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From : Clerk to the Legislative Council

To : All Members of the Legislative Council

Council meeting of 17 March 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.

22 questions to be asked at the Council meeting of 17 March 2021

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Question 1
(For oral reply)

(Translation)

Supporting employers and employees affected by the epidemic

Hon Jimmy NG to ask:

As the Coronavirus Disease 2019 epidemic has dealt a heavy blow to the economy of Hong Kong, the Government has launched one after another two tranches of the Employment Support Scheme (“ESS”) to provide financial support for eligible employers to assist them in paying employees’ wages from June to August and from September to November last year respectively, thereby retaining those employees who may otherwise be made redundant. Regarding the Government’s support for those employers and employees affected by the epidemic, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) as some employers have relayed that the application procedure and the vetting and approval process of the second tranche of ESS were obviously more complicated and lengthy than those of the first tranche, resulting in their not receiving the wage subsidies under the second tranche of ESS for a prolonged period of time, of the reasons for that;
- (2) of the respective numbers of complaints and reports of abuse received about ESS so far, together with a breakdown by the type of issues involved as well as the follow-up actions taken and their outcomes; and
- (3) as the Government has made it clear that it will not launch a third tranche of ESS but the epidemic has not subsided, and some members of the public are worried about the onset of waves of enterprises closing down and unemployment, whether the Government has plans to set up a “loan fund for occupation switching for the unemployed”, so as to support unemployed persons for self-enhancement and occupation switching; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Question 2
(For oral reply)

(Translation)

Promoting a post-epidemic green recovery of the economy

Hon Martin LIAO to ask:

Since last year, a number of international organizations such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have, one after another and on a number of occasions, called on the governments of various countries to promote a post-epidemic “green recovery” of their economies, and to steer their economic revitalization measures along the direction of green and low-carbon transformation and sustainable development. China has also called on various countries to seize the historic opportunities presented by the new round of scientific and technological revolution and industrial transformation, and promote a post-epidemic green recovery of the world economy. The Hong Kong SAR Government has also stated that it will support a green recovery of the economy. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the plans and measures to promote a post-epidemic green recovery of Hong Kong’s economy; in respect of each measure, the anticipated manpower and expenditure involved, economic benefits to be generated and implementation timetable, as well as how the measure will help Hong Kong reach its latest target of achieving carbon neutrality before 2050;
- (2) of the plans and measures to support Hong Kong’s various sectors in seizing the green economic opportunities in the short, medium and long terms in areas such as green finance, green innovation and technology, as well as green industries; and
- (3) whether it has assessed the respective green employment opportunities to be brought by the aforesaid measures for Hong Kong; whether it has set new targets (including those on aspects of economic benefits and employment opportunities) for the future development of Hong Kong’s environmental industry; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Question 3
(For oral reply)

(Translation)

Ancillary transport and accommodation facilities
of the Kai Tak Cruise Terminal

Hon Mrs Regina IP to ask:

Due to the rampant epidemic, it has been months since cruise vessels last berthed at the Kai Tak Cruise Terminal (“KTCT”). The KTCT operator has pointed out that in the past, most of the cruise passengers experienced great inconvenience as they had to queue up for a long time, while carrying bulky luggage, for taxis to travel to and from KTCT and hotels, the airport or their homes. On the other hand, in respect of six sites near KTCT originally reserved for hotel use, the Government has rezoned four of them for building residential flats, and is studying the rezoning of the remaining two sites for residential use as well. Some members of the tourism industry consider that the Government should expeditiously improve the ancillary transport and accommodation facilities of KTCT, so as to offer a better travel experience for the cruise passengers who will return after the epidemic has come to an end. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it has plans in the coming three years to provide car parks on the idle sites near KTCT, so that local residents going on a cruise trip may choose to travel to and from KTCT by private cars, thereby shortening the queue for taxis; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (2) whether it has plans in the coming three years to introduce water taxi service plying between KTCT and the Kwun Tong Public Pier for use by cruise passengers, thereby shortening the queue for taxis and alleviating the traffic load on roads; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (3) whether it will keep the aforesaid two sites for hotel use, so as to address the accommodation needs of cruise passengers in future; if not, of the reasons for that?

