme consecutively last year to provide eligible licence holders of restaurants and canteens in operation with a one-off subsidy in accordance with the approved gross floor area of their licensed premises, of the respective numbers of applications received, approved and rejected by the Government under the two subsidy schemes; if there were rejected applications, of the reasons for that; and

- (5) as the two subsidy schemes mentioned in (4) stipulate that the relevant food business licence must be valid throughout the whole period from the date of approval of the application to the specified date or else the Government will consider recovering from the applicant any subsidy disbursed and the related expenses incurred, of the number of applicants from whom the subsidies have been/are being recovered due to violation of the stipulation, and the total amount of subsidy involved?

Question 8
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Assistance provided to the financial services industry

Hon Christopher CHEUNG to ask:

The second-round relief measures implemented by the Government include the establishment of a Financial Industry Recruitment Scheme for Tomorrow (“FIRST Scheme”) to help create 1 500 new positions in the financial services industry, which has been hit by the epidemic, for employing local talents. Each eligible employer may apply for salary subsidies for a maximum of 25 eligible new full-time positions, and each position is entitled to a subsidy of up to \$10,000 per month for a period of 12 months. Regarding the assistance provided by the Government to the financial services industry, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the respective numbers of applications received and approved by the Government under the FIRST Scheme; the total number of positions for which subsidies were approved and the total amount of subsidies disbursed so far, as well as the average monthly amount of subsidy for each position;
- (2) given the enthusiastic response received for the FIRST Scheme, whether the Government will (i) launch a second phase of the FIRST Scheme with increased number of positions and raised amount of subsidies, and (ii) encourage the securities industry to make use of the Scheme to employ more technology talents; and
- (3) whether it will consider establishing a financial technology (“fintech”) special fund for the financial services industry, through which (i) subsidies are disbursed to securities-related enterprises for them to develop fintech enhancement projects, and (ii) allowances are provided to the practitioners concerned for them to enrol in fintech courses, so as to assist the securities industry in the comprehensive application of fintech?

Question 9
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Quality of drinking water in public rental housing estates

Hon YUNG Hoi-yan to ask:

There have been instances from time to time in which residents of public rental housing (“PRH”) estates found impurities and contaminants in drinking water. For example, some residents of Po Lam Estate in Tseung Kwan O found black precipitates in drinking water in December last year. The residents concerned have relayed that upon receipt of reports of such incidents, the authorities generally only took interim measures (e.g. deploying water wagons for supplying water to the affected residents) without fundamentally solving the problem of alleged contamination of drinking water. Quite a number of residents of PRH estates are worried that consumption of problematic drinking water over a long period of time will expose them to health hazards. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the number of reports received by the authorities in each of the past three years concerning problems with drinking water in PRH estates; (i) the district, (ii) the name of the estate, (iii) the age of the building, and (iv) the respective numbers of units and residents involved in each incident; in respect of each incident, the numbers of days and times for which water wagons were deployed for temporary water supply, the time taken for conducting tests and investigations and the results thereof (including the impurities contained in drinking water and the causes for such a situation), as well as the corresponding and follow-up measures taken;
- (2) whether it will conduct a comprehensive inspection of the fresh water supply systems in all PRH estates; if so, of the specific timetable, as well as the financial and manpower resources needed; if not, the reasons for that, and what new measures the authorities will take to prevent drinking water problems from occurring in PRH estates; and
- (3) whether, in order to strengthen the confidence of residents of PRH estates in drinking water safety, the authorities will conduct drinking water sampling tests for PRH estates on a regular basis, and comprehensively review the construction of the fresh water supply systems for public housing (including the materials, works implementation procedures and specifications); if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Question 10
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Stamp duty on stock transactions

Hon CHUNG Kwok-pan to ask:

