

OFFICIAL RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS

Wednesday, 15 February 2023

The Council met at Eleven o'clock

MEMBERS PRESENT:

THE PRESIDENT

THE HONOURABLE ANDREW LEUNG KWAN-YUEN, G.B.M., G.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE TOMMY CHEUNG YU-YAN, G.B.M., G.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE JEFFREY LAM KIN-FUNG, G.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE STARRY LEE WAI-KING, G.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE CHAN HAK-KAN, S.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE CHAN KIN-POR, G.B.S., J.P.

DR THE HONOURABLE PRISCILLA LEUNG MEI-FUN, S.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE PAUL TSE WAI-CHUN, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE MICHAEL TIEN PUK-SUN, B.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE STEVEN HO CHUN-YIN, B.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE FRANKIE YICK CHI-MING, S.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE MA FUNG-KWOK, G.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE CHAN HAN-PAN, B.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE KWOK WAI-KEUNG, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE ELIZABETH QUAT, B.B.S., J.P.

IR DR THE HONOURABLE LO WAI-KWOK, G.B.S., M.H., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE JIMMY NG WING-KA, B.B.S., J.P.

DR THE HONOURABLE JUNIUS HO KWAN-YIU, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE SHIU KA-FAI, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE YUNG HOI-YAN, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE CHAN CHUN-YING, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE LUK CHUNG-HUNG, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE LAU KWOK-FAN, M.H., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE KENNETH LAU IP-KEUNG, B.B.S., M.H., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE VINCENT CHENG WING-SHUN, M.H., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE TONY TSE WAI-CHUEN, B.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE DOREEN KONG YUK-FOON

THE HONOURABLE CHU KWOK-KEUNG

THE HONOURABLE STANLEY LI SAI-WING, M.H.

DR THE HONOURABLE HOEY SIMON LEE, M.H., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE ROBERT LEE WAI-WANG

THE HONOURABLE DOMINIC LEE TSZ-KING

IR THE HONOURABLE LEE CHUN-KEUNG

DR THE HONOURABLE TIK CHI-YUEN, S.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE STANLEY NG CHAU-PEI, S.B.S.

DR THE HONOURABLE JOHNNY NG KIT-CHONG, M.H.

THE HONOURABLE CHAU SIU-CHUNG

DR THE HONOURABLE CHOW MAN-KONG

DR THE HONOURABLE DAVID LAM TZIT-YUEN

THE HONOURABLE LAM CHUN-SING

THE HONOURABLE NIXIE LAM LAM

DR THE HONOURABLE DENNIS LAM SHUN-CHIU, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE LAM SAN-KEUNG, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE ANDREW LAM SIU-LO, S.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE DUNCAN CHIU

THE HONOURABLE YIU PAK-LEUNG, M.H.

DR THE HONOURABLE WENDY HONG WEN

THE HONOURABLE DENNIS LEUNG TSZ-WING, M.H.

THE HONOURABLE LEUNG MAN-KWONG, M.H.

THE HONOURABLE EDWARD LEUNG HEI

THE HONOURABLE KENNETH LEUNG YUK-WAI, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE CHAN YUET-MING, M.H.

THE HONOURABLE ROCK CHEN CHUNG-NIN, S.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE CHAN PUI-LEUNG

THE HONOURABLE CHAN YUNG, B.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE SUNNY TAN

THE HONOURABLE JUDY CHAN KAPUI, M.H.

THE HONOURABLE MAGGIE CHAN MAN-KI, M.H., J.P.

IR THE HONOURABLE CHAN SIU-HUNG, J.P.

THE HONOURABLE CHAN HOI-YAN

THE HONOURABLE JOEPHY CHAN WING-YAN

THE HONOURABLE CHAN HOK-FUNG, M.H., J.P.

IR THE HONOURABLE GARY ZHANG XINYU

THE HONOURABLE LILLIAN KWOK LING-LAI

THE HONOURABLE BENSON LUK HON-MAN

DR THE HONOURABLE KENNEDY WONG YING-HO, B.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE EDMUND WONG CHUN-SEK

THE HONOURABLE KINGSLEY WONG KWOK, B.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE YANG WING-KIT

REVD CANON THE HONOURABLE PETER DOUGLAS KOON HO-MING,
B.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE TANG FEI, M.H.

THE HONOURABLE TANG KA-PIU, B.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE LAI TUNG-KWOK, G.B.S., I.D.S.M., J.P.

PROF THE HONOURABLE LAU CHI-PANG, B.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE LOUIS LOONG HON-BIU

DR THE HONOURABLE NGAN MAN-YU

THE HONOURABLE CARMEN KAN WAI-MUN

DR THE HONOURABLE TAN YUEHENG, J.P.

DR THE HONOURABLE SO CHEUNG-WING, S.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE YIM KONG

THE HONOURABLE ADRIAN PEDRO HO KING-HONG

THE HONOURABLE SHANG HAILONG

PROF THE HONOURABLE CHAN WING-KWONG

PROF THE HONOURABLE WILLIAM WONG KAM-FAI, M.H.

MEMBERS ABSENT:

THE HONOURABLE MRS REGINA IP LAU SUK-YEE, G.B.M., G.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE MARTIN LIAO CHEUNG-KONG, G.B.S., J.P.

THE HONOURABLE HOLDEN CHOW HO-DING

THE HONOURABLE LAM SO-WAI

THE HONOURABLE KENNETH FOK KAI-KONG, J.P.

PUBLIC OFFICERS ATTENDING:

THE HONOURABLE CHRISTOPHER HUI CHING-YU, G.B.S., J.P.
SECRETARY FOR FINANCIAL SERVICES AND THE TREASURY

DR LIBBY LEE HA-YUN, J.P.
UNDER SECRETARY FOR HEALTH AND
SECRETARY FOR HEALTH

THE HONOURABLE LAM SAI-HUNG, G.B.S., J.P.
SECRETARY FOR TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS

THE HONOURABLE BERNADETTE LINN HON-HO, J.P.
SECRETARY FOR DEVELOPMENT

DR THE HONOURABLE CHOI YUK-LIN, J.P.
SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION

PROF THE HONOURABLE SUN DONG, J.P.
SECRETARY FOR INNOVATION, TECHNOLOGY AND INDUSTRY

THE HONOURABLE CHRIS SUN YUK-HAN, J.P.
SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND WELFARE

MR LIU CHUN-SAN, J.P.
UNDER SECRETARY FOR TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS

MR CLARENCE LEUNG WANG-CHING, B.B.S., J.P.
UNDER SECRETARY FOR HOME AND YOUTH AFFAIRS

CLERKS IN ATTENDANCE:

MR KENNETH CHEN WEI-ON, S.B.S., SECRETARY GENERAL

MS DORA WAI, DEPUTY SECRETARY GENERAL

MS AMY YU, ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL

MS MIRANDA HON, ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL

LAYING OF PAPERS ON THE TABLE OF THE COUNCIL

The following papers were laid on the table under Rule 21(2) of the Rules of Procedure:

Papers

Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications

Annual Report 2021-22 (including Financial Report and Independent Auditor's Report)

Vocational Training Council

Annual Report and Financial Report 2021/2022 (including Independent Auditor's Report)

Correctional Services Department Welfare Fund

Report by the Commissioner of Correctional Services of Hong Kong Incorporated on the Administration of the Fund, Financial Statements and Report of the Director of Audit for the year ended 31 March 2022

Report of the Public Accounts Committee on Report No. 78 of the Director of Audit on the Results of Value for Money Audits
(February 2023—P.A.C. Report No. 78)

Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the Reports of the Director of Audit on the Accounts of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region for the year ended 31 March 2022 and the Results of Value for Money Audits (Report No. 79)
(February 2023—P.A.C. Report No. 79)

Report No. 4/2023 of the House Committee on Consideration of Subsidiary Legislation and Other Instruments

ADDRESS

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Address. Mr SHIU Ka-fai will address the Council on the “Public Accounts Committee Reports No. 78 and No. 79”.

Mr SHIU Ka-fai, please speak.

Report of the Public Accounts Committee on Report No. 78 of the Director of Audit on the Results of Value for Money Audits (February 2023—P.A.C. Report No. 78) and Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the Reports of the Director of Audit on the Accounts of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region for the year ended 31 March 2022 and the Results of Value for Money Audits (Report No. 79) (February 2023—P.A.C. Report No. 79)

MR SHIU KA-FAI (in Cantonese): President, on behalf of the Public Accounts Committee (“the Committee”), I submit the P.A.C. Reports No. 78 and No. 79, which cover the chapters in the Director of Audit’s Reports No. 78 and No. 79, as well as the Administration’s recommendations and follow-up actions on the previous reports.

Having considered the above Audit Reports, the Committee decided to hold public hearings on the three chapters involving issues of a more serious nature, including Chapter 2 on “Licensing services for drivers” and Chapter 3 on “Management of the development at Anderson Road project” of the Director of Audit’s Report No. 78, as well as Chapter 1 on “Continuing Education Fund” of the Director of Audit’s Report No. 79. The reports tabled today cover only the two chapters respectively on “Licensing services for drivers” and “Continuing Education Fund”. The Committee is still following up on “Management of the development at Anderson Road project” and will submit a supplemental report in due course. I will now briefly report on the conclusions and recommendations of the public hearings in respect of this round of reports.

Regarding the chapter on “Licensing services for drivers”, the Committee is mainly concerned about the provision of driving test services for non-commercial vehicles. In respect of written tests, the Committee expresses serious concern that the Transport Department (“TD”) had not updated the relevant question banks between August 2000 and September 2020, and urges TD to devise a mechanism for regular and timely updating of the question banks, so as to ensure that candidates are well acquainted with the road safety legislation.

In respect of road tests, as pointed out in the Audit Report, the Committee expresses serious concern and finds it unacceptable that the percentage increase of waiting time for road tests for private cars and motor cycles ranged from 30% to 284% at different driving test centres (“DTCs”) for the period from 2015 to 2021, while the number of DTCs failing to achieve utilization rate of more than 80%

increased from five in 2015 to seven in 2019. Moreover, the Committee expresses disappointment that TD, despite having reviewed the duty reporting arrangement for Driving Examiners (“DEs”) in 2019, had not streamlined the process and used the time saved to conduct more road tests to meet the urgent need. The Committee strongly urges that TD should devise measures to address the problem of excessively long waiting time for road tests, and requests TD to review afresh the duty reporting arrangement for DEs and report the outcome of the review to the Committee.

The Committee also recommends that TD should reinstate and draw up a new performance pledge for conducting road tests for public reference, and collect data from candidates and consider whether measures should be taken to ensure that they have received sufficient driving training before taking road tests, so as to reduce the number of repeaters and enhance road safety.

Regarding the chapter on “Continuing Education Fund”, the Committee notes that the Labour and Welfare Bureau (“LWB”) is responsible for overseeing the operation of the Continuing Education Fund (“CEF”); the Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency (“WFSFAA”) is responsible for the administration of CEF; and the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (“HKCAAVQ”) is responsible for providing advisory service on the implementation of CEF and monitoring the quality of CEF courses. The Committee expresses grave concern that LWB has not been able to effectively monitor the inspection work performed by HKCAAVQ. In particular, HKCAAVQ applied the same basis of calculation for service fees to both successful and unsuccessful surprise inspections for LWB. The Committee recommends that LWB should review the content of the service agreements with HKCAAVQ to rectify any irregularities identified.

The Committee expresses serious concern about WFSFAA’s inadequacies in conducting inspections of CEF course providers, and suggests that LWB should regularly review the mode and number of inspections conducted by WFSFAA and HKCAAVQ in order to enhance the efficiency of their inspection work. Noting that LWB will organize joint inspections with WFSFAA and HKCAAVQ on a trial basis, the Committee has requested LWB to revert to it on the effectiveness assessment results. Moreover, the Committee expresses grave concern that WFSFAA has failed to identify course providers’ non-compliances with the CEF terms and conditions during its inspections. In particular, some course providers promoted CEF courses as a means of paving the way for emigration, which was

not compatible with the aim of CEF. The Committee strongly recommends that LWB and WFSFAA should step up inspections and take regulatory actions as appropriate against those course providers, and incorporate in the CEF terms and conditions specific guidelines and requirements in relation to the safeguarding of national security.

The Committee also strongly recommends that LWB should make good use of information technology to enhance the operational effectiveness of CEF. This will not only enable LWB to enhance its monitoring over the work of WFSFAA and HKCAAVQ, but also provide a one-stop online service platform for CEF claimants and facilitate electronic submission of applications for CEF course registrations as well as supporting documents by course providers.

Lastly, I would like to record my appreciation of the contributions made by members of the Committee. We are grateful to the witnesses who appeared before the Committee. Moreover, I would like to extend my gratitude to the Director of Audit and his colleagues for their unfailing support.

Thank you, President.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Questions. First question.

Solving the manpower shortage problem in the aviation industry

1. **MS NIXIE LAM** (in Cantonese): *It has been reported that the COVID-19 epidemic has dealt a heavy blow to Hong Kong's aviation industry, resulting in a substantial loss of manpower in the industry. Some members of the aviation industry have relayed that with the relaxation of anti-epidemic measures in various places, the demand for air transport is expected to increase rapidly, and the problem of manpower succession in the aviation industry will become more severe by then. Such situation will not only affect the supply of outbound flights, but also make it difficult to meet the requirements placed upon Hong Kong in the context of the overall development of the country, putting Hong Kong in danger of losing its important status as an international aviation hub. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *whether the authorities know the manpower demand and supply situation of various job types in the aviation industry, including the total number of employed persons in 2022 and the number of existing job vacancies, and whether they have assessed if the relevant manpower in the aviation industry is sufficient to meet the demand arising from the resumption of growth in passenger and cargo flights;*
- (2) *of the support measures implemented by the Government to assist the industry in solving the manpower shortage problem, and the respective effectiveness of such measures; and*
- (3) *given that some members of the industry have relayed that some job types in the aviation industry, such as pilots, aircraft maintenance engineers, runway maintenance personnel and air cargo loadmasters, are facing an acute shortage of manpower, whether the authorities will consider including the aforesaid job types in the “Talent List of Hong Kong”, and importing the aforesaid types of workers at or below the level of technician under the “Supplementary Labour Scheme” as short-term measures to solve the manpower shortage problem; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?*

SECRETARY FOR TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS (in Cantonese): President, Hong Kong is an international aviation hub. In view of the severe impact of the pandemic on Hong Kong’s aviation industry, the Government and the Airport Authority Hong Kong (“AAHK”) respectively rolled out various relief measures during the pandemic in support of the industry. The Government also continued to fully support AAHK in implementing the Three-Runway System project and other projects under the Airport City vision in order to boost the competitiveness of Hong Kong International Airport (“HKIA”).

Since the Government relaxed inbound control measures, passenger throughput of HKIA has been recovering steadily. As of January this year, air traffic movement and passenger throughput have respectively recovered to 50% and 35% of pre-pandemic levels. With the cancellation of the vast majority of the inbound control measures, as well as the full resumption of normal travel between Hong Kong and the Mainland, we believe that Hong Kong’s aviation industry will continue to recover, and the manpower demand in the industry will rise accordingly.

In response to the three parts of Ms LAM's question, my reply is as follows:

- (1) During the pandemic, the manpower level in the aviation industry decreased with the plunge in Hong Kong's air traffic volume, which has led to the manpower shortage faced by the industry now. In the light of this, the Chief Executive has in the 2022 Policy Address tasked the Transport and Logistics Bureau to review the labour shortage situation in the transport sector, including the aviation industry, and draw up solutions. In this connection, the Government has been liaising with the aviation industry to understand their views and needs. According to the rough estimate of AAHK in end 2022, there are about 53 000 people working at HKIA. In order to have a better grasp of the manpower situation in the airport community, AAHK is now conducting a fresh round of airport manpower survey, which is expected to be completed within this quarter. After consolidating the views of the industry and reviewing the results of the relevant survey, the Government will, in association with AAHK, consider the feasibility of various options, with a view to coming up with relevant measures in the second half of this year so as to drive the sustainable manpower development in the aviation industry.
- (2) In face of the manpower shortage in the aviation industry, in order to maintain the competitiveness of HKIA amid the recovery of the aviation industry, the Government has been maintaining close contact and communication with AAHK and the aviation industry, with a range of measures taken to relieve the short-term pressure on manpower within the industry.

In terms of recruitment and staff deployment, AAHK has cooperated with the Labour Department and workers' unions respectively in organizing job fairs for HKIA. Such recruitment activities will continue to be organized in the coming months. In addition, AAHK rolled out a staff pooling pilot scheme in December last year, whereby AAHK arranges a small team of staff whose ramp support service can be hired by airport operators when they are short-staffed. AAHK will consider expanding the scheme to other job types in future.

With regard to improving airport staff's benefits, apart from extending the temporary measures under the Public Transport Fare Subsidy Scheme as announced earlier, the Government has also been

encouraging public transport operators to offer concessions to eligible airport staff. On the other hand, AAHK has constructed the HKIA Community Building for the airport community, with the restaurant, preschool, fitness centre and other facilities therein opening in phases to increase the attractiveness of working at HKIA. Furthermore, AAHK will implement other measures that will leave the airport community with more financial resources for hiring and improving staff's remuneration packages, including extending waivers and concessions of some airport fees. The Government is also exploring with AAHK ways to help and encourage the aviation industry to hire more staff and retain talents, such as improving transport arrangements for staff and providing financial incentives.

As for medium- to long-term manpower shortage, AAHK has been proactively introducing innovation and technology to relieve staffing pressure at HKIA, such as using autonomous tractors for baggage delivery and rolling out "Flight Token" to allow passengers to pass through airport checkpoints through facial recognition.