Question 4
(For oral reply)

(Translation)

Development of the lands surrounding
various boundary crossings

Hon LAU Kwok-fan to ask:

There are views that the Government should optimize the use of the lands surrounding various boundary crossings in the New Territories in order to develop port economy and increase housing supply. However, the Government has not made holistic considerations in respect of the development of such lands, resulting in large tracts of agricultural land and fish ponds having been left deserted for a long time. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it has compiled statistics on the current total area of the deserted agricultural lands and fish ponds surrounding various boundary crossings in the New Territories; of the plans in place to unleash their development potential; whether it will conduct an overall planning for the deserted lands, including rezoning such lands for the development of new development areas or new towns, thereby increasing housing supply;
- (2) of its new thinking on putting the lands surrounding various boundary crossings in the New Territories to optimal use, e.g. whether it will construct office buildings for relevant government departments and develop a centre for innovative industries on such lands so as to develop a port economic zone, thereby better seizing the opportunities brought by the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (3) whether it will consider setting up an ad hoc committee to study the implementation of, and conduct holistic planning for, the development projects on the lands surrounding various boundary crossings in the New Territories, as well as co-ordinate the implementation of the relevant projects; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Question 5
(For oral reply)

(Translation)

News reporting of RTHK

Hon LUK Chung-hung to ask:

From the 23rd to the 24th of January this year, the Government set up a “restricted area” in Jordan, arranged for persons within the area to take a test for the Coronavirus Disease 2019 and distributed to each of them a food pack which contained four cans of canned food of different types (three of which were cans with easy-to-open covers). Those persons staying in the guesthouses within the area (including journalists) were also distributed food packs. A news report of Radio Television Hong Kong (“RTHK”) pointed out that “no can opener nor cooking implement is provided in the guesthouse”, and attached a photo of a food pack in which none of the cans showed the side with a ring pull. Some members of the public have criticized that the photo, by wilfully hiding the ring pulls of the cans, misled readers into thinking that all the cans could only be opened with a can opener. RTHK issued a statement, countering the criticisms as smear accusations which it severely condemned, and insisting that the news report had stated the facts. However, a newspaper which had published a similar photo subsequently issued a statement, in which it stated that the photo concerned had been removed as the photo was misleading, admitted its oversight and made an apology. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it has requested RTHK to conduct a review and submit a report on the practices adopted in the news report; if so, of the progress of the review, and whether it will submit the report to this Council; and
- (2) whether RTHK issued the aforesaid statement after obtaining the approval of the then Director of Broadcasting (“D of B”); if so, whether the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development has requested an explanation from D of B; if so, of the justifications for giving the approval; if no approval had been obtained, whether RTHK has reviewed if the contents of the statement were appropriate; if it has, of the review outcome; if it has not, the reasons for that?

Question 6
(For oral reply)

(Translation)

Enacting legislation pursuant to Article 23 of the Basic Law

Dr Hon Junius HO to ask:

Article 7 of the National Security Law for Hong Kong, which has been implemented since 30 June last year, stipulates that “[t]he Hong Kong Special Administrative Region shall complete, as early as possible, legislation for safeguarding national security as stipulated in the Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and shall refine relevant laws”. In other words, the Hong Kong SAR should, pursuant to Article 23 of the Basic Law, enact laws on its own to prohibit acts endangering national security. The Government has also repeatedly indicated that the Hong Kong SAR has a constitutional obligation to enact legislation on Article 23 of the Basic Law. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the latest progress of the work to enact legislation pursuant to Article 23 of the Basic Law; and
- (2) whether, according to the Government’s assessment, the relevant legislative work can be completed within the current term of the Legislative Council; if the assessment outcome is in the affirmative, of the legislative timetable; if it is in the negative, the reasons for that?

Question 7
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Supporting the manufacturing industry
and promoting re-industrialization

Hon Abraham SHEK to ask:

To cope with the Coronavirus Disease 2019 epidemic, in March last year, the Government launched the Local Mask Production Subsidy Scheme to subsidize manufacturers to produce face masks (“masks”) locally, and introduced a special call under the Public Sector Trial Scheme to support product development and application of technologies for the prevention and control of the epidemic in Hong Kong. On supporting the manufacturing industry and promoting re-industrialization, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) among the masks procured by the Government since January last year, of the number and percentage of those which were locally produced; given that at present, locally produced masks can satisfy local demand, whether the Government will in future give priority to procuring locally produced masks so as to support the development of the manufacturing industry; if not, of the reasons for that;
- (2) of the number of cases, since the outbreak of the epidemic, in which government departments used products and technologies for epidemic prevention and control which were researched and developed locally, as well as other details of such cases; whether it has assessed the opportunities that may be created by such products and technologies for Hong Kong’s re-industrialization and promotion of the “Made in Hong Kong” brand (especially in areas such as biomedical sciences and testing); and
- (3) whether, under the existing policy, government departments and subvented organizations are required to give priority consideration to local products in their procurement (especially those innovation and technology products researched and developed locally) so as to support the development of the local manufacturing industry and promote re-industrialization; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Question 8
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Cathay Pacific's lay-off exercise