At present, both the buyers and the sellers of securities listed in Hong Kong are required to pay stamp duty on stock transactions of an amount equivalent to 0.1% of the values of the transactions. While there are comments that increasing the rate of this tax will help alleviate the serious fiscal deficit, there are views that such a move will undermine the international competitiveness of Hong Kong's stock market, given that no such tax is collected in Japan, Singapore and the United States. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the estimated and actual revenue from stamp duty on stock transactions in each of the past five financial years, as well as the estimated revenue from this tax in each of the coming three financial years (set out in a table);
- (2) as opinions are widely divided as to whether such tax should be maintained or abolished, or be adjusted upward or downward, whether the Government conducted in the past five years any quantitative analysis on the impacts of changing such tax on (i) tax revenue, (ii) the international competitiveness of Hong Kong's stock market, as well as (iii) the turnover rate and trading volumes of stocks, etc.; if so, of the details; if not, whether it will conduct such analysis expeditiously; and
- (3) whether it has plans to adjust the rate of the tax and the relevant policy in the near future; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Question 11
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Continuing Education Fund

Hon Martin LIAO to ask:

The Government set up the Continuing Education Fund (“CEF”) in 2002 to provide adults with learning aspirations with subsidies for pursuing continuing education and training. Due to the epidemic, some of last year’s face-to-face classes of the courses covered by CEF had to be changed to online classes. The Government issued notices in March and December last year setting out the special arrangements, for those courses affected by the epidemic during the period from 1 January last year to 30 April this year, under which face-to-face classes may be changed to online classes, subject to the number of hours for the latter accounting for no more than 70% of the total number of teaching hours (“cap on online-class proportion”). In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the number of applications for reimbursement of course fees made to CEF in each of the past five years; the percentage of approved applications in the total number of applications, and the average amount of subsidy for each approved application, with a breakdown by course type;
- (2) given that a course provider changed all face-to-face classes of a course to online classes, thus exceeding the cap on online-class proportion which resulted in the relevant course participants not being eligible for CEF’s reimbursement of the course fees, of the number of this type of complaints received by the Government last year and the number of course providers involved;
- (3) as online classes have become a new norm amid the epidemic, whether the Government will consider further relaxing the cap on online-class proportion; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (4) of the measures put in place to ensure that the quality of CEF courses in terms of contents, teaching methods, etc. will not be undermined by the fact that their face-to-face classes are changed to online classes, so as to safeguard the interests of course participants; and

- (5) as quite a number of members of the public have relayed that the current scope of CEF courses is too narrow, making them unable to find a suitable course, whether the Government will review the scope of the courses covered by CEF; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Question 12
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Development of historical and heritage tourism

Hon YIU Si-wing to ask:

Earlier on, the Government decided to demolish a disused underground cistern at Bishop Hill in Sham Shui Po. When the demolition works were in progress in December last year, some residents discovered that the cistern had distinctive architectural features. Subsequently, the Water Supplies Department halted the works, and confirmed that the cistern had been completed as early as in 1904. The incident has aroused wide public concerns. Some members of the public are worried that damages will be caused to buildings with historical value due to the insufficient sensitivity of and incomprehensive coordination among the relevant government departments, rendering the loss of highly attractive tourism resources in Hong Kong. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the respective numbers of monuments for which the Government carried out protection, restoration and maintenance works in each of the past three years, and the details of the works concerned;
- (2) given that the Development Blueprint for Hong Kong's Tourism Industry, published by the Government in 2017, set a five-year implementation goal of facilitating the development of local historical and heritage, cultural and creative tourism, of the expenditure incurred by the Government on facilitating historical and heritage tourism in each year since 2017;
- (3) whether it has regularly reviewed the attractiveness of the various monuments to local and overseas tourists, and made timely adjustments to the relevant publicity efforts and promotional strategies; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (4) of the further measures in place to develop and enrich historical and heritage tourism, with a view to giving tourists a more unforgettable travel experience?