In terms of training, the Hong Kong International Aviation Academy ("HKIAA") provides various aviation-related training courses. In addition, the Government is also expanding the eligibility criteria of and relaxing the employment requirements on graduates benefiting from various aviation-related training and incentive schemes supported by the Maritime and Aviation Training Fund, with a view to encouraging more young people to enrol in aviation-related technical training courses or professional programmes for their career development and for attracting new blood for the aviation industry.

Besides, to nurture more young people to join the aviation industry in Hong Kong and the Greater Bay Area ("GBA") as a whole, HKIAA will, in collaboration with the relevant aviation training institutions in the Mainland, launch the GBA Youth Aviation Industry Internship Programme whereby students from Hong Kong and the Mainland will be posted to HKIA and other airports in GBA respectively for internship, thereby helping to support the long-term manpower development of the aviation industry in Hong Kong and GBA. The programme will be launched in the first half of 2023.

- (3) The Talent List of Hong Kong aims to attract high quality professional talents who are most needed in the immediate to medium term for the development of Hong Kong's economy. As far as pilots are concerned, to safeguard local pilots' employment opportunities and encourage local airlines to train cadet pilots, we consider that the existing market availability test under the General Employment Policy should continue to apply to pilots so as to align with the Government's policy objective of nurturing local aviation talents.

As for workers at or below the level of technician, the Government appreciates that some aviation industry practitioners have suggested importing labour from other parts of GBA to meet the manpower need on the airport frontline. The Government will listen to and carefully consider suggestions from the industry, AAHK and other relevant stakeholders. For all proposals involving importation of labour, the Government will consider the actual need of the industry and the impact on the local labour market, with a view to striking a balance between them. Thank you, President.

MS NIXIE LAM (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. After listening to the Secretary's reply, I am thankful to the Secretary for saying that the relevant survey will be conducted in the first quarter, but it seems that the measures mentioned in the reply are just like distant water which can hardly put out a nearby fire.*

The aviation industry has been Hong Kong's gateway to the world, affecting the pace of recovery of many different industries in Hong Kong. As mentioned by the Secretary a while ago, the Chief Executive stated in his Policy Address last year that the authorities would review the labour shortage situation in the transport sector. On this point, will the Bureau launch a pilot project in the airport restricted area ("ARA") and appropriately allow some imported technical personnel to work in ARA upon completion of the above mentioned survey to be conducted in the first quarter, so as to alleviate the manpower shortage problem? Thank you.

SECRETARY FOR TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS (in Cantonese): President, the sustainability of manpower resources of the aviation industry is crucial to consolidating Hong Kong's status as an international aviation hub. As

a matter of fact, in the course of resumption to normalcy, many airports have encountered manpower bottlenecks, and Hong Kong is no exception. For this reason, the Government has maintained communication with AAHK and the aviation industry and introduced various measures to alleviate manpower shortage in the aviation industry.

Indeed, we have heard the voices of the industry. Pointing out that some operations are farther away from HKIA and a lot of work is carried out within ARA, the industry players have asked whether labour importation schemes can be implemented. Having heard their voices, we are, in collaboration with AAHK, exploring the feasibility of different options—this is one of the options—so as to drive the sustainable manpower development in the aviation industry. Thank you, President.

MR CHAU SIU-CHUNG (in Cantonese): *President, the difficulty in hiring airport staff is related to the short-sightedness of the human resources policies of airport operators. When business is flourishing, the operators are only willing to hire contract staff and outsourced workers to address the staffing problem, and they have never attached importance to building a stable team with a sense of belonging, which is one of the causes of the manpower shortage.*

Moreover, to airport staff, apart from remunerations and benefits, long travelling hours and exorbitant transport expenses are of their utmost concern. Even though some bus companies have offered negligible concessions, they are now paying \$50 to \$60 for travelling to and from HKIA for work every day.

President, many countries/regions have built their airports on the outskirts of the city, and their governments will provide airport staff with free transport or even accommodation services, i.e. dormitories. Our government has done nothing in this regard.

With the commissioning of the third runway in 2024, I believe the manpower demand of HKIA will be doubled. I would like to ask the Government if it would ask public transport operators to directly provide free services or newer discounts or concessions to airport staff. Alternatively, will the Government ask airport operators to directly purchase staff discounts from bus companies for airport staff to facilitate their travelling to and from HKIA? Thank you.

SECRETARY FOR TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. I know that individual bus companies and the MTR Corporation Limited have been providing concessions to eligible airport staff, so as to alleviate the burden of transport expenses on them. The Member has just made some proposals, such as requesting some companies at HKIA to provide free transport services. We will certainly explore this proposal with industry players and companies in the airport community because it can actually facilitate commuting of airport staff to and from HKIA, especially given that the round-the-clock operation of HKIA is relatively special and that the working hours of airport staff are always different than those of ordinary workers. In view of this, we will actively explore the proposal with the companies and transport operators concerned.

The Government has announced in the Policy Address that the special temporary measures under the Public Transport Fare Subsidy Scheme will be extended for another six months until April this year. The Government will continue to provide commuters with a subsidy amounting to one third of their monthly public transport expenses in excess of \$200, subject to a maximum of \$500 per month. This measure will also alleviate the burden of transport expenses on airport staff. We will continue to explore with AAHK and the industry about how to help the industry to recruit and retain staff through improving transport arrangements for them. Thank you, President.

MS DOREEN KONG (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. The Secretary has mentioned in his reply that AAHK is conducting an airport manpower survey but I think it is lacking awareness because they explicitly know that HKIA will resume normal operation sooner or later, and HKIA and the aviation industry are indeed crucial in maintaining our position as an international financial centre. May I ask the Secretary why an assessment has not been conducted in advance and why have adequate preparations not been made to meet the possible demand for additional manpower? Thank you.*

SECRETARY FOR TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. As we all know, it has been three years since the outbreak of the pandemic. At the very beginning, we all wondered whether normalcy could be resumed within half a year, just like what happened during the SARS outbreak in 2003. Yet, it was actually impossible for us to guess what exactly would happen.

In regard to airport operation, though we could not say that it was almost at a standstill in the past two years, the operation was only about 5% of that in the past. As of the second half of last year, there were signs indicating that the operation of HKIA was about to resume. We considered that conducting a manpower survey at that time could enable us to more accurately grasp the situation of staff wastage for various job types. Late last year, though normalcy was not fully resumed, AAHK estimated that there were 53 000 employees. In light of the pace of normalcy resumption, I think that conducting an airport manpower survey at this juncture can help us get a better grasp of the relevant situation, and as the survey will not take long, it can be completed within this quarter. In addition, we will not wait until the completion of the survey to take actions. We have started to explore with the industry and AAHK different options for providing additional manpower within the shortest time. We are making efforts to arrange for additional manpower. Thank you, President.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Dr Kennedy WONG, do you intend to ask a question?

(Dr Kennedy WONG indicated that he did not intend to ask a question)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr YIU Pak-leung, please raise your question.

MR YIU PAK-LEUNG (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. The Secretary has told us in the main reply that there are about 53 000 people working at HKIA, yet he has not revealed to us the current shortfall of manpower and how many staff will be needed in the future. I believe that the three runways will be simultaneously in use by 2024. With the resumption of normal travel domestically and externally, there will be an acute shortage of manpower at HKIA. Since the fourth quarter of last year, some airlines have reflected to me ...*

(There was noise interference with the broadcasting system in the Chamber)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr YIU Pak-leung, please move your mobile phone away.

(Mr YIU Pak-leung moved his mobile phone away)

MR YIU PAK-LEUNG (in Cantonese): *Since the fourth quarter of last year, some airlines wanted to resume certain routes which had been suspended or increase the frequency of flights. However, the aviation industry had a shortage of not only pilots, flight crews and engineers but also ground staff, which created immense difficulties for many airlines intending to increase the frequency of flights or resume certain routes. Although the Bureau has medium- and long-term plans, what short-term concrete measures do they have to help the aviation industry to restore capacity as soon as possible? The aviation industry is the upstream sector of Hong Kong's tourism industry and its recovery is crucial to speeding up the overall recovery of the tourism industry and also to the Hong Kong economy as a whole. In view of this, what feasible short-term emergency measures do the Bureau have to solve the manpower shortage problem as soon as possible?*

SECRETARY FOR TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. In my main reply, I have touched upon a series of short-term measures with a view to alleviating manpower shortage in the industry.

Mr YIU has talked about flights a while ago. In fact, apart from the cabin crew on flights, ground staff are also important. This explains why AAHK rolled out a staff pooling pilot scheme last December. As some airport operators may be short-staffed for baggage delivery after taking up certain job offers, AAHK rolled out this staff pooling pilot scheme after consulting them. AAHK would hire some staff on its own, and of course, it would only be a small team. It is because these operators already have sufficient manpower for baggage delivery and other services, but there may sometimes be mismatches. Therefore, we want to adopt a central pool system. If these operators are short-staffed at peak times, they may hire the ramp support service to resolve problems relating to baggage delivery and other services.

I have also answered the Member's question about transport expenses. Another newly available facility is the HKIA Community Building of AAHK. The building is not only for use by the AAHK staff but also by those working at HKIA. There are facilities such as a preschool and a restaurant. We hope that the attractiveness of working at HKIA will be increased after resumption of normalcy, which will facilitate staff retention and hiring of additional staff. Thank you, President.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Second question.

Promoting the development of innovation and technology

2. **MR SHANG HAILONG** (in Cantonese): *President, the Government earlier on promulgated the “Hong Kong Innovation and Technology Development Blueprint” to establish a clear development path for Hong Kong’s innovation and technology (“I&T”) work. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *given that the Government has put forward a number of initiatives to “compete for enterprises” in the latest Policy Address, whether the Innovation, Technology and Industry Bureau will strengthen collaboration with the “Office for Attracting Strategic Enterprises” in formulating the relevant plans, and set clear key performance indicators for the relevant work, so as to facilitate the Legislative Council and the public to monitor the implementation progress of the relevant work; and*
- (2) *whether, in order to pool together more technology talents, the Government will consider formulating a special mechanism with the Mainland Government to provide more facilitation measures for the future development of major I&T cooperation hubs including the San Tin Technopole and the Loop, such as allowing Mainland I&T personnel who hold legal travel documents and need to commute frequently between Hong Kong and the Mainland to adopt an approach of “leaving early and returning late” in travelling between the two places?*

SECRETARY FOR INNOVATION, TECHNOLOGY AND INDUSTRY (in Putonghua): President, promoting the development of innovation and technology (“I&T”) is the work focus of this term of Government. The Government has promulgated the Hong Kong Innovation and Technology Development Blueprint (“the Blueprint”) at the end of last year to lay out the general directions and major strategies for Hong Kong’s future I&T development in the coming 5 to 10 years from the perspective of a top-level planning. The Blueprint has set out major policy suggestions under four broad development directions, including enhancing the I&T ecosystem and enlarging the I&T talent pool.

Having consulted the Office for Attracting Strategic Enterprises (“OASES”), a reply to the various parts of the question raised by Mr SHANG is as follows:

- (1) In his 2022 Policy Address announced in October last year, the Chief Executive set the objective of promoting technology industry development through attracting industries and talents to Hong Kong, primarily focusing on technology industries in which we enjoy clear advantages and with strategic significance such as life and health technology, artificial intelligence and data science, and advanced manufacturing and new energy technology. The goal is to attract not less than 100 high-potential or representative I&T enterprises to set up or expand their businesses in Hong Kong in the coming five years, including at least 20 top-notch I&T enterprises.

The Innovation, Technology and Industry Bureau (“ITIB”) is now making all-out efforts on this front in collaboration with OASES. We have been contacting various Mainland and overseas I&T enterprises from key industries to introduce the advantages and latest development of the I&T industry in Hong Kong and invite them to set up their businesses in Hong Kong. Promoting the development of the technology industry requires the concerted efforts and collaboration of different stakeholders in society. We will bring the whole society together to attract business and investment, thereby achieving the goal set in the Policy Address. ITIB and its departments, as well as I&T parks that have close connection with the industry, such as the Hong Kong Science and Technology Park (“HKSTP”) and Cyberport, will fully leverage the network of our various I&T stakeholders, assisting the outreach to enterprises from the Mainland and overseas to tell the good stories of Hong Kong.

The Blueprint has set macro development targets for Hong Kong’s I&T development in the coming 5 to 10 years and put forth reference development indicators covering research and development (“R&D”), start-up, talent, industry development, etc. This will allow stakeholders to review the implementation of various strategies under the Blueprint. We will review the progress of various indicators periodically and brief the relevant Panel of the Legislative Council (“LegCo”) when appropriate. We will also review the need to update relevant indicators in response to national planning, local and global economic and social development from time to time.

- (2) Under the Northern Metropolis Development Strategy, the San Tin Technopole will provide about 240 hectares of land for I&T-related uses, including the Loop of 87 hectares and other land around San Tin of about 150 hectares. Together with the Shenzhen I&T Zone, it will form the Shenzhen-Hong Kong Innovation and Technology Co-operation Zone (“Co-operation Zone”) in the Loop of approximately 540 hectares, which can combine the strengths of both Hong Kong and Shenzhen in pooling together Mainland and overseas talents, and become an essential propeller for the development of an international I&T centre in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (“GBA”). The target of the San Tin Technopole is to become an integrated community which can attract I&T talents and provide them with facilitation to work and settle. This would provide better support for Hong Kong’s I&T development and attract Mainland and overseas enterprises, research institutes and higher education institutions to set up presence and open up new industries, thereby developing a stronger I&T development platform and building a comprehensive I&T ecosystem and industry chain.

The country has all along been the strong support for Hong Kong’s I&T development. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (“SAR”) Government has been in close liaison with the relevant Central Government ministries and the Guangdong Provincial Government to actively explore measures to facilitate convenient cross-boundary flow of innovation elements such as talents, materials, capital and information, including actively providing facilitation to non-Chinese nationals residing in Hong Kong to travel to other cities of GBA for business, research, exchanges and visits. Meanwhile, in order to jointly attract talents and investment to the Co-operation Zone, the governments of Hong Kong and Shenzhen signed a cooperation agreement in 2021 for the development of the Co-operation Zone and put forward a joint policy package covering support measures on facilitating flow of talents, scientific research resources, business development, etc. The SAR Government will continue to explore actively with relevant authorities in the Mainland measures facilitating the cross-boundary flow of talents between the two places, in particular I&T talents working in the Loop in future. We will make timely announcement. Thank you, President.

MR SHANG HAILONG (in Putonghua): *Thank you, President. I thank Secretary Prof SUN Dong for answering the first part of my question just now. He has mentioned that 100 representative and high-potential enterprises will be attracted to Hong Kong in the coming five years, and 20 of them will be top-notch enterprises. So, we look forward to seeing the results and hope to see them soon.*

However, the Secretary has not answered the second part of my question. Regarding the second part of my question, the Secretary has only mentioned that Hong Kong and Shenzhen signed a cooperation arrangement to facilitate the flow of talents; at the same time, the Government will in future continue to deepen some measures facilitating the flow of talents between the two places. However, our concern is that in the Chief Executive's Question and Answer Session earlier, the Chief Executive already proposed to fully support some policies on talent exchanges by using the Loop as a pilot site. Yet, it seems that we cannot see from the Secretary's reply today any progress in this regard. Therefore, we hope we can ask for more details or at least some timetables to enable us to see the progress of the Government's work in this area. Thank you.

SECRETARY FOR INNOVATION, TECHNOLOGY AND INDUSTRY (in Putonghua): Just now, Mr SHANG asked about talent exchanges in the Loop. As everyone knows, the Loop is currently scattered with mobile cabin isolation facilities. So, the first thing we need to do is to draw up a clear timeline for properly handling these anti-epidemic facilities. To this end, the Government already has a clear timeline internally, and it is hoped that the Loop will be reverted to its original I&T uses soon. The next step is how to position the development of the Loop. We have already done intensive planning, including the plan that both the Loop and the San Tin area will be developed in the form of industrial parks. On this basis, what must we do in the third step? We must commence the work of attracting business and investment, so that the relevant industries can set up presence as soon as possible. In this process, we will explore the issue of the flow of talents. For now, we have communicated with the Mainland Government closely. As I have mentioned earlier, we will actively explore measures to facilitate the cross-boundary flow of innovation elements such as talents, materials, capital and information, implying that not only the flow of talents but also information, capital, and projects are included. This is an integrated and holistic plan, so all the work is being done in an orderly manner. Thank you, President.

MS CHAN YUET-MING (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. Regarding the convenient customs clearance arrangements in the Northern Metropolis for promoting the flow of talents, I also asked a question at the Chief Executive's Question and Answer Session in October last year. Quoting the farming permit system as an example, I directly asked the Chief Executive whether he would consider introducing measures in the Northern Metropolis to facilitate customs clearance for talents. The Chief Executive said on that day that he would surely support smoother exchanges and communication between the people of the two places, open up the relevant channels with the Mainland and use the Loop as a pilot site. The Secretary has also mentioned in his reply today that timely announcement will be made on measures facilitating the cross-boundary flow of I&T talents working in the Loop.*

My follow-up question is about the arrangements facilitating customs clearance for talents. Can more details be given in this respect? Also, apart from I&T talents, will the same facilitation arrangements be applied to other talents working in the I&T parks? Thank you.

SECRETARY FOR INNOVATION, TECHNOLOGY AND INDUSTRY (in Putonghua): *Thank you, President. I also thank Ms CHAN for her question. In fact, the SAR Government has set up the Steering Group on Integration into National Development. One of the issues we have closely monitored is how to expedite the close interaction and communication between the talents of the two places, especially technology talents. For example, we are actively providing facilitation to non-Chinese nationals residing in Hong Kong to travel to other cities of GBA for business, research, exchanges and visits. Recently, Guangdong Province has just announced that scientific research talents in GBA will be allowed to come to Hong Kong and their stay will be extended from seven days to one month. These are all being taken forward in an orderly manner. Furthermore, we are looking forward to the future of the Loop as a special zone within the special administrative region, where talents can move freely in and out of the Loop. To this end, the establishment of some of our facilities and cross-boundary transportation arrangements are all under planning. Thank you.*

PROF WILLIAM WONG (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. Last year ...*

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Prof William WONG, you have not put on a microphone.