Hon Michael TIEN to ask:

The Government decided in June last year to invest in Cathay Pacific Airways Limited ("CX") to help it tide over the predicament it was facing amid the epidemic. On the other hand, CX announced in October last year a business restructuring plan under which some 8 500 positions were to be cut. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it knows the respective numbers and percentages of local and non-local pilots dismissed in the aforesaid lay-off exercise, as well as the relative ratios of these two types of pilots before and after the lay-off exercise;
- (2) whether it has studied if CX's lay-off exercise is consistent with the Government's policy of safeguarding priority employment of Hong Kong people; and
- (3) whether it has required CX, when conducting a lay-off exercise again in the future, to accord, on the premise of ensuring that its manpower resources are equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge and working experience, priority to retaining local pilots and other local employees; if not, of the reasons for that?

Question 9
(For written reply)

(Translation)

National security education

Hon CHEUNG Kwok-kwan to ask:

The Education Bureau (“EDB”) issued circulars to schools across the territory on the 4th of last month to provide guidelines on school administration and education in respect of safeguarding national security. In addition, EDB has compiled the Curriculum Framework of National Security Education in Hong Kong (“the Framework”) to assist schools in implementing national security education. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) given that EDB has added a three-hour “Supplement: National Security” on top of the existing 15-hour standalone module on “Constitution and the Basic Law” at the junior secondary level in order to support schools to implement national security education, whether EDB will review, in a timely manner, the effectiveness of such arrangement and the need to increase relevant lesson time;
- (2) whether it will, by drawing reference from the practice of disbursing to schools the Moral and National Education Support Grant, disburse to schools a “national security education support grant”, so that schools can have more resources to implement national security education;
- (3) as the Framework provides that the learning elements at the junior primary level include letting students know the names of the four offences regulated by the National Security Law for Hong Kong, how EDB assists junior primary students in comprehending the complicated concepts involved in the offences concerned, and assesses their learning effectiveness;
- (4) of the measures in place to ensure that teachers receive adequate training on the knowledge needed for teaching the National Security Law for Hong Kong; and
- (5) whether it has plans to arrange for Mainland teachers to come, after the epidemic has subsided, to Hong Kong to share their experience of teaching knowledge about national security?

Question 10
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Providing opportunities for policy discussion for young people

Hon CHUNG Kwok-pan to ask:

The Government launched in 2017 the Member Self-recommendation Scheme for Youth (“MSSY”) to provide opportunities for young people for policy discussion and enable them to understand government operation. Under MSSY, persons aged between 18 and 35 may self-nominate to become members of 10 specified advisory and statutory bodies. The Government has implemented three phases of MSSY so far, and will raise the number of participating bodies to 15 starting from Phase IV. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) regarding each phase of MSSY, (i) the number of applicants, (ii) the percentage of applicants appointed, (iii) the profile of the appointees, such as their age distribution and qualifications, and (iv) the details relating to the appointees’ participation in the work of the relevant bodies (including the number of meetings attended, and the number of cases in which their views were adopted and implemented);
- (2) as the findings of a survey conducted in the middle of last year showed that 73% of the 524 young respondents aged between 18 and 35 had indicated that they would not consider making applications under MSSY, and the reasons cited included: they perceived themselves to be lacking the qualifications, had no interest in the specified bodies, and did not believe that such bodies could exert influence, what measures the Government has put in place to incentivize young people to apply for participating in MSSY;
- (3) whether the Government will include more advisory and statutory bodies of different policy areas in MSSY and elevate the role and positioning of the young people appointed under MSSY in the relevant bodies, so as to enable them to serve their full functions and recruit more young people of different backgrounds to participate in MSSY; and
- (4) whether the Government will introduce other policy initiatives to attract young people to participate in public affairs and policy discussions, thereby contributing to society; if so, of the details?