Question 13
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Members of the public flocking to
the countryside amid the epidemic

Ir Dr Hon LO Wai-kwok to ask:

Some residents in the New Territories have relayed that since the outbreak of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 epidemic, the number of visitors to the countryside such as country parks has been increasing incessantly, giving rise to public health and hygiene problems such as the spread of the epidemic disease and the accumulation of rubbish left by visitors. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) given that a large number of countryside visitors gather from time to time in the countryside for recreation and amenity, increasing the risk of spreading the epidemic disease, whether the relevant government departments will step up management and law enforcement in such places; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (2) given that the authorities have reduced the numbers of rubbish bins and recycling bins in the country parks in recent years to encourage visitors to “take their litter home with them”, whether the authorities have reviewed if such arrangement has aggravated the haphazard disposal of rubbish by visitors in the country parks; whether the authorities will adjust such arrangement during the epidemic; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (3) whether the authorities have communicated with the rural committees and local organizations in various districts to explore ways of tackling the aforesaid public health and hygiene problems; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (4) whether the authorities will step up promotional efforts through the media and social platforms to advise members of the public to avoid flocking to the countryside during the epidemic, and of the matters requiring their special attention when engaging in activities in such areas; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Question 14
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Illegal activities in country parks

Hon Kenneth LAU to ask:

It has been reported that recently quite a number of motocross bike enthusiasts have been practising biking on the hillside of Kai Kung Leng in Lam Tsuen Country Park, turning the hillside completely into a piece of bare ground with soil erosion intensified, as well as knocking down and damaging some ancestral graves of indigenous villagers. Moreover, quite a number of countryside visitors fly unmanned aircraft systems (“UASs”) within country parks, and accidents caused by improper operation of UASs have occurred in such places from time to time. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the respective numbers of (a) accidents and resultant casualties, (b) complaints and (c) prosecutions, in the past five years in respect of the illegal activities of (i) riding motocross bikes and (ii) flying UASs in country parks, with a breakdown by name of country park;
- (2) whether it has plans to step up law enforcement actions in country parks to combat these two types of illegal activities; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (3) whether it has plans to tighten the relevant legislation and administrative measures in order to effectively combat these two types of illegal activities?

Question 15
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Arrangements for water charges

Hon LEUNG Che-cheung to ask:

The Water Supplies Department (“WSD”) suspended its routine work of taking readings of water meters on several occasions last year on grounds of epidemic prevention, and upon resumption of meter-reading work, it calculated the water consumption for the combined billing periods concerned on the basis of the preceding and the latest actual meter readings of the accounts concerned for issuing water bills. Since the duration of a billing period was changed from four months to a maximum of 12 months, some members of the public had to pay a considerable amount of water charges in one go. Some members of the public have indicated that such calculation method has posed immense financial pressure on them. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether WSD has, before issuing water bills demanding the payment of a considerable amount of water charges, publicized to members of the public the aforesaid calculation method of water charges through various channels (including the Government’s television announcements in the public interest and notifications by post); if not, of the reasons for that;
- (2) whether WSD will exercise discretion to waive the surcharges on overdue water charges, and allow members of the public to opt for settling water charges by instalments; if not, of the reasons for that;
- (3) of the latest progress of the implementation of the Automatic Meter Reading System by WSD, and the number of smart water meters which WSD plans to install within the coming three years; whether it has assessed if the problems arising from suspending meter-reading work may be avoided with the adoption of such system; if it has assessed and the outcome is in the affirmative, of WSD’s plans to expedite the installation of smart water meters on clients’ premises; and
- (4) as some members of the public have pointed out that the aforesaid calculation method of water charges has caused inconvenience to them and posed financial pressure on them, whether WSD will propose to the Financial Secretary that the following initiative be put forward in the Budget soon to be announced: waiving the water charges payable by members of the public for at least one period; if not, of the reasons for that?