PROF WILLIAM WONG (in Cantonese): *I am sorry. Thank you, President. Secretary, in the Policy Address last year, it was proposed that through the \$5-billion Strategic Tech Fund (“STF”), the collaboration with OASES and other complementary measures, not less than 100 high-potential and representative I&T enterprises will be attracted to set up or expand their businesses in Hong Kong in the coming five years. Have the authorities formulated any criteria for the operation of STF? Have the authorities considered using STF to provide funding support for rent, R&D, recruitment of talents and so on? Thank you, President.*

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I would like to remind Prof WONG and other Members not to speak with their mobile phones in their hands because the signals from the mobile phones will cause interference to the on-site public address system. Members may place their mobile phones further away or use mobile phones that do not cause interference.

Secretary, please reply.

SECRETARY FOR INNOVATION, TECHNOLOGY AND INDUSTRY (in Putonghua): Thank you, President. I also thank Prof WONG for his question. Diversifying venture financing channels is critical to accelerating Hong Kong’s I&T development, especially supporting the development of technological start-ups. The current-term Government has made a record by introducing co-investment schemes. It has also consolidated STF mentioned by the Member just now, the Hong Kong Growth Portfolio and the GBA Investment Fund and so on, amounting to an investment of \$62 billion. Moreover, at the end of last year, the Hong Kong Investment Corporation Limited was established, with the Government taking the lead and the industry actively participating in it. The composition of the relevant committees will be announced soon. What is more, in the course of attracting business and investment, we have received many proposals, which have been forwarded to OASES and the relevant committees. Therefore, I believe many investment measures will be realized very soon.

In attracting business and investment, we have several principles on how to better help the I&T development in Hong Kong with such money. In addition to STF mentioned by the Member, we emphasize the need to provide more support to enterprises in the strategic areas that have been identified in Hong Kong, including enterprises that have the potential to be developed into the world's top-notch enterprises in the relevant fields of Hong Kong, and enterprises that have the potential to provide more employment opportunities for Hong Kong, especially for young people. Of course, we also need to see if there is a possibility of capitalizing on Hong Kong's strengths to serve the country's needs. I believe that with the passage of time, many results will gradually take shape. Thank you.

IR DR LO WAI-KWOK (in Cantonese): *President, I have repeatedly stressed that talents and land are the two most important elements in the I&T development. We have recently heard that the SAR Government has made some progress in attracting talents and key enterprises to Hong Kong, but in respect of land provision, it may take too long for the case of the Northern Metropolis as mentioned in the Secretary's main reply. Therefore, what we really want to know is: While identifying enterprises or attracting talents, we also have talents in Hong Kong who are willing to devote themselves to this industry, so what about the land required, including industrial land and residential land for providing accommodation for talents?*

SECRETARY FOR INNOVATION, TECHNOLOGY AND INDUSTRY (in Putonghua): Thank Ir Dr LO for his supplementary question. The question raised by Ir Dr LO is very crucial. As I have said earlier, there are two major factors in Hong Kong's I&T development. Apart from talents, land is the second one. I can tell Ir Dr LO with great pleasure that the cooperation among various departments of the current-term Government in using these key resources has been greatly enhanced. For example, our ITIB and the Development Bureau ("DEVB") have been sparing no effort in maintaining communication with each other over the past six months. DEVB has also been actively supporting our work on I&T development. San Tin and the Loop are cases in point. The release time of many sites spanning many years originally has been reduced, and we are accelerating the release of such sites. For instance, we will maintain our original target of releasing the first batch of land in the Loop by the end of this year to attract business and investment. In the coming year, we will also start releasing the first batch of land in the San Tin area to attract business and investment.

In planning these I&T parks, we have also considered some infrastructure facilities required by talents. For instance, in the Loop which is only 87 hectares in size, we have, during its design stage, reserved a considerable area of land to provide accommodation for talents. Such an approach is also applicable to the San Tin area.

Besides, we are also actively working on land development in other places. For example, HKSTP has proposed to establish a second Advanced Manufacturing Centre. We have already identified the relevant land and are planning the related work. Some reclamation projects in the vicinity will also commence one after another in an orderly manner.

Apart from this, Ir Dr LO has talked about industrial development. A considerable amount of land will be required for developing top-notch enterprises and production lines—large production lines indeed. We are stepping up our efforts to draw up the relevant measures and may introduce some policies. These large top-notch enterprises require a relatively large area of land for development in Hong Kong, so we must find ways to meet their needs. Thank you.

MR YIM KONG (in Putonghua): *Thank you, President. The Government has indicated that it will actively explore innovative development models and put forward I&T development sites for developing I&T industry parks and advanced pilot production bases. Given that the introduction of private sector participation in the development is conducive to enhancing efficiency and making up for the shortage of government resources, may I ask the Secretary how the Government will consider cooperating with private enterprises? What are the modes of cooperation? What measures will be adopted recently to take this forward? Thank you, President.*

SECRETARY FOR INNOVATION, TECHNOLOGY AND INDUSTRY (in Putonghua): Thank you, President. I also thank Mr YIM Kong for his supplementary question. As I have mentioned earlier, from the end of this year to next year, we will release a batch of sites in the Loop and the San Tin area one after another. Our main objective is to attract the whole community, including private enterprises, to participate in developing these industrial parks.

Originally, the Government planned to build eight buildings in the Loop, and we are keeping this plan intact. For the remaining area, in addition to building some public infrastructure, we also hope that more private developers will participate in the development. We also wish to take this opportunity to bring top-notch industries from the Mainland and overseas to the Loop and the San Tin area, and to use these sites reasonably according to their enterprises' needs. The Government adopts a very open attitude towards this aspect. We also hope that quality industries from worldwide, including those from the Mainland, will come to Hong Kong to seize this rare historical development opportunity. Thank you.

MR DOMINIC LEE (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. Since the Chief Executive proposed the concepts of “competing for enterprises” and “OASES” in his recent Policy Address, we have seen from the media that there seems to be quite a lot of positive responses, but it appears that nothing concrete has been implemented so far. May I ask what challenges we are actually facing in the process of “competing for enterprises” or attracting business and investment from enterprises? Why do they still have reservations and refuse to come to Hong Kong? For example, what are our shortcomings compared with Singapore or other places, and what more can be done by the Government?*

SECRETARY FOR INNOVATION, TECHNOLOGY AND INDUSTRY (in Putonghua): It should be said that the Government's recently established “OASES” plays a very crucial role in coordinating the work of various departments in the process of attracting enterprises to Hong Kong. For example, building a large production line in Hong Kong will involve land planning, environmental protection, transportation, customs and logistics. Our bureau alone cannot achieve this, so a coordinating body is now required in the Government, and “OASES” can precisely play a very important role in this regard.

Regarding what the Member said about the current situation of attracting enterprises to Hong Kong, in fact, globally speaking, our work of attracting enterprises has just begun. When I talk to my friends overseas, they do not know what is going on in Hong Kong. So, we hope that LegCo Members, the Government and all sectors of the community will work together to “tell the good stories of Hong Kong” to the world, including our compatriots in the Mainland, so that the whole world knows what is happening in Hong Kong. As it is hoped that these enterprises will come to Hong Kong for development, let us work together in this regard, shall we?

MR LAI TUNG-KWOK (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. The Secretary has mentioned earlier that it is very important to facilitate the flow of top talents between the two places. It is very convenient for Hong Kong people to return to the Mainland with their Home Return Permits. Although the Mainland has recently announced that top talents can make multiple trips to Hong Kong and stay for 30 days each time, there seems to be an issue that has not been mentioned, that is, whether they come to Hong Kong as visitors or whether they can engage in certain forms of research work in Hong Kong. If that is the case, they will need to apply for employment visas. This is an issue that needs to be addressed. Similarly, some non-Chinese residents of Hong Kong need to apply for visas to return to the Mainland, which also needs to be dealt with. May I ask the Secretary how he intends to take this forward?*

SECRETARY FOR INNOVATION, TECHNOLOGY AND INDUSTRY (in Putonghua): I thank Mr LAI for raising a highly technical and important question. The SAR Government is now opening up its mindset. For example, the Mainland has just implemented the arrangement of allowing professionals to stay in Hong Kong for one month. Should we allow these professionals to work in Hong Kong for one month with remuneration and allow them to have some special working arrangements? We are discussing this issue within the Government. Now, we must emancipate our way of thinking and open up our mindset. These are the talents sent to Hong Kong from the Mainland, so we must use them well. These people should not just come as tourists, right?

Likewise, can some talents in Hong Kong, including non-Chinese nationals, engage in some business-related activities during their short-term stay in the Mainland, or even be remunerated? In short, we must explore this issue in depth by emancipating our way of thinking now. I am grateful to Mr LAI for raising this highly technical and important question. Thank you, President.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Third question.

Telemedicine services

3. **MR LAI TUNG-KWOK** (in Cantonese): *It is learnt that in 1998, the Hospital Authority (“HA”) started to provide remote video consultation service*

through video conferencing systems on a limited basis to a small number of elderly people living in residential care homes for the elderly (“RCHEs”). In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it knows if HA still provides the aforesaid consultation service at present; if HA does, of the number of consultations provided in each of the past five years, as well as the hospital clusters and hospitals providing the service; if not, the reasons for that;*
- (2) as it is proposed in the 2022 Policy Address that HA will make a wider use of telehealth services to improve patient experience, whether the authorities have plans to extend telehealth services to more RCHEs; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and*
- (3) as there are views that despite the publication of the “Ethical Guidelines on Practice of Telemedicine” and the related “Questions and Answers” by the Medical Council of Hong Kong, they are still unable to allay the concerns of the healthcare sector about the risk of bearing additional legal liability for providing telemedicine consultation services, whether the authorities have studied the enactment of legislation on telehealth services, so as to clarify the relevant legal liability issues; if so, of the outcome; if not, the reasons for that?*

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. I also thank Mr LAI for raising the question.

The Hospital Authority (“HA”) has been striving to enhance service quality and patient experience by various means, including optimizing the use of technology, particularly telehealth, which is one of the key development directions. In recent years, HA has been actively promoting telehealth such that suitable patients can receive services without having to visit hospitals or specialist out-patient clinics (“SOPCs”). Apart from providing tele-consultation services to confirmed COVID-19 patients during the epidemic, HA has also introduced telehealth services in various SOPCs, nurse clinics, allied health services and outreach services.

HA has all along been providing various services to support patients in residential care homes for the elderly (“RCHEs”). The Community Geriatric Assessment Teams (“CGATs”) of HA provide outreach services and visit RCHEs regularly, offering services to patients in RCHEs who suffer from more serious or complicated conditions and are unable to attend appointments at SOPCs due to mobility difficulties. At the same time, they also enhance training for carers in taking care of patients in RCHEs. Furthermore, CGATs provide medical and nursing care through telehealth to patients according to patients’ clinical needs and actual operation.

- (1) All seven hospital clusters of HA have been providing telehealth services to patients in RCHEs. Also, since the onset of the COVID-19 epidemic in Hong Kong in early 2020, all hospital clusters of HA have strengthened relevant services in response to relevant needs. From April to December in 2022, about 47 000 attendances were recorded for CGATs’ tele-consultation services, including the enhanced services for RCHEs during the COVID-19 epidemic. The enhanced services have been extended to subvented and private RCHEs as well.
- (2) Thanks to support from the Government, healthcare service providers and patients, the practice of telehealth has become increasingly popular amidst the COVID-19 epidemic. Individual private hospitals and medical institutions also provide telehealth support services for patients as well as COVID-19 infected persons. Such patients were able to receive healthcare services without leaving home during the critical period, which also helped to relieve overcrowded hospitals and clinics.

In this context and under the premise of optimizing the application of technology, the Chief Executive proposed in the 2022 Policy Address to strengthen telehealth services for improving patient experience. In this connection, HA will progressively apply telehealth to suitable non-COVID clinical services, including SOPC services. HA is currently piloting telehealth services through the “HA Go” mobile application and the Clinical Management System being used by healthcare staff. Who are suitable patients? HA will take the stability of patients’ conditions into consideration. Patients who do not require clinical examination but need to receive follow-up

consultations in Hong Kong will be provided with consultation service via telehealth. We are also aware of the limitations of telehealth in that it may not be applicable to all patients or every medical condition. For instance, for patients who require examination by doctors or have to undergo testing like blood taking or imaging, they would need to visit hospitals or clinics. For patients staying overseas, doctors in Hong Kong who are not licensed to practise in the place concerned in fact cannot provide medical services legally.

HA will regularly review the effectiveness of the application of telehealth, including enhancing the clinical workflow for providing tele-consultation services so as to better meet patients' needs and enhance cost-effectiveness. The Government will also continue to explore with HA opportunities to develop telehealth further. On the other hand, when developing primary healthcare and the associated eHealth supporting system, the Government will further study the feasibility of providing telehealth services and how to provide users with more convenience.

- (3) As for guidelines, the purpose of issuing the Ethical Guidelines on Practice of Telemedicine (“the Guidelines”) by the Medical Council of Hong Kong (“MCHK”) in December 2019 is to prevent doctors, when providing telemedicine, from violating the Code of Professional Conduct (“the Code”), which shall be observed by all registered doctors in Hong Kong. The Guidelines cover a wide range of matters including doctor-patient relationship, patient privacy and ways to properly preserve medical records. If doctors violate the Guidelines, they may also violate the Code, and MCHK will exercise disciplinary actions against them. MCHK issued Questions and Answers to the Guidelines in March last year for doctors to refer to when providing telemedicine services, such that the quality and safety of telemedicine services are guaranteed.

Due to the COVID-19 epidemic, the number of persons requiring telehealth has increased significantly. In March last year, the Government invited MCHK to brief the industry on the contents of the Guidelines and the stance of MCHK, with a view to addressing the concerns of various sectors about the provision of telehealth services for COVID-19 patients.

Therefore, all locally registered doctors should basically comply with the Code and act in the best interests of patients when delivering telemedicine services, and use their professional judgment on a case-by-case basis to assess patients' appropriateness for such services.

The Government will continue to closely monitor the rolling-out and penetration of telehealth in Hong Kong, and adopt appropriate measures to further promote its development when necessary.
Thank you, President.

MR LAI TUNG-KWOK (in Cantonese): *President, the Secretary has affirmed in part (2) of her reply that in the fight against the epidemic, tele-consultation services have been remarkably effective for patients in RCHEs, thereby relieving overcrowded hospitals and clinics. In view of this, will the Government not only maintain an ambivalent position by saying that it will conduct regular reviews or further study the feasibility, but also make more efforts and take concrete action to set up a working group to draw up a more comprehensive timetable and roadmap for the provision of telehealth services for RCHE residents in a practical manner?*

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH (in Cantonese): I thank the Member for his supplementary question. As a matter of fact, HA is already providing telehealth services for RCHE residents, but its CGATs visit patients in RCHEs in person on most occasions. If CGATs take the view that tele-consultation is required for a patient, the RCHE concerned will arrange it with the relevant healthcare staff of HA.

However, I have to acknowledge that we wish to put more effort into telehealth in the future as far as technology development is concerned. Thus, apart from providing telehealth to RCHE residents, HA will explore its use in other areas. For example, ordinary follow-up patients with suitable conditions will be provided with tele-consultation services. If a patient is allowed to receive rehabilitation services at home, support services will also be provided via telehealth, so that the patient can recuperate while at home. That is why HA has in fact already set up a working group to examine how telehealth services can be promoted comprehensively.

PROF CHAN WING-KWONG (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. In my view, appropriate healthcare services can be provided remotely for patients, especially those with mobility difficulties, and the Government should vigorously promote telemedicine and clarify the related liabilities as soon as possible. I think that promotion efforts on telemedicine services should be made on all fronts and should not be limited to HA's healthcare facilities.*

During the outbreak of the fifth wave of the epidemic, Chinese medicine practitioners provided appropriate healthcare services for confirmed COVID-19 patients through video consultation, the effectiveness of which was plain for all to see. When I provided tele-consultation services for such patients living in RCHEs, I found that some of them did not quite understand how they could receive healthcare through a computer or smartphone. Therefore, I would like to ask the Secretary: In the future, will policy support, technical support, etc. be provided to further assist RCHEs in teaching the elderly the basic functions of tablets or smartphones as well as mobile applications, so as to facilitate the use of telemedicine services by the elderly? Thank you, President.

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. Thank you, Prof CHAN. As Prof CHAN has rightly pointed out, the Chinese medicine sector has provided various telemedicine services during the fight against the COVID-19 epidemic, especially for patients in RCHEs, for which we are very grateful. During the epidemic, private hospitals and clinics have offered telemedicine services. Members of the public generally have no problem with using software to receive telemedicine services. Nevertheless, it takes some time for the elderly to get used to it.

In fact, we need to pay attention to some issues relating to such software, for example, patient privacy and data confidentiality. When HA patients use the “HA Go” mobile application, data confidentiality is ensured. During the review of the eHealth System, we will consider incorporating this mobile application into eHealth, so that healthcare service providers can use it via eHealth to provide telemedicine services for the public.

Of course, it is also important to teach the public how to use this mobile application. As far as RCHEs are concerned, it is important to teach not only the residents, but also the staff. We have a series of initiatives in place to enable RCHE staff to communicate with healthcare service providers via tablets more easily. Thank you, Prof CHAN. Thank you, President.