Question 11
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Search and rescue and patrol work in the countryside

Hon Jeffrey LAM to ask:

It has been reported that since the number of people visiting the countryside for recreation and amenity (“hikers”) increased sharply last year as compared with those of the previous years, the number of mountain search and rescue (“S&R”) calls received by the relevant government departments in the same period rose correspondingly. In addition, quite a number of hikers committed unlawful acts during their visits to the countryside, such as littering and improper disposal of cigarette butts, causing damage to trees and recreational facilities, as well as barbequing or cooking outside designated places. Regarding S&R and patrol work in the countryside, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the number of mountain S&R operations in which the Government Flying Service (“GFS”) participated, and the average number of officers, fuel cost and total expenditure involved in each of such operations, in each of the past three years;
- (2) of the number of mountain S&R calls received by the Fire Services Department (“FSD”), and the casualties of the relevant incidents, in each of the past three years; whether the Government will consider making public the relevant figures and details on a monthly basis so as to remind hikers to pay attention to safety;
- (3) whether it has assessed, among the cases of the calls mentioned in (2), the respective numbers of those belonging to (i) misuse of the service and (ii) incidents arising from the reckless acts of the persons seeking assistance (e.g. taking photographs at spots located at precipitous terrains or hiking under inclement weather), as well as the impacts of these two types of cases on other emergency rescue services; whether the Government will step up publicity efforts to remind hikers to pay more attention to safety and make reasonable use of emergency call services;
- (4) of the number of occasions on which hikers activated the GPS Hiker Tracking Service on the Government’s mobile applications, and the number of S&R operations in which the location of the persons seeking assistance was ascertained through such service, in each of the past three years;

- (5) given that the number of mountain S&R calls increased in recent years, whether the Government has allocated additional resources to the relevant government departments (i.e. FSD, GFS and the Civil Aid Service) so as to enhance their equipment, manpower and training in respect of S&R;
- (6) whether it will make good use of technologies to carry out mountain S&R operations, e.g. using unmanned aircraft systems to search for persons seeking assistance as well as deliver relief materials to them, providing QR codes on the distance posts along hiking trails to facilitate persons seeking assistance to provide their accurate locations, and erecting luminous warning signs powered by solar photovoltaic or wind power generation systems; and
- (7) of the approaches currently adopted by the relevant government departments for patrolling hiking trails to combat hikers' unlawful acts and how much manpower is involved in such work, as well as how such departments get to know that there are damaged trails or recreational facilities; the time normally taken to complete the restoration of damaged trails and recreational facilities?

Question 12
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Unemployment problem

Hon YIU Si-wing to ask:

The Government launched the Employment Support Scheme (“ESS”) under the Anti-epidemic Fund last year to provide wage subsidies to eligible employers in two tranches for paying the wages of their employees from June to August and from September to November last year. As the Government has not provided wage subsidies any longer since December last year, and Hong Kong’s economy has not shown any improvement, quite a number of employers have one after another laid off their employees to cut expenses. On the other hand, the latest seasonally adjusted unemployment rate is 7%, hitting a record high in 17 years, with the number of unemployed persons reaching as high as 250 000. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the up-to-date expenditure and the current balance of ESS;
- (2) whether it has reviewed if ESS is cost effective in retaining jobs in the long run; if it has reviewed and the outcome is in the affirmative, whether it will launch ESS again; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (3) of the extent to which the unemployment problem has worsened not until which will the Government launch new short-term measures to assist the unemployed?

Question 13
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Provision of assistance for industries affected by the epidemic

Hon Starry LEE to ask:

To cope with the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (“COVID-19”) epidemic, the Government has invoked, on a number of occasions since March last year, the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirement and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F) to direct various types of scheduled premises to suspend operation on specified dates, with the period of suspension ranging from 44 to 200-odd days in total. Some operators of such premises have indicated that as they still need to meet expenses such as rent despite suffering substantial reduction of income, they are now at the end of their tether and on the brink of closing down. They have also pointed out that the Government did not make decisions on whether the scheduled premises were required to suspend operation on the basis of objective criteria. For instance, cinemas, where only passive activities are involved and customers can wear a face mask at all times, have been required to suspend operation for a greater number of days than swimming pools, where active activities are involved and customers can hardly wear a face mask. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it will revise its current practice and make decisions as to whether the various types of scheduled premises are required to suspend operation on the basis of the risk of epidemic spreading; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (2) whether it will discuss separately with the operators of various types of scheduled premises to tailor-make appropriate epidemic prevention arrangements (e.g. arranging for staff to undergo COVID-19 testing, cleaning up and disinfecting venues, registering customer information) on the basis of the characteristics of the activities conducted on the scheduled premises, so that such premises will not be required to suspend operation for epidemic prevention reasons; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (3) as the Singapore Government has enacted legislation on temporary measures to stipulate that a tenant of a non-residential property who is unable to pay rent mainly due to the COVID-19 epidemic may suspend rent payment upon serving a notification on its landlord, and the landlord may not, on account of this, commence legal proceedings or terminate the lease, whether the Government will study (i) introducing a similar scheme of “rent holidays” for the scheduled premises, or (ii) encouraging, through provision of