Question 16
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Specimen collection methods for virus testing

Hon WONG Kwok-kin to ask:

Currently, one of the specimen collection methods for Coronavirus Disease 2019 testing is that the persons to be tested (“subject persons”) collect by themselves specimens of their deep-throat saliva (“DTS”). Some experts have pointed out that this specimen collection method has weaknesses, including that (i) the quality of the saliva specimens hinges on a number of factors (e.g. whether the subject persons have grasped the skill for spitting out saliva from their throats, and whether they have eaten/drunk anything or brushed their teeth or rinsed their mouths within two hours prior to the collection of DTS specimens), and (ii) the subject persons may have submitted fake specimens (as revealed earlier on by a member of an expert advisory panel that, among the DTS specimens submitted by members of high-risk groups for testing last year, about 3% of the specimens were suspected to be tap water only as they did not contain any human DNA). In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the number of suspected fake specimens received by the authorities so far, with a breakdown by the category of testing groups (including targeted groups and groups subject to compulsory testing) that have submitted the specimens concerned;
- (2) whether those persons who have submitted fake specimens will be legally liable; if so, of the details (including the maximum penalty), and whether any prosecutions have been instituted so far; if so, of the government departments responsible for such work and the number of prosecutions instituted; if no prosecution has been instituted, the reasons for that; and
- (3) of the measures in place to prevent persons who are subject to compulsory testing and members of high-risk groups from submitting fake specimens; as there are weaknesses in the method for collecting DTS specimens, whether the authorities will switch to use other methods (e.g. entrusting professionals to collect combined throat and nasal swabs) to collect specimens from these types of persons; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Question 17
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Radio Television Hong Kong

Hon CHAN Han-pan to ask:

Regarding the programme quality, governance and development of Radio Television Hong Kong (“RTHK”), will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) given that the Communications Authority (“CA”) received in the past two years quite a number of complaints about RTHK’s programmes, and CA determined that some of the programmes had contents that had failed to meet the requirements on objectivity, impartiality and accuracy in information, whether the Government has put in place new measures to prevent the occurrence of similar incidents; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (2) of the progress of the work to review the governance and management of RTHK carried out by the dedicated team since it commenced work in July last year, and the expected dates for the dedicated team to submit and publish its review report; whether, before the recommendations put forward in the review report are implemented, the Government has short-term measures in place to step up its monitoring of RTHK’s governance and management; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (3) as there are views that as the dual roles of RTHK as a public service broadcaster and a government department conflict with each other from time to time, RTHK should be privatized, whether the Government will consider afresh the disestablishment of RTHK from the government structure and transforming RTHK into a private organization; if so, of the details and timetable; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (4) as some members of the public have relayed to me that the television documentary “All About the Chinese Style – Kenya”, produced by RTHK itself and broadcast in the year before last, had biased contents, and may be in breach of the programming objective to “give emphasis to the provision of accurate, impartial and objective public affairs programming” as set out in the Charter of Radio Television Hong Kong, whether it knows if CA has received any related complaints; if CA has, whether CA has conducted an investigation; if CA has investigated, of the outcome; if CA has not investigated, the reasons for that?

Question 18
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Management of the Tracker Fund of Hong Kong

Hon LUK Chung-hung to ask:

The objective of the Tracker Fund of Hong Kong (“TraHK”) is to provide investment results that closely correspond to the performance of the Hang Seng Index (“HSI”). As provided in the prospectus of TraHK, its manager seeks to achieve the investment objective by investing all, or substantially all, of TraHK’s assets in shares in the constituent companies of HSI in substantially the same weightings as they appear in HSI. However, State Street Global Advisors Asia Limited (“SSGA”), the manager of TraHK, issued a notice on the 11th of last month to inform unitholders that, as affected by the executive order signed by the President of the United States, TraHK would not make any new investments in those constituent companies of HSI which were sanctioned entities (“the companies concerned”) with immediate effect (“the decision”). Two days later, SSGA issued another notice stating that it would resume investments in the companies concerned on the next day. Some investors have pointed out that the tracking error occurred during the period when TraHK ceased making investments in the companies concerned may affect the Fund’s investment returns. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it has assessed if the decision has gone against the investment objective of TraHK;
- (2) whether it knows if the regulatory authorities have gained an understanding and requested an explanation from SSGA immediately after the decision was made, and assessed the impacts of the decision on the securities market and investors; and
- (3) whether it will request the Hong Kong Monetary Authority and TraHK Supervisory Committee to review the aforesaid incident, including considering (i) if SSGA’s making the decision constitutes an act of misconduct and has violated the relevant codes/professional conduct, (ii) if SSGA can still effectively perform its duties and responsibilities as a manager, and (iii) if there is a need to replace the manager to ensure effective management of TraHK, thereby restoring investor confidence?