MR EDMUND WONG (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. President, the Bureau has just mentioned that HA provides telemedicine services via the “HA Go” mobile application. I would like to ask the Bureau: Does it plan to facilitate the provision of telemedicine services by private healthcare facilities and promote public-private partnership in telemedicine so as to alleviate the healthcare manpower shortage in Hong Kong? Thank you, President.*

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. I thank the Member for his supplementary question. Public-private partnership is one of the development directions we intend to pursue all along. Regarding the promotion of the eHealth System, the Government very much hopes that all healthcare service providers in the private sector will use it. Nevertheless, private hospitals which currently serve COVID-19 patients have their own tele-consultation or telehealth systems in place. Our focus is how such service providers can be connected with eHealth for sharing of clinical data. We strive to negotiate with the industry, hoping that service providers in the private sector will be required to, or endeavour to, connect with eHealth for sharing of data. Thank you, President.*

MR MICHAEL TIEN (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. Telemedicine will definitely become a major trend in the future. The RCHE sector has relayed to me that they hope telemedicine will be made widely available. During the fifth wave of the epidemic, some doctors were afraid of paying a visit to RCHEs where there was an outbreak. In such cases, telemedicine was useful.*

“One cannot make bricks without straw”. The sector has said to me that not all RCHEs are equipped with Wi-Fi. In particular, staff members of small RCHEs often have to use their own mobile phones for patients to receive video consultation, and the quality of video varies, some clearer and some blurrier. President, the piece of software they use for video calling may be a trial version rather than a business version, and users are forced to close it or watch an advertisement after using it for a period of time. Different healthcare clusters even have different model requirements for printers used for printing prescriptions. RCHEs have been asked to make purchase on their own, but their staff members are not familiar with information technology and feel at a loss.

The inconsistencies in system requirements and health infrastructure standards are indeed perplexing. If the Government is determined to take forward telehealth, it needs to do something about the infrastructure. The Secretary has just mentioned that a review will be conducted, but I do not know how long it will take. The simplest thing the Bureau can do within the shortest time is to develop video consultation software on its own and provide funding support for RCHEs to enhance their hardware and infrastructure in alignment with certain requirements, such as standard resolution for some ...

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr Michael TIEN, please raise your supplementary question.

MR MICHAEL TIEN (in Cantonese): *I would like to ask the Government: Will it expeditiously develop such video consultation software and provide hardware and infrastructure such as Wi-Fi and cameras with a standard resolution? This is the quickest thing that can be done.*

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH (in Cantonese): Thank you, President, and I thank Mr TIEN for his supplementary question. Regarding the provision of hardware and software for RCHEs, we will discuss with the colleagues from the Labour and Welfare Bureau. As a matter of fact, HA's CGATs have also made great efforts to teach RCHE staff to use such software. More importantly, we think elderly people in RCHEs usually suffer from more complicated and serious conditions. Thus, healthcare workers often have qualms about solely relying on telemedicine, and usually visit RCHEs in person. If nurses notice something wrong with an elderly person in RCHEs, they will use their tablet to communicate with the doctor at the hospital and see how services should be provided or whether the elderly person needs to be sent to hospital. However, I agree that the whole supporting system needs to be enhanced. I thank Mr TIEN for his views.

DR PRISCILLA LEUNG (in Cantonese): *President, as the Secretary has stated in her reply, tele-consultation services have benefited 47 000 persons, including my family, during the epidemic. Therefore, I hope such services will not only be available to RCHE residents in future. In fact, many people in Hong Kong have become used to tele-consultation services since the epidemic, and think very highly of their quality. Yet, how should tele-consultation services be provided?*

President, in 2019, we visited Hangzhou and Singapore, where drug dispensing and consultation were provided under a single system smoothly. This has something to do with confidence, habit, long-term planning and policymaking. My supplementary question focuses on the building of confidence and licensing. Will the Secretary consider following the example of Singapore and establishing a licensing regime for tele-consultation to provide insurance protection and other policy support for healthcare workers involved in implementing and providing such services?

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. Thank you, Dr LEUNG. I am absolutely supportive of this idea. Apart from providing tele-consultation services through the use of software, we also need to consider a series of supporting measures, such as the delivery of medicines to patients' homes and the issuance of sick leave certificates, if required, to patients by electronic means.

However, the 47 000 attendances mentioned just now only concern patients in RCHEs. In fact, over 500 000 attendances for HA's telehealth services have been recorded during the epidemic. Dr LEUNG's suggestion of setting up a licensing regime for tele-consultation is a very good idea. We will definitely study its feasibility and may discuss and consider the details with the sector in due course. Thank you.

MR DUNCAN CHIU (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. First of all, I declare that I am a Board Member of HA as well as the Chairman of its Information Technology Services Committee. The development of telehealth services has really gained tremendous momentum amid the epidemic. The some 500 000 attendances just mentioned by the Secretary have posed a very good test for the services. In fact, many barriers have been overcome during this period. Driven by the great urgency of the situation, the authorities have managed to accomplish many previously difficult tasks, including delivering medicines to patients' homes within 24 hours, which has actually helped many members of the public. I understand that with the epidemic situation subsiding, some services may be suspended and some will be reviewed.*

In fact, as some Members have just mentioned, the Mainland authorities have drawn up some clear guidelines on telehealth services, such as applicable health conditions, patient conditions and the age requirement for persons

accompanying children. During this period, various arrangements have also been trialled in Hong Kong. Although it is mentioned in the main reply that MCHK has now drawn up the Guidelines, we hope that the Bureau will discuss the contents of the Guidelines with MCHK expeditiously to make them clearer. As a matter of fact, some of the Mainland guidelines can serve as reference for some matters, for example, among many health conditions, which ones are suitable or unsuitable for telehealth. I hope the Bureau will make the Guidelines clearer as soon as possible. Besides, another issue that needs more consideration is cross-boundary use, which is actually a great advantage of telehealth services. Such services can be made available to, say, Hong Kong residents in the Mainland. I hope the Bureau will also give clear indications about this issue expeditiously. Thank you, President.

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH (in Cantonese): Thank you, President, and thank you, Mr CHIU. I believe what Mr CHIU has talked about is clinical guidelines because MCHK's Guidelines set out a framework for how telemedicine services can be provided without violating the Code, while applicable health conditions, the age requirement for accompanying persons, etc. actually fall within clinical guidelines. There is some initial consensus within the sector. For example, in-person consultation is preferred over tele-consultation if it is the patient's first appointment, or in other words, the doctor has never seen the patient before, or if the patient requires a physical examination. Nevertheless, in this respect, we can discuss with the sector to see if any clinical guidelines can be drawn up for the entire sector, especially given that tele-consultation is a very effective tool in primary healthcare.

As for the cross-boundary use of telehealth services, legal issues would be involved. If a patient is outside Hong Kong, say, in the Mainland and seeks telehealth services from a Hong Kong doctor who is not qualified to practise in the Mainland, this will be illegal. Therefore, the sector is well aware that a boundary has been drawn and they are only allowed to practise in Hong Kong. In this regard, perhaps we will make it clearer to the sector what they are and are not allowed to do.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Fourth question.

Developing traditional Chinese medicine

4. **DR HOEY SIMON LEE** (in Cantonese): *President, in November 2022, the National Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine promulgated the “Development Plan for the Informatization of Traditional Chinese Medicine during the 14th Five-Year Plan Period”, putting forward “the continuous promotion of an in-depth integration of traditional Chinese medicine (“TCM”) business with information technology, and the facilitation of transformation and upgrading of the industry through digitalization, networkization and intelligentization”. On the other hand, the Hunan-Jiangxi-Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Traditional Chinese Medicine Industry Chain Collaborative Development Alliance was also established in the same month to focus on promoting the inheritance, innovation and development of TCM. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) of the initiatives for promoting the informatization of local TCM at present;*
- (2) whether it has conducted analyses on the progress of informatization of TCM in Hong Kong and the relevant situation on the Mainland, particularly in the two aspects of testing and scientific research as well as merchandise trading, and explored how collaborative development can be achieved with the Mainland; and*
- (3) whether a development plan for the TCM industry is currently in place to explore how to capitalize on Hong Kong’s strengths and enhance its cooperation with the Mainland (including other cities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area) in respect of the TCM industry; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that? Thank you.*

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH (in Cantonese): Thank you, President and Dr LEE.

Chinese medicine (“CM”) is an important part of Hong Kong’s healthcare system. The Government has all along been committed to promoting the development of CM on various fronts including policy and regulation, talent nurturing, research and innovation, CM services and the CM drug industry, with a

view to bringing the strengths and functions of CM into full play so as to integrate into the overall national development of CM. In this connection, the Government has been encouraging the CM sector to enhance the application of technologies at different levels and harness its benefits to improve service quality, business efficiency and promote industry development.

Among all, as mentioned in the “Development Plan for the Informatization of Traditional Chinese Medicine during the 14th Five-Year Plan Period”, the transformation and upgrading of the CM sector can be driven by digitalization, networkization and intelligentization, thereby fostering the modernization of CM as well as the high-quality development of the CM sector and industry. With regard to the aforementioned aspects, various developments have been achieved.

In terms of CM practice, if we are to digitalize CM services for future analysis or application of artificial intelligence to enhance service quality, we must first get hold of sufficient data and establish a platform for collecting these data. In this regard, the first and foremost task is to standardize CM and CM drug terminology into data that may be used for communication within the sharing system. This is a crucial task in the process of promoting the informatization and digitalization of CM. We have been maintaining close communication with the CM sector, and have set up a relevant task group on standardization to develop CM clinical and CM drugs terminology tables for the Electronic Health Record Sharing System (“eHealth”), with reference to the terminologies used locally and in the Mainland.

The next step is to have a shared electronic platform for communication. The Government has engaged the Hospital Authority to develop a CM clinical management software named “EC Connect” to support the daily administration and clinical management of CM clinics, and foster the connection of these CM clinics with eHealth for the sharing of CM clinical data.

Separately, the system of the future Chinese Medicine Hospital (“CMH”) will also complement eHealth by adopting the standardized CM terminologies as basis to enable data installation and record sharing in the future. Moreover, CMH, which is developed to be a smart hospital, will adopt numerous innovative technologies for promoting CM.

As for CM drug, we aim at a high-quality development. The Government Chinese Medicines Testing Institute (“GCMTI”) is in fact committed to developing a set of internationally-recognized reference standards and testing methods for CM

drugs and related products by employing state-of-the-art technology and through scientific research to strengthen quality control by the sector on CM drugs and related products, thereby establishing the brand image of Hong Kong's CM drugs.

Apart from taking forward various research projects on CM drug identification studies, chemical marker analysis and testing methods, GCMTI also actively promotes the innovative application of CM data and resources, and is developing a digitalized CM drug information platform, including digitalizing physical CM drug specimens by phases to create digital exhibits, and establishing the genetic traceability between CM drugs and their species origins by scientific analyses. The relevant work would provide the industry with comprehensive and professional information on CM drug identification, thereby enhancing their identification capability in the course of procurement of CM drugs. Representatives of the Department of Health, upon invitation, attended meetings of the professional committee of CM digitalization under the China Association of Traditional Chinese Medicine to strengthen the research and collaboration of drug testing research institutes and experts of Hong Kong and various Mainland provinces and municipalities in the area of digitalization of CM drug specimens and drug identification, thereby fostering the integration of traditional CM and digitalization.

The work of GCMTI on CM drug testing, research, training and international exchange has been supported by the relevant Mainland ministries/commissions and research institutions. The National Institutes for Food and Drug Control and the other research institutions have all along been providing assistance to GCMTI on the research work in relation to implementing the Hong Kong Chinese Materia Medica Standards, i.e. HKCMMS, with a view to enhancing the reference standards of Chinese herbal medicines. GCMTI was also invited last year by the National Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine for the first time to take part in the Fourth Chinese Materia Medica Resources Survey to examine the situation of CM drug resources in Hong Kong so as to dovetail with the establishment of a national database of CM drug resources survey outcomes. GCMTI's CM herbarium is being set up with the assistance of the National Medical Products Administration ("NMPA"). We are also delighted by NMPA's donation of precious and representative specimens of CM drugs for display.

In addition, the Government has also been promoting informatization of CM services in other areas, including subsidizing the sector through the Chinese Medicine Development Fund to procure computer hardware and related software,

systems for drug logistics management, transaction and distribution records, and digitalizing the application and licensing services for over 40 certificates or licences under the Chinese Medicine Council of Hong Kong to provide convenience to the sector.

Hong Kong has all along been backed by the motherland. Under the direction of the National 14th Five-Year Plan, we have been actively strengthening Hong Kong's role under the blueprint set out in the Construction Plan for the Chinese Medicine Highlands in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area ("GBA") (2020-2025). Among others, Hong Kong registered traditional proprietary Chinese medicines ("pCms") for external use can currently be registered and sold in the Mainland through streamlined approval procedures, thereby facilitating expansion of new markets by Hong Kong pCm manufacturers and creating favourable conditions for Hong Kong pCms to "go global" in the long run.

As announced in the 2022 Policy Address, we will jointly formulate a blueprint for the overall development of CM with the CM sector and map out the short-, medium- and long-term objectives and related recommendations on the overall development and long-term planning. One of issues to be explored is the development of the CM industry, covering the industry regulatory situation, the direction of industry development, ways to facilitate business and develop markets, etc.

Meanwhile, we will continue to work with the CM sector to deepen Hong Kong's CM collaboration with the Mainland, GBA and the international community, proactively integrate into the national development in CM, give full play to Hong Kong's strengths and capitalize on Hong Kong's vital role as the gateway connecting the Mainland and the world, with a view to promoting the informatization, modernization and internationalization of CM. Thank you, President.

DR HOEY SIMON LEE (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. I am grateful to the Secretary for briefing us on various aspects of work, so that we can understand the Government's work with its objectives, especially in respect of local usage, bringing convenience to the public and standardization. However, on the basis of the Secretary's reply just now, we can consider how to promote the development of CM by fostering its commercialization and industrialization.*

This is because the informatization of CM and establishment of a development alliance with the Mainland, as I mentioned in the main question, are actually very conducive to establishing authority in setting the standards and prices for trading Chinese herbal medicines. What are the Government's plans and measures in striving to enable Hong Kong to become a centre for setting the standards and prices of Chinese herbal medicines? I think this is something to consider further in commercialization and industrialization. Only with the ability to set the standards can we proceed to the next step of setting the prices. Thank you, President.

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH (in Cantonese): Thank you, President, and thank you, Dr LEE. This is a very good supplementary question because the development of the CM industry must include the two aspects of setting the standards and the prices.

In terms of setting the standards, we are just getting started. We are hoping that through the work of GCMTI, we can set some Hong Kong standards which will enable us to move towards internationalization. As for the next step of setting the prices, more negotiations and cooperation with the industry may be needed before we can take another step forward. However, this is the direction of our long-term development; we hope that a very definite plan can be set in the blueprint to be formulated in the coming year, so as to gradually build up our authority in this area through short-, medium- and long-term objectives. Thank you, Dr LEE.

MR CHAN PUI-LEUNG (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. May I ask the Secretary whether there is any regular academic exchange on CM between the Mainland and Hong Kong, such as exchange among health departments and tertiary institutions, or are there any joint institutional student training programmes?*

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH (in Cantonese): Thank you, President, and I also thank Mr CHAN for his supplementary question. The CM sector has all along been engaged in many exchange activities. Apart from regular exchange with universities and the trade, there is close liaison with the Mainland throughout the process of training for students of CM courses and qualified Chinese Medicine practitioners ("CMPs"), providing them with many opportunities for exchange, learning or training on the Mainland. For example, CMPs graduated in Hong

Kong and Macao can be employed on the Mainland through the relevant arrangements under the Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA), so that they can understand the actual situation of providing CM services on the Mainland and bring the knowledge back to Hong Kong. In particular, as CMH in Hong Kong will come into operation in 2025, we should strengthen liaison and training in this regard so as to provide the relevant services in CMH.

Regarding the establishment of CMH, we have maintained a very close relationship with the Mainland. With the affirmation and support of our country, Shanghai has sent several experienced CMPs to Hong Kong to assist in the setting up of CMH in Hong Kong, and they have given us a lot of advice on its service structure. We have also collaborated with the CM industry on the Mainland in many research projects. Apart from exchange at the management or government level, there is also communication among the industry practitioners through knowledge exchange or training on various areas. Thank you, Mr CHAN.

DR WENDY HONG (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. There is a certain demand for Chinese herbal medicines all over the world, and as the Secretary mentioned just now, Hong Kong has made a lot of efforts in testing and setting the standards, and our advantages include having an international market network, experience in global business, an international logistics system, integrity, and so on. May I ask the Bureau whether it will consider cooperating with the Mainland to develop a global trading platform for Chinese herbal medicines, so as to enable Hong Kong to become an international trading centre for Chinese herbal medicines?*

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH (in Cantonese): I thank Dr HONG for her supplementary question. This is a very good suggestion which shows that Hong Kong has some edges or advantages in the entire CM sector, and we will give priority to this suggestion in promoting the industrialization or development of CM. We will also set out in the blueprint how the industrialization process will proceed and how Hong Kong will play a good role in promoting the development of CM in the international arena. Meanwhile, we will have regular exchange, negotiations and cooperation with the Mainland to explore how Hong Kong can capitalize on its strengths. I thank Dr HONG for her suggestion.

IR LEE CHUN-KEUNG (in Cantonese): *President, CM and CM services are in fact interlinked, but there are still many limitations and difficulties for CMPs in their development in Hong Kong. While the Government is promoting the informatization of CM in Hong Kong, local CMPs are not really connected to eHealth. As a result, if CMPs want to know the patient's medical history or test reports, they can only ask the patient. However, some elderly people simply do not know how to answer these questions, thus causing great inconvenience.*

Therefore, may I ask the Secretary whether there is any concrete timetable for connecting CM clinics with eHealth as she mentioned just now, so that CMPs will know when they can be on a par with Western medical practitioners? Thank you, President.