financial incentives, the landlords to grant rent cuts, so as to relieve the financial pressure on the operators concerned; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

- (4) given that the scheduled premises have suffered substantial income loss due to suspension of operation or reduction of business hours pursuant to the relevant directions, whether the Government will provide further financial support for the operators concerned so as to relieve their financial pressure; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Question 14
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Measures to support the sustained development of the retail industry

Hon SHIU Ka-fai to ask:

The Government allocated \$130 million in 2014 for the implementation of three measures related to the manpower development of the retail industry, including implementing an Earn and Learn Pilot Scheme for Retail Industry, raising the retail industry's image and setting up a Retail Technologies Adoption Fund for Manpower Demand Management. Regarding the measures to support the sustained development of the retail industry, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it has assessed the effects of the aforesaid three measures on the retail industry over the years; if so, of the details;
- (2) of the latest implementation situation of the three measures, and the balance of the allocation;
- (3) given that the Coronavirus Disease 2019 epidemic has accelerated the development of online shopping and the operation of the retail industry under an integrated online-to-offline model, thus leading to a surge in the industry's demand for the relevant talents, and that the Government has decided to cease accepting new applications under the aforesaid measures starting from this year, whether the Government will consider the following proposal of some members of the industry: continuing to use the balance of the allocation for enhancing training on technology application and digital skills for the practitioners of the retail industry, and at the same time for promoting the new image of the retail industry so as to attract new blood, thereby helping the industry meet the talent challenges brought by the digitalization of the retail industry; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (4) as some members of the industry have indicated that in their work to transform their retail business, quite a number of retailers currently lack support on aspects like funding, mastery of the relevant technologies, and effective online sales channels and promotion platforms, what targeted measures, other than those for talent development, the Government has put in place to help the industry resolve the current difficulties so as to support the sustained development of the industry?

Question 15
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Employment market

Ir Dr Hon LO Wai-kwok to ask:

It has been reported that while quite a number of enterprises have frozen or reduced their headcount because they have been affected by the Coronavirus Disease 2019 epidemic, certain information technology-related industries have been unable to recruit adequate manpower to take up newly created posts. Such a situation reflects that there is a mismatch in the employment market. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it has assessed the short-term and long-term impacts of the epidemic on the local employment market; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (2) whether it will improve its work on the projection of manpower supply and requirements, including conducting projections more frequently and taking into consideration short-term political and economic factors, so as to enhance the accuracy of projection findings; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (3) whether it has enhanced the communication with representatives of the industrial and commercial sectors, so as to grasp the market demand for talents who have received education on subjects related to Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (“STEM”), as well as allocate additional resources to tertiary institutions for offering more STEM-related courses and places; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (4) whether it will introduce more facilitation measures to attract innovation and technology talents to come to Hong Kong for career development, so as to meet the market demand for such talents and build a talent pool; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Question 16
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Impacts of Government's budget deficits on pension payments

Dr Hon CHIANG Lai-wan to ask:

According to the forecast in the Budget published last month, the Government will record deficits in the coming five financial years. Under the situation that the fiscal reserves will continue to dwindle, quite a number of retired and serving civil servants and judicial officers who are entitled to pensions are worried whether the Government is able to continuously fulfill its obligation to make pension payments. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the respective numbers, as at 31 December last year, of (a) civil servants and (b) judicial officers who are (i) retired and receiving pensions and (ii) serving under pensionable appointment terms;
- (2) of the total amount of pension payments (including lump sum and monthly payments) made by the Government in each of the past 10 years, and its year-on-year rate of change;
- (3) on the premise that there is no appropriation from the General Revenue Account ("GRA"), how many months of pension expenditure that the current balance of the Civil Service Pension Reserve Fund represents; and
- (4) whether it has devised a contingency plan for the situation that appropriations from GRA to the said Fund are inadequate?