Question 19
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Overseas Education Allowance Scheme

Hon KWOK Wai-keung to ask:

Under the Overseas Education Allowance (“OEA”) Scheme, eligible civil servants may claim OEA in respect of their children who are nine to 19 years old and are studying in the United Kingdom or their countries of origin. Civil servants appointed on or after 1 August 1996 are not entitled to this benefit. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the implementation situation of the OEA Scheme in each of the past five years, including:
 - (i) the number of civil servants eligible for claiming OEA, with a breakdown by their terms of appointment (i.e. local terms of appointment and overseas terms of appointment),
 - (ii) the number of persons claiming OEA, with a breakdown by their terms of appointment,
 - (iii) the number of students involved, with a breakdown by subtype of allowance disbursed (i.e. the Boarding School Allowance and the Day School Allowance) and the place where their schools were located, and
 - (iv) the average amount of allowance disbursed in respect of each student, and the total expenditure involved;
- (2) whether the Government conducted any consultation with the various civil service unions in the past three years on the implementation situation and continuity of the OEA Scheme; if so, of the dates and the subjects of such consultations; if not, the reasons for that, and whether it will establish a regular communication mechanism with the various unions to regularly gauge their views on those civil service allowances which are fringe benefits in nature (including OEA); and
- (3) whether it has plans to review and improve the OEA Scheme, including broadening the eligibility for the Scheme so that (i) civil servants may make applications in respect of their children who are studying in institutions in Mainland cities, and (ii) civil servants appointed on or after 1 August 1996 will be eligible for making applications; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Question 20
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Development of the lands currently or
formerly in the Frontier Closed Area

Hon Tony TSE to ask:

The Government substantially reduced the land coverage of the Frontier Closed Area (“FCA”) from about 2 800 hectares to about 400 hectares during the period from 2012 to 2016. However, as the Government has not made detailed planning over the years for optimizing the use of the lands released from FCA (“the released lands”), quite a number of lands with development potential have been left idle for years or put to temporary uses only, such as warehouses, car parks and recycling yards. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the following information of (a) the lands in FCA and (b) the released lands at present: (i) locations, (ii) areas, (iii) whether they are government lands or private lands, (iv) permitted uses, and (v) existing uses (set out in a table);
- (2) whether it will expeditiously carry out detailed planning for the released lands, so as to fully realize their development potential, alleviate the land shortage problem, and tie in with the rapid development of the Mainland cities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (“Greater Bay Area”); if so, of the timetable; if not, the reasons for that;
- (3) whether it will expeditiously study the further reduction in the coverage of FCA for closer integration between Hong Kong and the Mainland; if so, of the timetable; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (4) whether it will hold discussions with the Mainland authorities regarding the work mentioned in (2) and (3), so as to better grasp the opportunities brought by the rapid development of the Mainland cities in the Greater Bay Area?

Question 21
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Government bonds

Hon CHAN Hak-kan to ask:

Since 2011, the Government has issued a number of rounds of retail bonds, including seven rounds of inflation-linked bonds and five rounds of Silver Bonds. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the total amount of interests and administrative costs (including fees payable to agents) involved in the issuance of the aforesaid bonds;
- (2) of the uses of the funds raised through issuing the aforesaid bonds, as well as the relevant total profit and loss figures;
- (3) whether it has assessed the benefits brought by issuing the aforesaid bonds to Hong Kong in aspects such as the Gross Domestic Product, job creation, development of the bond market, tax revenue, as well as creation of wealth effect, and provide the relevant data; and
- (4) whether it has assessed what benefits the issuance of bonds will bring to public finance under the situation of fiscal reserves being still ample?