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH (in Cantonese): Thank you, President, and I thank Ir LEE for his supplementary question. I absolutely agree that connection with eHealth is a very important issue. In fact, we have started to develop a software platform for CM clinical management since 2017 to facilitate connection with eHealth; the project was introduced in 2020 on a pilot basis and implemented in 2022. The work in this respect certainly needs to be carried out in a gradual manner. At present, more than 500 CMPs are actually using the Government-developed software “EC Connect”, which is connected to eHealth.

Meanwhile, many CMPs in the industry are in fact using their own software systems, and we are now exploring how these software systems can be connected to eHealth so that CMPs can access the data stored in the eHealth system through their own software systems. Those who are currently using “EC Connect” are indeed connected to eHealth. We have already made the data available to all CMPs to enable them to see their patients' data in the eHealth system, the only remaining step required is to connect CMPs' private software systems to eHealth. We look forward to its completion in the next year or two to facilitate data access through eHealth so that CMPs can provide their patients with appropriate services. Thank you, Ir LEE.

MS CHAN HOI-YAN (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. Whether we are promoting the development of CM or the CM industry in Hong Kong or hoping to develop the CM profession into an industry, we cannot do without one very important element, which is talent.*

Just take a look at the starting salary of CMPs a year and a half ago. There are currently three local universities offering bachelor's degree programmes in CM with very high admission requirements. After admission, students have to study hard for six years, but the starting salary for CMPs working in the Hospital Authority Tripartite Chinese Medicine Clinics cum Training and Research Centres only ranges from \$24,000 to \$27,000. In contrast, the starting salary for a registered nurse is at least \$30,000, while that for a Western medicine practitioner is \$64,000. May I ask, given the poor remuneration of CMPs under this salary structure, how local talents can be attracted to join the profession, even with the macro visions mentioned earlier? Thank you.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): The supplementary question raised by Ms CHAN Hoi-yan is not related to the main question.

Secretary, do you have anything to add?

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH (in Cantonese): I am grateful to Ms CHAN for her supplementary question. At present, the starting salary of CMPs does stand at what Ms CHAN has just mentioned, but the salary of CMPs working in the CM Clinics in the 18 districts is set by the non-governmental organizations (“NGOs”) responsible for their operation. These NGOs will make annual adjustments in the light of market conditions, and the Government will closely monitor the situation and provide support to them.

In this respect, it is true that there is neither a salary structure nor a career pathway for CMPs at present, but we are expecting them. We hope that after the establishment of CMH, it will be easier to draw up a salary structure and a career pathway for CMPs in CMH, which will then provide a reference for the aforementioned CM Clinics. Negotiations in this regard are underway and we expect to include at least a significant coverage of this aspect in the blueprint, and hopefully, the positioning of Chinese medicine pharmacists will also be covered in addition to that of CMPs. We hope that there will be progress and development in this matter in the coming year. Thank you, Ms CHAN.

DR JUNIUS HO (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. Since the Government is inclined to promote the development of CM, be it in scientific research, testing, training or even international exchange, may I ask the Secretary whether the policies will favour certain companies already engaged in the relevant work to a further extent? Since some companies currently engaged in the processing of CM drugs, for example, those involved in research and development of a single or compound medicine, are already doing very well and they even perform better than the Government in terms of training of CM personnel and scientific research, will the authorities strengthen cooperation with them in this regard? This is a very important issue, which is the first and foremost task to be addressed.*

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH (in Cantonese): I thank Dr HO for his supplementary question. We will certainly strengthen our cooperation with the industry, which has all along been highly respected. We are grateful for their efforts in fostering the development of CM, and they may have made more progress than us in many areas. We will certainly work hard to communicate with the industry, and we rely on them to “go global” first and take up the role as the pioneer in certain areas. Some companies are already well established and may have achieved significant results in terms of scientific research and training of talents, and they are our important partners too. We hope that they can lead the industry to go global in the process of development. I thank Dr HO for his suggestion.

PROF CHAN WING-KWONG (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. First of all, I must declare that I am the Chairman of the Chinese Medicine Practice Subcommittee under the Chinese Medicine Development Committee and a member of the Board of Directors of CMH.*

President, I absolutely support facilitating the transformation, upgrading and development of the CM industry through digitization, networkization and intelligentization, but the progress of the relevant work is rather slow at present. I would also like to follow up on the supplementary question raised by Ir LEE Chun-keung just now.

Take access to data stored in eHealth as an example. All along, eHealth has only covered data on Western medicine, and it was not until late March last year that the scope of accessibility of eHealth began to cover CM data. Currently,

CMPs who have registered in eHealth can access CM data of patients with their consent through eHealth. In this regard, may I ask the Secretary whether there are any measures to expedite the demolition of the data fortress between CMPs and Western medical practitioners to enable them to access the medical records of each other's patients more conveniently so as to truly realize data sharing, thereby further promoting the mutual development of and collaboration between CMPs and Western medical practitioners?

Also, regarding international exchange ...

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Prof CHAN Wing-kwong, you have already raised a supplementary question. Please sit down.

Secretary, please reply.

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH (in Cantonese): Thank you, President, and I thank Prof CHAN too. What Prof CHAN said is right. The purpose of setting up eHealth is to enable better communication between different healthcare personnel, so that data in respect of medical examination and drug prescription received by a patient from certain healthcare personnel can be made available to other healthcare personnel, so that they can have access to the relevant records at the other end to meet the needs of the patient. Thus, it is within our scope of duties to provide accessibility to data on both Chinese and Western medicine, and we will do that in due course.

However, I would also like to explain why it seems to have taken a long time before mutual accessibility to data stored in eHealth could be provided in late March last year. This is mainly because of the need for standardization of many CM terminologies without which communication cannot be achieved in the mutually accessible system. We have spent a lot of time discussing with the industry, and we have also drawn reference from the Mainland's standardized practice on terminology standardization before connection can be made through "EC Connect". However, Prof CHAN's suggestions are very good, and they will definitely be considered further in our development of eHealth. Thank you, Prof CHAN, and thank you, President.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr CHAN Hok-fung, are you in your seat?

MR CHAN HOK-FUNG (in Cantonese): *Yes, I am.*

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr CHAN Hok-fung, please put down the placard at your seat first; it is blocking my view and I cannot see if you are in your seat or not. You can show the placard during your speech, but do not place it at your seat before you speak so that it will not block my view.

(Mr CHAN Hok-fung moved the placard away)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Fifth question. Mr CHAN Hok-fung.

The traffic and transport network of Lantau

5. **MR CHAN HOK-FUNG** (in Cantonese): *At present, Tung Chung Road is the only road that links North and South Lantau, and South Lantau Road is the only road connecting various places of South Lantau. Any traffic incident on these two roads will have a serious impact on the traffic on Lantau Island. It is learnt that on the 24th of last month, a traffic accident on South Lantau Road paralysed the traffic in the area for nearly four hours. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *given that some members of the local community have relayed to me that during the consultations conducted on major infrastructure projects such as the Hong Kong International Airport and the Kau Yi Chau Artificial Islands, the Government has promised to synchronize the overall traffic and transport network linking North and South Lantau in order to achieve a win-win situation, but so far the Government has not constructed any new road to connect Tung Chung with Mui Wo and Tai O, whether the Government has given the Islands District Council (“IDC”) an account of the reasons for not implementing the relevant developments; if so, of the details;*

- (2) *given that last year the Government put forward the proposal to construct “two tunnels and one viaduct” on Lantau Island to connect Mui Wo with Siu Ho Wan and to connect Shek Pik with Tai O Road, etc., of the implementation timetable for the aforesaid proposal, and whether the Government will report the relevant progress to IDC on a regular basis; and*
- (3) *whether it will construct a traffic and transport network linking North and South Lantau and looping around Lantau Island, with Tung Chung as the centre; if so, of the timetable, and whether it has assessed the difficulties that may be encountered in the implementation of such proposal?*

SECRETARY FOR DEVELOPMENT (in Cantonese): President, Mr CHAN’s question expresses concern about the traffic and transport network within Lantau, particularly the North and South Lantau. After consulting the Transport and Logistics Bureau, the Civil Engineering and Development Department (“CEDD”) and the Transport Department (“TD”), I hereby reply as below:

- (1) The Government always consulted the Islands District Council (“IDC”) and other stakeholders regarding development projects around Lantau. For the discussions in recent years, the Development Bureau (“DEVB”) and CEDD consulted IDC in February 2019 about the “Study on the Artificial Islands in the Central Waters” during which it was mentioned that the Government’s priority would be taking forward the artificial islands near Kau Yi Chau of around 1 000 hectares. Under the traffic and transport planning supporting the development, the associated strategic road will connect different development areas. Its preliminary alignment will link the Hong Kong Island, the Kau Yi Chau Artificial Islands, North Lantau and New Territories West, not via South Lantau, which is mainly positioned as a rural and nature conservation spot.

We fully understand that in response to a suggestion in the meeting from District Council member(s) regarding developing road connection between North and South Lantau, the representative of DEVB responded that CEDD was conducting the “Study on Traffic,

Transport and Capacity to Receive Visitors for Lantau” (“T&T Study”), which would holistically review the traffic needs for road connection within Lantau, in particular the connection between North and South Lantau, and recommend improvement options.

- (2) CEDD completed the T&T Study mentioned above in mid-2022, and reported to the Panel on Development of the Legislative Council, the Lantau Development Advisory Committee (“LanDAC”) and the Traffic and Transport Committee of IDC.

The T&T Study pointed out that currently Tung Chung Road was the only road connecting North and South Lantau. As noted by the Member, any serious incident will severely impact the external road traffic of South Lantau. Having considered various factors, especially the resilience of the road network against emergencies, road safety, construction cost, etc., we recommended in the T&T Study to strengthen the traffic infrastructure in East and West Lantau respectively to improve the connection between North and South Lantau. The recommendations include:

East Lantau

- (i) construct a new road tunnel connecting Mui Wo in the south and the existing road/tunnel of Discovery Bay in the further north; or
- (ii) construct a new road tunnel directly connecting Mui Wo in the south and Siu Ho Wan in the north.

West Lantau

- (i) construct a new road tunnel connecting Shek Pik in the south and Tai O in the north; and/or
- (ii) provide a viaduct for improving parts of Keung Shan Road with lots of bends and are relatively steep in gradient and narrow, improving the connection between South Lantau and Tai O.

Besides, we also recommended exploring the reuse and improvement of Old Tung Chung Road, which is in the middle part of Lantau. The different recommendations are provided at the Annex of the response.

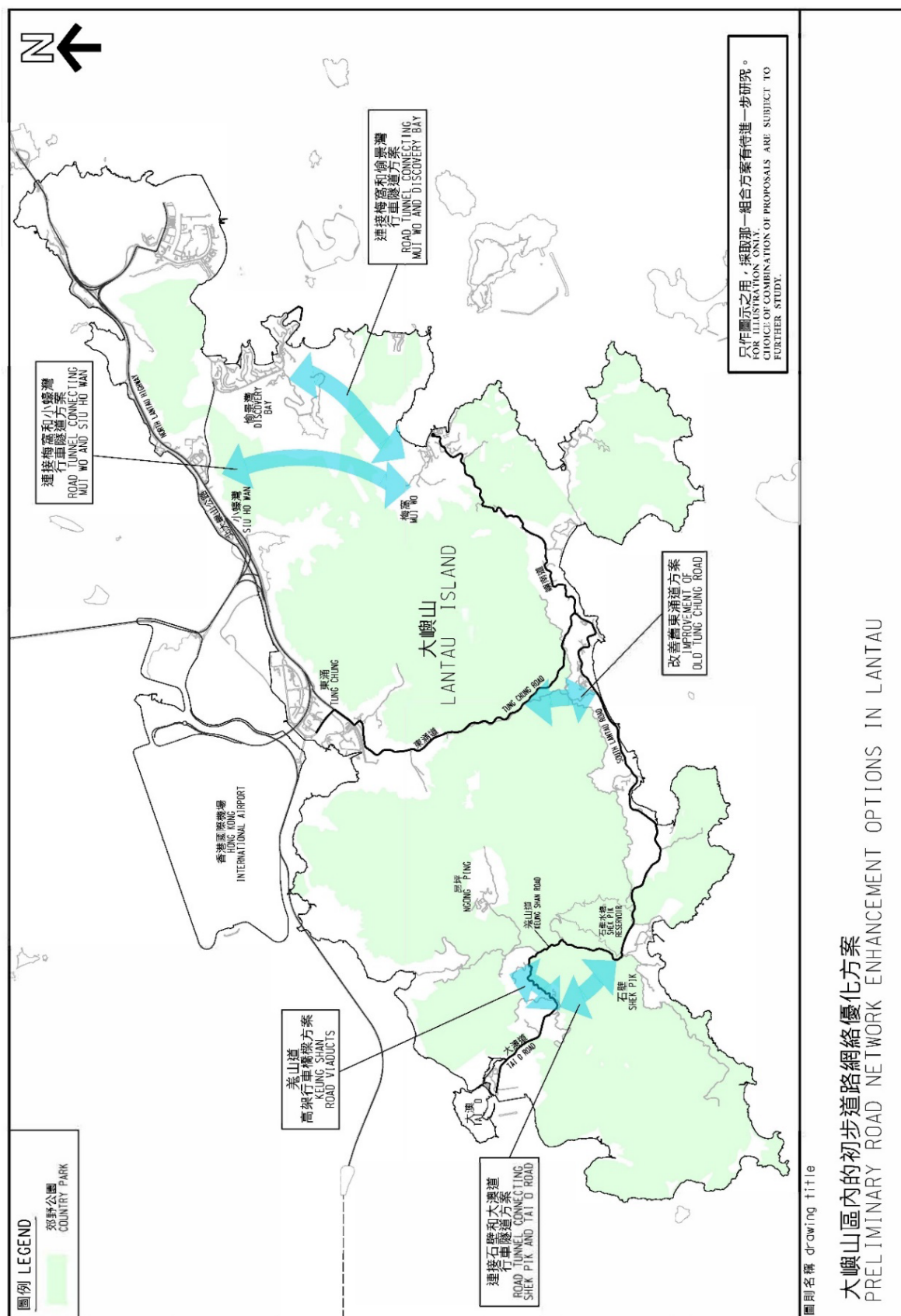
CEDD will soon commence the feasibility study in March this year, to further review the feasibility of the above recommendations and select the most suitable combination of options. Tasks include preliminary environmental assessment, ground investigation, etc. The study is expected to complete in mid-2025. During the study, the Government will communicate with stakeholders in a timely manner, including IDC and LanDAC, to collect views and report technical study findings. Apart from following up on the large-scale improvement options, the Government will carry out smaller-scale works such as road widening or road bend improvement works in stages at South Lantau Road, Keung Shan Road, Tai O Road, etc.

- (3) Most of the southern part of Lantau is of nature conservation value and with road network of rural design. To conserve the tranquil environment of the southern part of Lantau and consider the road capacity of Lantau, roads in South Lantau (including Tung Chung Road, South Lantau Road and Keung Shan Road) are designated as closed roads at present. Access to these roads with vehicles requires a valid “Lantau Closed Road Permit”.

Currently, the annual average daily traffic of roads in South Lantau are less than half of their design capacities. Considering that there being quite an extent of spare road capacities and the overarching planning principles of “Development in the North, Conservation in the South” of Lantau, there is insufficient justification for the time being from the traffic flow perspective to support constructing transport infrastructure other than the connection options between North and South Lantau as I mentioned above or a road network round the island of Lantau.

Nonetheless, we hope the recommended options mentioned in Part (2) above could largely improve the connection between North and South Lantau. Therefore, we shall accord priority to the exploration and selection of a feasible and the most suitable combination of options at this stage with a view to taking them forward as soon as possible.

ANNEX



MR CHAN HOK-FUNG (in Cantonese): *President, during the construction of the new airport in 1997 and subsequently the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, and during the consultation of the Lantau Tomorrow Vision, the authorities also told the residents of Lantau Island that they would conduct studies and improve the transport network connecting North and South Lantau. After 30 years of study, the authorities still reply today that the feasibility study would complete in mid-2025. I asked in the main question when the construction would commence, but the Secretary did not give a response to that in the main reply. She only stated that the feasibility study was expected to complete in mid-2025. Can the Secretary tell me clearly when the “two tunnels and one viaduct” project will be completed?*

SECRETARY FOR DEVELOPMENT (in Cantonese): *President, the technical study I mentioned just now, which will commence next month, is precisely in preparation for future works. Therefore, according to the timetable, upon the completion of the technical study in mid-2025, we will make a decision on the options, which may be a combination of various improvement options I mentioned earlier focusing on East and West Lantau. Our goal is to seek funding allocation immediately when the time comes so that the works can commence.*

MR EDMUND WONG (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. My supplementary question is about overcrowding in Tai O on weekends. Local residents are afraid to go to the city because it would be difficult for them to return home. It once took some tourists five hours to get back to Tung Chung. I would like to ask whether the authorities have evaluated the demand of incoming tourists, in addition to that of local tourists and residents, as the epidemic eases and society resumes normalcy? Do the authorities have to re-evaluate the transport in Tai O in order to cope with the demand of tourists and residents? Thank you, President.*

SECRETARY FOR DEVELOPMENT (in Cantonese): *President, TD has been following the demand and use of land and water transport there. For example, some short waterborne routes to Tai O have already been regularized. For larger improvement projects on road traffic, as I said earlier, we will select a feasible combination of options after the completion of the technical study. As for minor road improvement works, we will continue to make proper arrangements for major*

roads on Lantau Island. In fact, in terms of land public transport, TD will take follow-up actions such as providing more information and increasing the frequency.