Question 17
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Collection of rates

Hon WONG Kwok-kin to ask:

Will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the total amount of revenue collected by the Government from rates and its year-on-year rate of change, in each of the past five years;
- (2) of the (i) number of units and (ii) total amount of annual rates payable (set out in tables of the same format as the table below), in respect of each type of buildings (i.e. private residential, public rental housing, office, commercial and industrial buildings) in each of the past five years, broken down by the range (as set out in the table below) to which the amounts of annual rates payable (before concession) for the units belonged;

Year: _____

Type of buildings: _____

Amount of annual rates payable for the units (\$)	Number of units	Total amount of annual rates payable
Below 2,500		
2,500 to 5,000		
5,001 to 7,500		
7,501 to 10,000		
10,001 to 15,000		
15,001 to 20,000		
20,001 to 30,000		
Above 30,000		
Total		

- (3) of the respective numbers of (i) “proposals” to alter an entry in a new Valuation List, and (ii) “notices of objection” against a/an correction, deletion or addition to an existing Valuation List, received by the Rating and Valuation Department (“RVD”) in each of the past five years; among those cases, the respective numbers of cases in which the rateable values were reduced eventually;
- (4) given that in assessing the rateable value of a certain property, the authorities will make reference to the open market rents agreed on or around the date of valuation, for similar properties in the same district, with due adjustments made to reflect differences in sizes, locations, facilities, and standards of finish and management, of the details of the calculation criteria and adjustment ratios concerned;

- (5) as some residents of the subsidized housing in Kowloon East (including Hong Pak Court and Hong Nga Court) have pointed out that the housing court in which they reside is similar to an adjacent housing court in terms of the completion time, location, number of storeys and building conditions, etc., but there is a great discrepancy between the rateable values of the units in the two adjacent housing courts, of the reasons for that; and
- (6) of the current staffing establishment in RVD for handling the work of assessment and review of property rates, and the work process of the annual revaluation of the rateable values of properties?

Question 18
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Special work arrangements for government employees

Hon Wilson OR to ask:

To cope with the Coronavirus Disease 2019 epidemic, the Government implemented, on several occasions since early last year, special work arrangements (“special arrangements”) under which all government employees, save for those involved in the provision of emergency and essential public services, worked from home. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it has assessed the impacts of the special arrangements on public services (including service efficiency and additional administrative costs incurred); if it has assessed, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (2) as some members of the public have relayed that during the periods when the special arrangements were implemented, they could hardly access those public services urgently needed and had no way to contact the relevant government officers, whether the Government will issue standard guidelines to various government departments on matters such as staff rosters, work approaches and external liaison under the special arrangements, with a view to reducing the impacts of the special arrangements on members of the public; if not, of the reasons for that; and
- (3) as I have learnt that during the periods when the special arrangements were implemented, some government employees were not assigned any work while staying at home, whether the Government will formulate plans so that when the special arrangements are implemented again in future due to an epidemic, such idle manpower may be deployed to support the anti-epidemic work of the Department of Health?

Question 19
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Virtual asset trading platforms

Hon LEUNG Che-cheung to ask:

The Securities and Futures Commission (“SFC”) issued a statement on virtual asset trading platforms (“VATPs”) in November 2018, setting out a conceptual framework (“the framework”) that aims to explore a pathway for compliance for VATP operators who are willing to be supervised by SFC. Under the framework, SFC will, in its Regulatory Sandbox, explore whether VATPs are suitable for regulation, and will observe the operation in the Sandbox environment of those VATP operators who are interested in engaging in the relevant business, and whether they are able to comply with the proposed regulatory requirements; if SFC is of the view, at the end of that stage, that it is appropriate to regulate the VATP operators concerned, it will consider granting licences. SFC announced in December 2020 that it had granted the first licence to a VATP in Hong Kong. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council if it knows:

- (1) the respective up-to-date numbers of applications received by SFC for inclusion of VATPs in the Regulatory Sandbox and for granting of licences to VATPs;
- (2) the criteria adopted by SFC for vetting and approving licence applications;
- (3) the measures put in place by SFC to assist those VATP operators whose operation in the Sandbox environment has been unsatisfactory in applying for licences;
- (4) the number of licences that SFC has planned to grant, and whether SFC has set a limit on the number of licence to be granted; the validity period of the licences in general; and
- (5) whether SFC will relax the licensing condition that VATP operators may provide services to professional investors only, so that they may provide services to retail investors at the same time?