MR KENNETH LAU (in Cantonese): *President, I am very dissatisfied with the Government's delay in building the road tunnel connecting Mui Wo with Siu Ho Wan and the road tunnel connecting Shek Pik with Tai O Road.*

The roads on Lantau Island have seen no major change since the 1950s. The traffic network there is yet to be improved, in particular, the road from Tung Chung Road to South Lantau Road which is currently a two-lane road. In the event of traffic accident due to adverse weather, the traffic of the entire South Lantau will be paralysed. I want to urge the Government to commence the "two tunnels and one viaduct" project as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, I would like to ask the Government whether it will carry out any widening and improvement works on Tung Chung Road and South Lantau Road at this stage, or consider building a new road connecting Sunny Bay and Mui Wo, so as to cope with the future development of Lantau Island and Mui Wo?

SECRETARY FOR DEVELOPMENT (in Cantonese): President, if we look forward, as mentioned earlier, there are already several options for connecting North and South Lantau. Our technical study will focus on these options. The Member asked whether improvements can be made to Tung Chung Road. In fact, we have conducted studies how improvements can be made to Tung Chung Road in Central Lantau years ago. However, as Tung Chung Road is flanked by country parks and steep slopes, it has remained the way it is since 2009 after some widening works had been done upon discussions in early years. Based on the studies conducted over the years, I believe there is really not much room for major improvements on Tung Chung Road.

Hence, to improve the connection between North and South Lantau, we proposed starting from East and West Lantau. Nevertheless, as I mentioned earlier, CEDD and the Highways Department ("HyD") will try to conduct some minor widening or straightening works on some sections of the existing roads in the next few years. Frankly speaking, these are not major strategic improvement

works, but they can be helpful under the constraints on the relevant road sections. Improvements will be made gradually in the form of minor works.

MR ANDREW LAM (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. One of the considerations for improving the situation on South Lantau Road is conservation, which is also very important. Currently, the section between South Lantau Road and Keung Shan Road is used not only by motor vehicles, but also by cows and bicycles, especially on weekends, causing dangers on the roads. My supplementary question is whether there is any short-term solution to address the situation in which bicycles, cows and motor vehicles compete for use of the roads. Thank you, President.*

UNDER SECRETARY FOR TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS (in Cantonese): President, I thank Mr LAM for his supplementary question. As we stated in the main reply, TD ...

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Under Secretary, have you not put on the microphone yet?

UNDER SECRETARY FOR TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS (in Cantonese): Excuse me, let me put on the microphone first ... as we stated in the main reply, TD and HyD have been committed to improve the driving conditions of roads on Lantau Island with a view to enhancing road safety.

In the past three years, i.e. from January 2020 to January 2023, HyD has completed reconstruction of pavement at 57 locations on South Lantau Road and 23 locations on Tung Chung Road, in order to maintain good road conditions for motorists. Meanwhile, to improve the driving conditions of various roads in South Lantau, TD and HyD have also completed a number of minor road widening and road bend improvement works, and added road markings and traffic signs, along South Lantau Road, Keung Shan Road and Tai O Road in recent years, with a view to alerting motorists to the dangers on the roads and reminding them to drive safely.

TD and HyD are also preparing to conduct some improvement, widening and road bend improvement works along Keung Shan Road. It is hoped that these minor works of various scales will be conducive to driving safety. Thank you, President.

DR JUNIUS HO (in Cantonese): *President, just now I heard that the Bureau already had plan to commence works in East Lantau to connect Mui Wo with Discovery Bay or Mui Wo with Siu Ho Wan. I find this a very good idea.*

In fact, while developing the 1 000 hectares of land in North Lantau, the Bureau should sort out the traffic on Lantau Island and build a traffic and transport network linking North and South Lantau, East and West Lantau as well as looping around Lantau Island. This is what I have proposed in the Council a few years ago. Today, I heard from the Secretary that there was already a proposal for East Lantau, while conservation must be considered in South Lantau. I want to say that conservation and development are not mutually exclusive, but rather the opposite. It is indeed possible to achieve smooth flow of traffic and people, and even birds will fly more at ease. Therefore, I think all roads on Lantau Island must be properly connected.

President, I find that the so-called survey and inspection are taking too long. The authorities expect to complete the study report only in 2025. I would like to know if there is any way to reduce the time required. Also, can the Government tell us when it will give the green light to the project? We will feel more assured if the Bureau can provide us with a blueprint. Thank you.

SECRETARY FOR DEVELOPMENT (in Cantonese): *President, the feasibility study that I mentioned earlier will commence in March this year and is expected to complete in mid-2025. It will include preliminary environmental impact assessment and topographical survey and investigation of the soils on the slopes nearby. They are detailed survey and investigation. Surely, we will see if there is a way to further compress the timeline. The study will involve some road sections in East Lantau and West Lantau. So, if the study on a certain road section is completed, can we roll out the works there first? We will reserve this option and review it in due course.*

MR DOMINIC LEE (in Cantonese): *President, there are currently many prohibited zones on Lantau Island. Apart from improving the transport network on Lantau Island and building some new roads, will the Bureau consider opening up some prohibited zones when necessary to enhance the transport connectivity?*

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Which public officer will give a reply? Under Secretary for Transport and Logistics, please reply.

UNDER SECRETARY FOR TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS (in Cantonese): President, I thank Mr LEE for his supplementary question.

As the Secretary for Development said just now, a large part of South Lantau is located in conservation areas with road network of rural design. The road capacity there is lower than that of standard urban roads. In the 1970s, TD designated sections of Tung Chung Road and South Lantau Road in South Lantau as closed roads to restrict vehicular access in order to protect the conservation areas and ensure sustainable development of the area in the long run.

At present, the road sections south of the junction of Tung Chung Road and Shek Mun Kap Road, as well as all roads in South Lantau are still closed roads. Yet, it does not mean that no driving is allowed there. Motorists who wish to access closed roads are required to hold a valid Lantau Closed Road Permit issued by TD and comply with the conditions specified in the permit and the approval letter.

In 2022, TD issued about 22 500 permits, including long-term permits and temporary permits. Basically, residents and business operators in South Lantau are issued long-term permits, while people who have to work on Lantau Island on a temporary basis may apply for temporary permits. To put it simply, the demand of residents and business operators to access South Lantau by private cars or commercial vehicles can actually be met.

The restriction mainly seeks to restrict the access of private cars from other areas to South Lantau. Our considerations in this regard are the capacity of the road network and environmental issues. We do not want too many private cars to enter these ecologically sensitive areas. We encourage members of the public

who wish to enter these ecologically sensitive areas for sightseeing or visiting purpose to use public transport. Hence, we do not support the idea of permitting a large number of people from other areas to use the roads in South Lantau.

Nevertheless, we understand that many people from other areas do wish to visit South Lantau by car. This explains why we have introduced the Driving on Lantau Island Scheme under which a small number of permits are available for application by the public to allow them to enter South Lantau by car on weekdays, serving as a kind of balance. Thank you, President.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Last question seeking an oral reply.

Betting duty

6. **MR ADRIAN PEDRO HO** (in Cantonese): *President, over the past few years, the economy of Hong Kong has been hard hit by the epidemic, and the expenses involved in anti-epidemic and relief measures have amounted to over \$600 billion. Some analyses have pointed out that, excluding the amounts of the Housing Reserve and Future Fund ploughed back and the proceeds from the issuance of bonds, the Government has recorded fiscal deficits for three consecutive years, and the fiscal deficit of the current financial year is estimated to be over \$100 billion. According to Article 107 of the Basic Law, Hong Kong shall follow the principle of keeping the expenditure within the limits of revenues in drawing up its budget, and strive to achieve a fiscal balance and avoid deficits. There are views that the Government should increase stable and recurrent revenue, and betting duty is one of such revenue. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *as the Government raised the betting duty and authorized betting on football matches in 2003, and amended the Betting Duty Ordinance in 2006 to convert the betting duty on horse race bets from turnover-based to a tax on net stake receipts, of the respective betting turnovers of and revenues from betting duty on football betting, betting on horse races, cash-sweeps and lotteries (i.e. Mark Six) in each of the years from 2003 to 2009;*

- (2) *whether the authorities will conduct a study on raising the betting duty, with a view to increasing the stable revenue of the Government from betting duty; and*
- (3) *whether it will, by drawing reference from the experience of neighbouring regions in issuing additional betting licences, conduct a study on suitably increasing the number of licences for conducting betting on football matches under section 6I of the Betting Duty Ordinance, with a view to increasing revenue from betting duty; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?*

SECRETARY FOR FINANCIAL SERVICES AND THE TREASURY (in Cantonese): President, the Government has all along been adhering to the principles of exercising fiscal prudence, keeping expenditure within the limits of revenue and committing resources as and when justified and needed in public finance management. The Government strives to achieve a fiscal balance over a period of time. In the face of the epidemic and economic downturn in the past few years, we have adopted an expansionary fiscal policy, implementing counter-cyclical measures to ease the pressure of economic downturn and relieve hardships in society. In the long run, with limited financial resources, the Government needs to manage public finances prudently when allocating resources for taking forward necessary initiatives, so as to maintain fiscal robustness and sustainability and maintain financial strength to prepare for known and unknown situations and needs.

The Government's policy is not to encourage gambling. However, since there is a certain degree of public demand for gambling, the Government allows legal and authorized means of gambling in a limited and regulated manner to address public demand, so as to prevent the public from turning to illegal gambling. The Government has authorized the Hong Kong Jockey Club ("HKJC") to conduct horse race betting, Mark Six lotteries and football betting under the Betting Duty Ordinance (Cap. 108) ("the Ordinance") to achieve its policy objective of combating illegal gambling through the provision of lawful and authorized betting outlets. At the same time, betting duty is charged for the above mentioned authorized betting activities under the Ordinance. At present, duties on betting on horse races and betting on football matches are charged on net stake receipts. The duty rates for betting on horse races are from 72.5% to 75% on a progressive basis and 50% for football matches. Betting duty for lotteries is charged at 25% on the amount of proceeds.

In consultation with the Home and Youth Affairs Bureau, my consolidated reply to the three parts of Mr HO's question is as follows:

- (1) The Government increased the betting duty rate to increase revenue in 2003. The duty on exotic horse race bets was increased from 19% to 20%. In the same year, to combat illegal football gambling, the Government also authorized football betting by way of licensing HKJC to conduct football betting in Hong Kong. To cope with the challenges from illegal bookmakers and enhance regulation of betting on horse races, the Government implemented in 2006 a series of reforms to the betting duty system, including conversion of betting duty on horse race bets from turnover-based to a tax on net stake receipts (i.e. betting proceeds minus payout) and introduction of a progressive marginal duty system.

According to the information of HKJC, the total proceeds of betting on horse races, betting on football matches and lotteries increased from \$86.9 billion in 2003-2004 to \$116.9 billion in 2009-2010. The proceeds of betting on horse races, betting on football matches and Mark Six lotteries of HKJC between 2003-2004 and 2009-2010 are summarized in Table 1:

	Table 1: Proceeds (\$million)						
	2003- 2004	2004- 2005	2005- 2006	2006- 2007	2007- 2008	2008- 2009	2009- 2010
Betting on football matches	16,063	26,731	31,272	30,190	34,442	35,108	38,908
Betting on horse races	65,025	62,661	59,032	63,860	66,791	67,653	71,647
Lotteries	5,860	6,599	6,293	6,589	6,382	6,429	6,375
Total	86,948	95,991	96,597	100,639	107,615	109,190	116,930

Remark: The figures above are based on the financial years of HKJC (from July to June of the following year)

As for betting duty, the revenue from betting duty increased from \$11.6 billion in 2003-2004 to \$12.8 billion in 2009-2010. The revenues from duty on betting on football matches, betting on horse races and Mark Six lotteries between 2003-2004 and 2009-2010 are summarized in Table 2:

	Table 2: Government revenue from betting duty (\$million)						
	2003- 2004	2004- 2005	2005- 2006	2006- 2007	2007- 2008	2008- 2009	2009- 2010
Betting on football matches	1,024	1,928	2,355	2,797	2,947	2,946	2,978
Betting on horse races	9,259	8,467	7,950	7,703	8,415	8,089	8,292
Lotteries	1,353	1,662	1,633	1,547	1,686	1,585	1,497
Total	11,636	12,057	11,938	12,047	13,048	12,620	12,767

- (2) To ensure fiscal sustainability, the Government will look into different measures, including tax rate adjustment, to increase revenue without affecting people's livelihood, while maintaining the policy of low tax rate as far as possible. We will take into account the fiscal position of the Government, the economic environment of Hong Kong and the impact on people from different walks of life in the community, and give prudent consideration to the proposal of adjusting betting duty.
- (3) Gambling policies in different jurisdictions around the world are not the same and betting duty regimes also vary. Therefore, the licensing regime of betting activities (including the number of betting licences issued) in other jurisdictions may not be directly applicable to Hong Kong. As for Hong Kong, the Government's policy has all along been not to encourage gambling.

As per the established practice, the licence for football betting is only issued by the Government under the Ordinance to only one organization, namely HKJC, so as to prevent competition amongst

operators which could stimulate demand for gambling. Having considered that the prevailing practice is consistent with the Government's gambling policy of not encouraging gambling and has all along been effective, we have no plan at the moment to increase the number of licence for football betting. Thank you, President.

MR ADRIAN PEDRO HO (in Cantonese): *I thank the Government for its reply. The figures quoted in its reply show that since the increase of betting duty rate and the reforms to the betting duty system, not only have the related revenues been increasing, but the total proceeds received by HKJC have also continued to grow, whereas there has been no impact on the public demand for gambling.*

According to the 2022 Annual Report of HKJC, the total balance of its reserves fund, charities trust and investment funds amounted to \$113.5 billion. May I ask whether the Government will regulate such a massive amount of disposable assets of HKJC, or whether it can do so? Thank you, President.

SECRETARY FOR FINANCIAL SERVICES AND THE TREASURY (in Cantonese): President, in reply to Mr HO's supplementary question, all of us are well aware that HKJC is an independent private entity, but not a statutory body. The Government has authorized HKJC to conduct Mark Six Lotteries, horse race betting and football betting under the Ordinance so as to regulate those betting activities, but its financial arrangement, including charitable donations, falls outside our scope of regulation.

However, when communicating with different political parties and Members and consulting members of the public, especially when the Financial Secretary will soon announce the 2023-2024 Budget ("the Budget"), I noticed some voices suggesting that we raise the betting duty rate to generate more revenue. I am also aware that HKJC has expressed its dissenting opinion in this regard.

As I said earlier, we need to take everything into account, including our fiscal position, the economic environment of Hong Kong and other factors concerning people's livelihood. We will duly consider all views and suggestions as a whole. Thank you, President.

REVD CANON PETER DOUGLAS KOON (in Cantonese): *President, HKJC is one of the largest charitable organizations in Hong Kong, donating about \$6.6 billion for charity in its previous financial year. An increase in betting duty rate may impair its capability of funding social welfare organizations. May I ask whether the Government will put all the extra tax revenues collected into social welfare? Thank you, President.*

SECRETARY FOR FINANCIAL SERVICES AND THE TREASURY (in Cantonese): *President, as I said in my reply to Mr HO's question just now, two issues are concerned: First, the target on which we levy the tax; and second, the uses of tax revenues. For the latter, of course, we already have a set of effective financial arrangements in place, including the appropriation of funding. All the arrangements have been continuously adopted.*

The focus now is on whom we should levy the tax. HKJC, as mentioned by the Member, is surely one of our main targets. As I have just said, we received quite a number of opinions in this regard during the Budget consultation. Coordination and holistic consideration on whether and how we should put them into practice are certainly needed. After tax revenues are collected and injected into a “big pool”, the Government will make use of the money therein for different needs. There is no “dedicated allocation” arrangement for this purpose. We already have an established funding mechanism, which is carried out on the legislative and executive levels. Thank you, President.

MR PAUL TSE (in Cantonese): *President, after listening to the main question and Mr HO's supplementary question, as far as I understand it, the thrust of his main question concerns the revenues from betting duty, whereas his supplementary question seems to have shifted the focus onto the regulation of HKJC's operation and its profits; it makes me wonder what the focus of his question is.*

As the Secretary has repeatedly mentioned in his reply, without a doubt, the Government does not encourage gambling and it aims to combat illegal gambling. Taking this perspective, we should not set our eyes only on tax revenues. Particularly, although the Secretary did not directly answer in part (2) of his main reply whether the tax rate would be increased and merely mentioned that they would look into it, he expressively stated that the Government would handle the issue without affecting people's livelihood, while maintaining the policy of low tax rate as far as possible.

I would like to know: By “without affecting people’s livelihood”, do the authorities include maintaining HKJC’s capability to do charity work or weakening the competitiveness of illegal bookmakers? In fact, gambling, to many grass-roots people, is as essential as spiritual food for life. Taking other social and livelihood policies into account, is it appropriate and timely to raise, or consider raising the tax at this time?

SECRETARY FOR FINANCIAL SERVICES AND THE TREASURY (in Cantonese): As I have said, any decision on public finances involves many different considerations. We should not just aim for increasing revenue, but also consider whether such decision will bring other impacts, especially on people from different walks of life in the community.

In response to the Member’s question, let me illustrate with an example how the authorities balance livelihood needs. Members may still remember that the Government has frozen some fees and charges for two years, from 2019 to 2021. In order to uphold fiscal discipline, since January 2022, all bureaux and departments have started reviewing their respective fees charged under the “user pays” principle in a progressive manner. They first dealt with administrative fees that do not directly affect people’s livelihood. Specifically, they started by adjusting those which are less relevant to livelihood, such as plans, digital photos and government publications.

In reply to the supplementary question raised by the Member just now, we consistently apply the same principle when dealing with betting duty and the overall finance. Even if we set a certain target for financial revenues, we still need to examine the impacts of pursuing such target on people’s livelihood or other areas. This practice has been adopted all along, and starting with this, we will consider various suggestions, including the one mentioned in today’s question. Thank you, President.

DR JOHNNY NG (in Cantonese): *President, the legislative intent for the SAR Government to authorize betting on football matches in 2003 was to bring the activity under regulation, thereby combating illegal gambling and curbing the prevalence of gambling. However, with the increasing modes of illegal gambling on sports, many people take part in illegal gambling by betting on various matches outside Hong Kong; in particular, online betting has become increasingly popular.*

It is known that over 550 000 people took part in illegal gambling last year, involving a profit of over \$14 billion. Football betting offered by HKJC has been facing more and more competition.

I would like to ask: In addition to horse races, football and lotteries, will the Government consider introducing a greater variety of sports betting on, say, basketball matches of NBA (National Basketball Association) or Formula 1 Races? On one hand, this can enhance the attractiveness of local bets offered by HKJC, reduce public participation in illegal gambling and curb the undesirable gambling trend; on the other hand, it can increase tax revenues going to the public coffer. Thank you, President.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Which public officer will give a reply? Under Secretary for Home and Youth Affairs, please reply.

UNDER SECRETARY FOR HOME AND YOUTH AFFAIRS (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. I also thank Dr NG for his supplementary question. As mentioned in the main reply, the Government's policy is not to encourage gambling, but to provide legal and authorized means of gambling to address public demand for various gambling activities, so as to prevent the public from turning to illegal gambling. In order to curb the social problems brought about by illegal gambling activities, the regulation on gambling activities should keep abreast of the times.

Generally speaking, the Government will explore whether more legal means of gambling activities should be introduced under the following circumstances: First, there has been a sufficiently large and persistent demand for a certain gambling activity; second, the demand is currently being satisfied by illegal means, and even with the devotion of substantial resources, the problem cannot be practically and fully tackled by law enforcement alone; and third, the proposition of authorizing the new gambling activity commands public support.

Based on the information available to us and our communication with the Police, we do not see any need to increase the legal means of betting activities for the time being. We will continue to closely monitor the trend of various gambling activities, and explore the need to increase the legal means of betting activities to curb the illegal ones when necessary. Thank you, President.

DR TIK CHI-YUEN (in Cantonese): *President, HKJC obtains proceeds from gambling, and thus allocates a portion of it to charity, showing its commitment to social responsibility.*

The Secretary mentioned in his reply to Mr HO's supplementary question that a number of social factors need to be considered before increasing the betting duty rate. Since increasing the betting duty rate will lower the proceeds received by HKJC, will that in turn reduce its charitable donations? Instead, will the Government require HKJC to allocate a certain amount of proceeds for charitable purposes regardless of the betting duty rate, so as to ensure that HKJC assumes a greater social responsibility?

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Which public officer will give a reply? Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury, please reply.

SECRETARY FOR FINANCIAL SERVICES AND THE TREASURY (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. In fact, my main reply has answered the Member's supplementary question. Insofar as our current regulation of HKJC is concerned, as it is an independent private entity, we have licensed and authorized it to conduct lotteries, horse race betting and football betting under the Ordinance. However, HKJC's financial arrangement, including operating expenses, charitable donations and reserves, falls outside our scope of regulation.

Nonetheless, I believe the Member is asking from the perspective of his constituency, i.e. social welfare, and is particularly concerned about the resources for social welfare being reduced as a result of any moves. Government expenditure is undoubtedly provided for on a policy-oriented basis. The Government will first examine the need for resources in various policy areas, and then allocate resources through the Budget or its daily operation. This is my first point.

To be specific, this question, as well as my reply, focuses on betting duty. In fact, I have made it very clear in my reply that we need to balance all factors and examine the impacts of any measures on various aspects, especially people's livelihood; that is to say, we need to give holistic consideration and strike a balance. We have heard the views of Members and members of the public concerning the Budget. Led by the Financial Secretary, we will take everything into consideration during the preparation of the Budget. Thank you, President.

MR SHIU KA-FAI (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. HKJC is the largest charitable organization in Hong Kong, bringing benefits to a wide range of other organizations. Therefore, we need to ensure the smooth operation of HKJC, so that it can help people in need.*

I have recently heard that individual Members, who intend to improve our fiscal position, make a target of HKJC in terms of betting duty. I acknowledge their good intentions. Yet, I have also heard other friends saying that increasing substantially the betting duty rate of HKJC will hinder its competitiveness, because HKJC does not only accept local bets from Hong Kong people, but it also manages commingled pools with bets from other countries, cities or places. As the pie has grown bigger, more tax revenues can be collected from them.

May I ask the Secretary whether the betting duty rate in Hong Kong is actually higher or lower than that in other countries? In any case, it is more important for us to ensure the smooth operation of HKJC, so as to help Hong Kong people in need. Thank you, Secretary.

SECRETARY FOR FINANCIAL SERVICES AND THE TREASURY (in Cantonese): President, we have surely taken gambling policies around the world as a point of reference when weighing and assessing all factors. That being said, I need to point out that gambling policies vary by jurisdiction, and so do betting duty regimes. Therefore, levy practices or the number of licences issued in other places may not be fully applicable to Hong Kong.

For example, the current duty rate on football betting is 50% in Hong Kong, which is already much higher than that in other jurisdictions. In comparison, the duty rate on football betting is 15% in the United Kingdom and 25% in Singapore. In terms of levy practices, betting duty is levied based on turnovers in some places, whereas on betting proceeds minusing payout in some others. As many variables and circumstances are giving play, it is difficult to draw a sharp line across the board for comparison.

Even so, I have heard a saying, probably made by a former Minister of Finance of France many years ago, that taxation is like plucking the goose—it is simply impossible to pluck all feathers at a time. Therefore, we need to balance and consider factors of all aspects. I believe that in the Budget to be announced by the Financial Secretary, there will also be some discussion on how we balance considerations in various areas. Thank you, President.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): The question session ends here.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Provision of employment support for persons with disabilities

7. **MS LILLIAN KWOK** (in Chinese): *The Rehabilitation Advisory Committee stated in the Persons with Disabilities and Rehabilitation Programme Plan published in June 2020 that promoting employment of persons with disabilities (“PWDs”) is to encourage them to contribute to the society at different work positions on the basis of their abilities (rather than their disabilities). Regarding the employment support provided by the Government for PWDs, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *of the number of PWDs participated in the various programmes implemented to support the employment of PWDs and the number of employment organizations involved, in each of the past five years;*
- (2) *whether it has, in respect of the various aforesaid programmes, arranged dedicated manpower to follow up the situation of the participants, as well as provided them with emotional support and followed up their employment situation; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and*
- (3) *whether the Government will regularly review and adjust the amount of subsidy under the Support Programme for Employees with Disabilities; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?*

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Labour and Welfare** on 15 February 2023 is in **Appendix 1**.

Encouraging local talents to stay in Hong Kong for development

8. **MR JIMMY NG** (in Chinese): *Hong Kong lost a labour force of about 140 000 in the past two years. There are views that apart from bringing in outside talents, the Government also needs to introduce measures to encourage local talents to stay in Hong Kong for development. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *as there are views that with the implementation of the Hong Kong National Security Law and the successful implementation of the principle of “patriots administering Hong Kong”, Hong Kong has achieved a “transition from chaos to order” and entered the new stage of “advancing from stability to prosperity”, whether the authorities will make an effort to mend the social rift and create a relatively relaxed and tolerant political environment, so as to encourage local talents with diversified values to stay in Hong Kong for development; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;*
- (2) *given that the Hospital Authority has earlier launched a series of staff retention measures, including the low-interest home loan scheme for staff and the arrangement for extending the employment of retired staff, etc., whether the authorities will assess the effectiveness of such measures and encourage different industries to launch relevant measures; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and*
- (3) *whether the authorities will set terms for all talent retention measures involving public funding support to ensure that talents who are beneficiaries will stay in Hong Kong for development; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?*

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Labour and Welfare** on 15 February 2023 is in **Appendix 1**.

Safety of hikers

9. **MR CHAN HAK-KAN** (in Chinese): *It is learnt that in recent years, many members of the public are keen on hiking activities, and have used related applications and webpages to obtain relevant information. However, some hikers’ lack of safety awareness has resulted in the frequent occurrence of accidents. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *of the respective numbers of cases in which hikers sought assistance, went missing and suffered casualty in each of the past three years, with a breakdown by the country parks involved; among the hiker missing and death cases, the respective percentages of those involving lone hikers;*

- (2) *of the number of operations mounted by the authorities to search for and rescue hikers in the past three years, as well as the average time required and the number of search and rescue (“S&R”) officers deployed for each of such operations;*
- (3) *of the number of downloads of the “Enjoy Hiking” mobile application launched by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department so far, and the utilization situation of the “GPS Hiker Tracking Service” function in the application (e.g. the number of S&R operations in which the use of such function by persons seeking rescue helped S&R officers to track their locations or narrow down the search areas in the past three years); whether the Government has reviewed if the GPS Hiker Tracking Service has helped shorten the S&R time, and whether it has plans to introduce measures to increase the usage of the application;*
- (4) *as it is learnt that hiking applications in the community, apart from providing information on hiking routes, are also equipped with functions of route deviation alerts to prevent hikers from getting lost and offline maps, and can be used to report and upload incidents of damaging the countryside immediately to notify other hikers, whether the Government has reviewed the hiking applications and webpages it launches, with a view to adding similar functions; if so, of the details; and*
- (5) *whether it will step up education and organize more activities to raise the awareness of hiking safety among members of the public; if so, of the details?*

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Environment and Ecology** on 15 February 2023 is in **Appendix 1**.

Green Tech Fund

10. **PROF WILLIAM WONG** (in Chinese): *The Government established the Green Tech Fund (“the Fund”) in 2020 to provide funding support to scientific research projects which promote decarbonization and enhancement of environmental protection in Hong Kong. According to the Government’s information, the Government has injected a total of \$400 million into the Fund, and the Fund has approved a total of 22 projects so far with a total grant of about*

\$100 million. A total of 191 applications were received and 14 projects were approved in the first round of applications for the Fund, whereas a total of about 100 applications were received and eight projects were approved in the second round of applications. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) *of the total number of applications received in the aforesaid two rounds of applications, and whether it has studied the reasons for the disparity between the number of applications approved and the total number of applications;*
- (2) *in respect of the unsuccessful applications in the aforesaid two rounds of applications, whether it has summed up the reasons why they were not approved, including the components of the assessment criteria (i.e. “potential contributions to decarbonization and environmental protection”, “technical and management capability”, “plan for further development of project deliverables” and “financial considerations”) that such applications mainly failed to fulfil, with a breakdown of such applications by the main reasons why they were not approved;*
- (3) *given that among the organizations whose applications were approved, around 70% were “designated local public research institutes”, while “local companies” and “research and development centres” account for around 30%, whether it has studied the reasons for the lesser number of the latter being granted funding support; of the authorities’ plans to assist more applicants (particularly non-public research institutes) in successfully applying for the Fund; and*
- (4) *whether it will consolidate the experience of the aforesaid two rounds of applications to hold seminars for the industry to explain the application process of the Fund and the reasons why previous applications were granted and not granted funding support, so that more applicants will understand how they will be granted funding support successfully, and that projects with potential can be granted funding support more easily?*

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Environment and Ecology** on 15 February 2023 is in **Appendix 1**.

Solving the problem of manpower shortage

11. **MR SHIU KA-FAI** (in Chinese): *The Chief Executive (“CE”) has indicated in the 2022 Policy Address that many sectors in Hong Kong are facing manpower shortages, and relevant bureaux will listen to the views of the sectors and put forward solutions having regard to the situation of individual sectors. In addition, in reply to my question raised at the Question and Answer Session of this Council on 19 January this year, CE indicated that for the employment of foreign workers in 13 industries or categories with manpower shortage, there had been no need to conduct prior local recruitment in order to prove the recruitment difficulties, and that CE had requested the 15 policy bureaux to conduct studies and submit reports on whether there was room for expansion in respect of importation of foreign workers for the 13 industries or categories (“the studies”). In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) of the industries in respect of which the relevant policy bureaux will put forward solutions to the problem of manpower shortage, as well as the timetable for putting forward the solutions and the contents of such solutions (if any);*
- (2) of the 13 industries or categories involved in the studies, and when the 15 policy bureaux will submit the reports on the studies to CE; and*
- (3) as it is learnt that the Secretary for Labour and Welfare (“the Secretary”) visited Singapore in early January this year, whether the Secretary has gained from the authorities in Singapore a detailed understanding of the local policy and situation on labour importation, including the reasons for importing labour and the benefits brought about by it; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?*

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Labour and Welfare** on 15 February 2023 is in **Appendix 1**.

The footbridge at the junction of Che Kung Miu Road and Mei Tin Road

12. **MR DOMINIC LEE** (in Chinese): *Some residents of Tai Wai have complained that there have been a number of issues concerning the management and facilities of the covered footbridge at the junction of Che Kung Miu Road and*

Mei Tin Road (commonly known as “the octopus bridge”) in recent years, and the ongoing demolition works (i.e. the permanent closure and demolition works of part of the bridge and other related facilities on the northern side of the bridge, which were gazetted on 11 November 2011) have also affected their daily lives seriously. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) as quite a number of residents in the district have relayed that since the octopus bridge’s entrance/exit in close proximity to the MTR Tai Wai Station is closed due to the aforesaid demolition works, they have to make a detour to a newly-built shopping centre nearby to travel to and from the Tai Wai Station and some elderly persons have even slipped and fallen as the floor is too slippery, while the escalators and lifts opened by the shopping centre are unable to handle the tremendous pedestrian flow, whether the Government will consider amending the land lease conditions involving the demolition works to retain the relevant part of the bridge and facilities, so that members of the public can have more choices of routes, thereby diverting the pedestrian flow; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; of the process for amending relevant land lease conditions by the Government and whether there were any precedents;*
- (2) as quite a number of residents in the district have pointed out that a number of works are still underway in the aforesaid shopping centre, the odour of “thinner” and noises arising therefrom have seriously affected their health, and they have opined that the developer concerned has closed and demolished the relevant part of the octopus bridge at a too early stage, and the deadline for the completion of the aforesaid demolition works set by the Government is too early, of the justifications for setting the deadline concerned and whether the Government will consider postponing the demolition works for at least one year until the shopping centre is fully open, as well as reopening the part of the bridge which has been closed; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; whether the Government will discuss with the landlords of the shopping centre about opening more passages (e.g. opening the escape staircases of the shopping centre) and other short-term improvement options, such that residents do not have to make a detour to travel to and from the Tai Wai Station;*

- (3) *given that some residents in the district have pointed out that graffiti have been painted on and damages have been made to the octopus bridge constantly in recent years, of the number of removals of graffiti on the bridge carried out by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department and the number of cases in which prosecutions have been instituted against relevant graffiti painters over the past six months, and whether the Government will step up law enforcement efforts or adopt other measures to improve and address the relevant issues; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;*
- (4) *as quite a number of residents in the district have complained that there are various issues concerning the octopus bridge (including insufficient slip resistance on the surface of the staircases, drainage system problems, damages in gutter covers (especially those located on steep roads and under the staircases) and the excessive gaps between gutter covers that often trip pedestrians over, as well as the shortage of rubbish bins, etc.), whether the Government will review and rectify the aforesaid issues; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and*
- (5) *whether it will consider liaising with franchised bus companies to add more signages on the octopus bridge so that residents can have a clearer picture on the locations of nearby bus stops; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?*

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Transport and Logistics** on 15 February 2023 is in **Appendix 1**.

EcoPark

13. **MS ELIZABETH QUAT** (in Chinese): *It has been reported that when EcoPark commenced operation in 2007, a total of 21 recyclers were successful in the tender exercise, but only 10 tenants remain in operation at present. Such tenants expect the Government to introduce specific support policies. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *whether it has assessed if the ancillary facilities of EcoPark are sufficient; given that only about 60% of area of the rentable land at EcoPark has been leased out, whether it has assessed the reasons for*

the relatively low occupancy rate of EcoPark; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

- (2) whether it knows the current management expenses of EcoPark, and whether the monthly rental income of EcoPark is sufficient to offset such expenses;*
- (3) of the specific measures in place to assist in collecting waste (e.g. waste metal, waste batteries, waste tyres and food waste) from the market and then handing it to EcoPark tenants, so as to reduce the transportation costs of such tenants;*
- (4) whether it will take measures to increase the number of jobs to be created by EcoPark, including providing lots of smaller area to enable smaller recyclers to operate there, and introducing “the number of jobs to be provided” as one of the conditions for awarding tenancy agreements; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;*
- (5) given that some recyclers have indicated that the successful bidders of the various lots at EcoPark need to build factories and apply for water and electricity supply by themselves, which is a time-consuming and cumbersome process, whether the Government will build a multi-storey factory well equipped with water and electricity facilities at EcoPark for successful bidders to move in, so as to reduce the operating costs of the industry; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and*
- (6) as some EcoPark tenants have indicated that in recent years, although the daily per capita municipal solid waste (“MSW”) disposal rate in Hong Kong has been increasing year after year, as local recyclers mostly export waste to other places for recycling, the quantity of MSW recycled has continued to drop, whether the Government will adjust the local recycling policy to achieve “according priority to recycling local waste locally”?*

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Environment and Ecology** on 15 February 2023 is in **Appendix 1**.