Question 20
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Residential care homes for the elderly

Hon CHAN Han-pan to ask:

Quite a number of members of the public have relayed that the waiting time for admission to subsidized residential care homes for the elderly (“RCHEs”) has become longer and longer due to the persistent shortage of the places therein, and carers taking care of elderly persons single-handedly at home bear tremendous pressure. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the number of elderly persons currently waiting for admission to subsidized RCHEs and the average waiting time; the new measures to be put in place in the coming three years to shorten the waiting time;
- (2) given that where developers are willing to incorporate certain lease conditions in their real estate development projects to ensure the provision of eligible RCHE premises, they may apply for exemption from payment of premiums for the premises concerned under the “Scheme to Encourage Provision of RCHE Premises in New Private Developments”, of the respective numbers of relevant applications received, approved and rejected by the Government since the Scheme was launched in 2003; if there were rejected applications, of the reasons for that; whether it will consider relaxing the eligibility criteria and streamlining the application procedure, so as to encourage developers to participate in the Scheme;
- (3) of the total number of applications received by the Government in the past 10 years for exemption from payment of premiums in respect of the construction of private RCHEs that meet the requirements of the Social Welfare Department; and
- (4) given that in order to protect the safety of elderly residents in the event of emergencies, it is stipulated in section 20 of the Residential Care Homes (Elderly Persons) Regulation (Cap. 459A) that all parts of a residential care home shall be situated at a height not more than 24 metres above the ground floor, but the Director of Social Welfare may authorize any part of the residential care home to be exempted from complying with such height restriction, of the respective numbers of exemption applications received and approved by the Director in the past 10 years, which had been made for the following purpose: to accommodate non-domestic portions

such as the laundry room, kitchen and storeroom at a height more than 24 metres above the ground floor, so as to release more space on the lower floors for the provision of places for the elderly?

Question 21
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Over-the-counter trading of virtual currencies

Hon CHAN Chun-ying to ask:

It has been reported that the price of bitcoins, one of the virtual currencies, has surged recently, arousing investors' interest in trading virtual currencies. At present, investors may conduct, in cash and without using any trading platform, over-the-counter ("OTC") trading of virtual currencies. Taking advantage of the anonymity inherent in virtual currencies and the absence of regulation of such tradings by the authorities, some lawbreakers, posing as a trading counterparty, deceived and even robbed investors who traded virtual currencies with them. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it has grasped the current situation of OTC trading of virtual currencies in Hong Kong (including the average daily turnover); if so, of the details, and whether it will release the relevant information; if it will not release such information, the reasons for that;
- (2) whether it has plans to regulate OTC trading of virtual currencies; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (3) whether it will take measures to raise public vigilance about the risks involved in conducting OTC trading of virtual currencies; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Question 22
(For written reply)

(Translation)

Cycling safety

Dr Hon Priscilla LEUNG to ask:

It has been reported that there was an increase in the number of people cycling for leisure and delivering takeaway food amid the rampant Coronavirus Disease 2019 epidemic in Hong Kong last year. There are often takeaway food couriers cycling in urban areas on roads in the opposite direction of the traffic or on pavements, causing dangerous situations frequently. As shown in the information of the Transport Department, the number of traffic accidents involving bicycles rose from 1 942 and 1 839 in 2018 and 2019 respectively to 2 947 in 2020. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the casualties caused by traffic accidents involving bicycles in each of the past three years and since January this year; among such accidents, the respective numbers of those which (i) occurred on cycle tracks and (ii) involved cycle takeaway food couriers;
- (2) of the number of summonses (with a breakdown by the type of contraventions) issued by the Government in each of the past three years and since January this year to cyclists who had violated the Road Traffic Ordinance (Cap. 374) and, among them, the number of those issued during territory-wide safe cycling enforcement operations;
- (3) whether the Police stepped up efforts last year to combat unlawful acts of cycling on pavements in urban areas; if so, of the number of prosecutions instituted; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (4) of the work on promoting cycling safety carried out by the Government since 2018, and its details (including the number of promotional activities, the number of participants and the expenditure); whether, in response to the increase in the number of people cycling, it has formulated new strategies for promoting cycling safety (e.g. collaborating with takeaway food delivery platforms to strengthen efforts to publicize cycling safety among takeaway food couriers, and stepping up, on holidays at popular cycling locations, publicity on cycling safety among members of the public); if so, of the details?