Promoting the informatization and connectivity of enterprises in Hong Kong and on the Mainland

14. **MR YIM KONG** (in Chinese): *The Innovation and Technology Commission (“ITC”) launched the Distance Business Programme (“the D-Biz Programme”) in 2020 to support enterprises to continue their operation and provide services through the adoption of information technology solutions during the epidemic. As at mid-January 2022, more than 20 000 enterprises were granted funding. On the other hand, it has been reported that in order to promote the industrial Internet, the Mainland Government is promoting the participation in the initiative of “getting on clouds and platforms” by industrial and commercial enterprises, and encouraging them to use business systems such as “cloud platforms”. There are views that even though normal travel between Hong Kong and the Mainland has now fully resumed, strengthening the ability of enterprises to do business remotely is still an effective means to enhance their competitiveness, and as most of the industrial and commercial enterprises in Hong Kong have close ties with Mainland manufacturers, the integration of the D-Biz Programme with the Mainland’s initiative of getting on clouds and platforms will help enhance the connectivity between Hong Kong and other Mainland cities of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (“GBA”), and promote the re-industrialization of Hong Kong. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *given that the then Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development indicated in his reply to a question raised by a Member of this Council on 16 February 2022 that the Government had no intention to re-introduce the D-Biz Programme, whether the current-term Government will adopt other innovative ways to continue to optimize the environment for doing business remotely; if so, whether ITC will study with the Mainland’s industry and information technology departments the feasibility of getting on clouds and platforms for cooperation; if not, the reasons for that; and*
- (2) *of the other measures put in place by the current-term Government to promote the informatization and connectivity of industrial and commercial enterprises in Hong Kong and other Mainland cities of GBA?*

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Innovation, Technology and Industry** on 15 February 2023 is in **Appendix 1**.

The BUD Fund

15. **MS YUNG HOI-YAN** (in Chinese): *To enhance the competitiveness of Hong Kong enterprises, the Government launched the “Dedicated Fund on Branding, Upgrading and Domestic Sales” (“BUD Fund”) in 2012 to provide funding support to eligible Hong Kong enterprises. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *of the numbers of applications received and approved under the BUD Fund each year since its launch in 2012, as well as the geographical coverage, the industries, the uses and amounts of the funding involved in such applications;*
- (2) *given that some enterprises have relayed that some intermediaries charge large amounts of fees for assisting enterprises in applying for the BUD Fund, which has in effect reduced the amounts of funding that really reach the hands of applicant enterprises, whether the Government has received relevant complaints or requests for assistance; if the Government has, whether it can provide information such as the number and types of relevant complaints or requests for assistance as well as the amount of funding involved; if the Government has not, whether it will take the initiative to investigate and examine the situation; and*
- (3) *whether the Government will review if there are loopholes in the existing application mechanism and requirements for the BUD Fund, and how the Government will step up its monitoring in the future to ensure that the funding can really reach the hands of applicant enterprises?*

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development** on 15 February 2023 is in **Appendix 1**.

Provision of additional facilities for accessing the Tai Lam Tunnel Bus-Bus Interchange

16. **MR HOLDEN CHOW** (in Chinese): *Some members of the local community have relayed that while the Tai Lam Tunnel Bus-Bus Interchange (“the Interchange”) is frequented by passengers and quite a number of them are elderly*

persons and persons with disabilities, passengers from the nearby Tai Lam bus turnaround area at Pat Heung Road have to navigate steep slopes and staircases in order to reach the Interchange at the entrance of Tai Lam Tunnel, which is very inconvenient for the elderly and persons with disabilities. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the latest statistics on the daily passenger flow at the Interchange during peak hours; and*
- (2) whether the authorities have considered including the aforesaid location in the “hillside escalator links and elevator systems”, so as to provide additional barrier-free facilities such as elevators between the Interchange and the Tai Lam bus turnaround area at Pat Heung Road, thereby bringing convenience to the elderly and persons with impaired mobility; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?*

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Transport and Logistics** on 15 February 2023 is in **Appendix 1**.

Treatment of post Coronavirus Disease 2019 condition

17. **PROF CHAN WING-KWONG** (in Chinese): *It has been reported that more than 900 000 recovered patients of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (“COVID-19”) have developed at least one of the symptoms of post COVID-19 condition (commonly known as “long COVID”). There are views that COVID-19 has become a local endemic disease and the number of patients developing symptoms of long COVID will be increasing. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) given that the Health Bureau and the Health and Medical Research Fund have awarded grants to seven long COVID related research studies, of the names, contents and results of such studies, as well as the names of the research institutes; the expected completion time of the research studies which have not been completed;*

- (2) *whether it has compiled statistics on the respective numbers of members of the public who went to public and private healthcare institutions for seeking medical consultation in each of the past six months due to the development of long COVID symptoms; if so, of the relevant symptoms and their duration;*
- (3) *given that the Hospital Authority (“HA”) launched the “Special Chinese Medicine Out-patient Programme for COVID-19 infected persons” (“the Special Programme”) in 2020 to provide eligible Hong Kong residents who have been confirmed to have contracted COVID-19 locally but still have COVID-19 sequelae with no more than 10 free Chinese medicine general consultations in the 18 Chinese Medicine Clinics cum Training and Research Centres, whether the Government knows the number of persons seeking medical consultation and the average number of diagnoses and treatments received by each patient under the Special Programme since its launch till the 30th of last month (i.e. the date on which the arrangement of issuing isolation orders was cancelled);*
- (4) *given that persons receiving services under the Special Programme need to produce the isolation orders issued by the Department of Health, but the arrangement of issuing isolation orders was cancelled on the 30th of last month, whether the Government knows if HA will revise the requirements for using such services, so that eligible members of the public can receive such services;*
- (5) *given that the Special Programme will end six months after the last date on which isolation orders were issued, whether the Government knows if HA will extend the Special Programme and collaborate with private Chinese medicine practitioners to provide more consultation quotas, thereby meeting the service demand; and*
- (6) *whether it has plans to carry out extensive publicity and education for members of the public, focusing on information such as the symptoms and treatment of and the nursing of health for long COVID?*

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Health** on 15 February 2023 is in **Appendix 1**.

Telling well the stories of China and the Hong Kong SAR

18. **MR ROCK CHEN** (in Chinese): *The report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposes to “extend the reach and appeal of Chinese civilization”, “stay firmly rooted in Chinese culture”, “better tell China’s stories, make China’s voice heard, and present a China that is credible, appealing, and respectable”, as well as “better present Chinese culture to the world”. There are views that the Hong Kong SAR, in addition to having the distinctive and significant advantages of enjoying strong support of the motherland and being closely connected to the world, is a place where Chinese and Western cultures converge and is in alignment with the world, it is therefore imperative that such strengths be put into good use to tell China’s story and the story of the Hong Kong SAR well. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *whether the Government will enhance the functions of the overseas Hong Kong Economic and Trade Offices by including a work requirement of telling well China’s story and the story of the Hong Kong SAR, and formulating key performance indicators for the relevant work; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;*
- (2) *how the Government currently employs the global office networks and personal connections of the Hong Kong Tourism Board and the Hong Kong Trade Development Council to make every effort to enable the world to better understand China’s development and the Hong Kong SAR’s unique strengths attributable to “one country, two systems”; and*
- (3) *whether the Government will nurture more patriotic and competent talents to become members of international institutions, or enhance the training in international affairs provided by the Civil Service College for civil servants and engage them more in international affairs, so that they can help to speak up for China and the Hong Kong SAR in the international arena; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?*

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development** on 15 February 2023 is in **Appendix 1**.

Designated clinics and tele-consultation service under the Hospital Authority

19. **MR CHAN PUI-LEUNG** (in Chinese): *Early last year, the Hospital Authority turned some general outpatient clinics into designated clinics for confirmed cases of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (“COVID-19”), and provided confirmed patients of COVID-19 with tele-consultation service. Such designated clinics and the tele-consultation service (“the clinics and the service”) have ceased operation since 30 January this year. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *whether it knows the average daily number of appointments during the operation period of the clinics and the service, and among such appointments, the respective attendances making appointments through the mobile application “HA Go” and by telephone; among the attendances making appointments by telephone, the number of appointments made via the “Care Booking Line”, as well as the number of dedicated telephone lines provided by each designated clinic in their Telephone Appointment Systems;*
- (2) *whether it knows the total service attendances during the operation period of the clinics and the service, and among them, the respective attendances of patients who were attended to by doctors at designated clinics and through tele-consultation service; the attendance of high-risk patients who made their appointments via the Care Booking Line, and the respective average waiting time of each high-risk patient and non-high-risk patient from making appointments to receiving medical attention;*
- (3) *whether it knows the total operating expenses of the clinics and the service;*
- (4) *whether it has assessed the specific implementation effectiveness of the clinics and the service; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; whether it will re-launch such services in light of the development of the epidemic; and*
- (5) *as there are views pointing out that the tele-consultation service in Hong Kong has greater development potential and can be used as a feasible option for general patients to receive medical attention,*

whether the Government will sum up the relevant experience in providing tele-consultation service for confirmed patients of COVID-19 and extend tele-consultation to other medical services, so as to promote the telemedicine development in Hong Kong?

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Health** on 15 February 2023 is in **Appendix 1**.

Village sewerage systems

20. **MR KENNETH LAU** (in Chinese): *It is learnt that public sewers still have not been laid in a number of villages in Hong Kong and villagers can only rely on primitive facilities to treat their sewage, the relevant sanitary conditions are therefore far from satisfactory. Some villagers have relayed to me that they hope the Government can expeditiously roll out the village sewerage programme (“the programme”) to cover unsewered villages and subsidize all villages across the territory to connect sewers from village houses to public sewers. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *of the respective current numbers of villages that have been included and those that have not yet been included into the programme; among the villages that have been included into the programme, of the respective numbers of those where the sewerage projects have been completed and those where the projects are being carried out, and set out by district the names of the villages, the numbers of village houses and the numbers of villagers involved in respect of the aforesaid two sets of figures; the reasons why the villages concerned have not yet been included into the programme;*
- (2) *of the details of the sewerage projects mentioned in (1) which are being carried out, including the names of the villages involved, the project titles, the project commencement dates and target completion dates;*
- (3) *among the villages mentioned in (1) where the sewerage projects have been completed, of the current percentage of households that have not yet connected their houses’ sewers to public sewers, and whether it knows the reasons for that; and*

- (4) *whether it will examine subsidizing all villages across the territory to connect village houses' sewers to public sewers, or allowing village house owners aged 60 or above to receive subsidies under the "Building Maintenance Grant Scheme for Needy Owners" without going through income assessment and means test, so as to help them connect their houses' sewers to public sewers as early as possible?*

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Environment and Ecology** on 15 February 2023 is in **Appendix 1**.

Administration of the estate of the late Mrs Nina WANG

21. **MRS REGINA IP** (in Chinese): *The Court of Final Appeal handed down a judgment on 18 May 2015, which held that the Chinachem Charitable Foundation Limited ("the Foundation") was to hold the estate of the late Mrs Nina WANG as a trustee, rather than receiving the estate concerned as an unconditional absolute gift; the Foundation's Board of Governors and the Secretary for Justice ("SJ") (as the guardian of the public interest) were required to formulate a scheme for implementing the will made by Mrs WANG in 2002, and prepare the scheme and submit it to the High Court for approval after consultation between the Foundation's Board of Governors and SJ. Moreover, SJ indicated in her reply to a question raised by a Member of this Council on 24 February 2021 that the Department of Justice had made an application to the Court on 29 March 2019 in respect of the relevant issues such as the propriety of the administration scheme it proposed and the details thereof, in order to seek the Court's determination or directions, and that the Court had fixed a directions hearing on 26 May 2021. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council of the progress of the relevant legal proceedings and whether the directions hearing concerned has been completed; if so, of the Court's directions for the use of such estate, and when SJ and relevant government departments will, in accordance with the Court's directions, properly handle such estate which should be used for charitable purposes, so as to avoid wasting resources?*

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Justice** on 15 February 2023 is in **Appendix 1**.

Work on promoting Hong Kong to the Mainland

22. **DR TAN YUEHENG** (in Chinese): *There are views that with the resumption of normal travel of persons between Hong Kong and the Mainland, the Hong Kong SAR Government should focus on engaging itself with the Mainland and telling Hong Kong's stories well to its Mainland counterparts while further enhancing the branding and image of Hong Kong, so as to facilitate the flows of people, goods and capital between Hong Kong and the Mainland to bring them back to the pre-epidemic levels as soon as possible. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *of the overall plan of the Hong Kong SAR Government this year to actively engage itself with the Mainland and tell Hong Kong's stories well to its Mainland counterparts, and how the Task Force on Promoting and Branding Hong Kong led by the Financial Secretary will play its role in this regard;*
- (2) *whether the officials of the Hong Kong SAR Government have plans to visit various Mainland provinces and municipalities to give talks and presentations; if so, whether they have formulated detailed promotional plans and activities, so as to restore and strengthen the cooperation between Hong Kong and Mainland cities in economic, humanities and other fields; and*
- (3) *as it has been reported that the number of Mainland visitor arrivals to Hong Kong after the orderly resumption of normal travel of persons between Hong Kong and the Mainland in January this year fell short of expectation and was far from returning to the pre-epidemic level, whether the Hong Kong SAR Government has plans to step up publicity efforts targeting Mainland visitors?*

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs** on 15 February 2023 is in **Appendix 1**.

MEMBERS' MOTIONS

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Member's motion on extending the period for amending subsidiary legislation.

Proposed resolution under the Interpretation and General Clauses Ordinance to extend the period for amending the Minimum Wage Ordinance (Amendment of Schedule 3) Notice 2023 and the Employment Ordinance (Amendment of Ninth Schedule) Notice 2023, which were laid on the Table of this Council on 18 January 2023.

I now call upon Mr MA Fung-kwok to move the motion.

**PROPOSED RESOLUTION TO EXTEND THE PERIOD FOR AMENDING
SUBSIDIARY LEGISLATION (L.N. 3 AND L.N. 4 OF 2023)**

MR MA FUNG-KWOK (in Cantonese): President, I move that the motion, as printed on the Agenda, be passed.

The motion moved by **Mr MA Fung-kwok** is in **Appendix 2**.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the motion moved by Mr MA Fung-kwok be passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you as stated. Will those in favour please raise their hands?

(Members raised their hands)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Those against please raise their hands.

(No hands raised)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I think the question is agreed by a majority of each of the two groups of Members present, that is, those returned by the Election Committee and those returned by functional constituencies and geographical constituencies.

I declare the motion passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Member's motion with no legislative effect.

Dr NGAN Man-yu will move a motion on “Improving the policies on foreign domestic helpers”.

Two Members will move amendments to the motion.

This Council will proceed to a joint debate on the motion and the amendments.

Later, I will first call upon Dr NGAN Man-yu to speak and move the motion. Then I will call upon Ir LEE Chun-keung and Ms Judy CHAN to speak in sequence, but they may not move the amendments at this stage.

The joint debate now begins. Members who wish to speak please press the “Request to speak” button.

I now call upon Dr NGAN Man-yu to speak and move the motion.

MOTION ON “IMPROVING THE POLICIES ON FOREIGN DOMESTIC HELPERS”

DR NGAN MAN-YU (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. President, regarding the policies on domestic helpers, we actually had discussions on the subject last year, during which the original motion and various amendments were passed.

Why do I have to move a similar motion again after a year and why do I keep pursuing on this subject? The reason is that in the past year, we have not seen any improvement made to the policies by the Bureau; the policies remain unchanged, which is disappointing.

The number of foreign domestic helpers (“FDHs”) in Hong Kong has grown from just over 20 000 in the 1970s to a peak of 400 000 in recent years. Assuming that there are three members in each family, 1.2 million people in Hong Kong will be living under the same roof with domestic helpers who greatly affect their daily lives.

The problem of FDHs has troubled many families in recent years. I have engaged in district work for a long time and often received enquiries, complaints and even grievances about FDHs. In recent years, the Consumer Council has announced the top ten consumer news reports for the year, and news reports related to FDHs have been on the list for two consecutive years, reflecting the community's keen concern about the problem of FDHs.

In order to understand more about the common problems faced by employers of FDHs, we conducted a survey for two consecutive years in 2021 and 2022 and collected opinions from over 1 600 employers. In October 2021, the Family Affairs Committee of the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong held a roundtable meeting to analyse and explore the problems of FDHs. In summary, there are three major problems in general.

The first problem is that “the helper does not match the description”. In fact, hiring an FDH is a modern version of “marrying someone in a blind marriage”; whether the person you get is good or bad depends merely on luck, without any guarantee. Last month, the TV programme “Scoop” reported a case of an employer who believed Kenyan FDHs to be conscientious and meticulous workers. But after the FDH was hired, she was unwilling to cook, refused to work in protest, even held a knife against the employer and finally disappeared; and there was no one to cook. There are also employers who have definitely paid for their FDHs to have full medical examinations, but soon after assuming duty, their FDHs are found to be sick and need medical treatment; and there are cases of pregnancy of FDHs, which is a big headache for the employers.

The second problem is that the employment agency (“EA”) engaged is unscrupulous. Although many agencies claim that their fees are clearly stated, our survey found that only 50% of the employers interviewed said that EAs have specified the details of their fees, and nearly 30% said that EAs have not. In addition, as many as 70% of the employers consider the fees charged by EAs unreasonable, giving them a feeling of being fleeced like dupes.

During the epidemic, there was also a shortage of FDHs. I believe Members will vividly remember, and many employers have also told us that there was a need to book a room at a quarantine hotel for the FDH entering Hong Kong. In addition to room charges, the employer has to pay administration costs; and before the arrival of the FDH, the employer has already spent more than \$20,000. Besides, some employers have to pay the EA an advance payment of more than

\$10,000. Eventually, the EA used the epidemic as the reason for the delay of the hiring process for more than two years. Although the FDH has not arrived in Hong Kong, the EA is not only unwilling to refund, but also charges the employer extra as administration costs for urging the FDH to come to Hong Kong.

The third problem is the fragmentation of responsibilities in implementing the policies on FDHs across different government departments. When employers have to make enquiries, seek help or file complaints, they are often confused as to which department to approach. Should they go to the Immigration Department, the Labour Department, or the Consumer Council?

In September last year, I submitted this proposal to the Chief Executive and the Secretary to improve the policies on FDHs precisely to address these situations. The proposal includes 13 suggestions, some are easy and others difficult, but I think the authorities can tackle the easy ones first and gradually improve the policies.

What the Government can easily do within a short time is to amend the terms and conditions in the employment contract to clarify some ambiguities.

As I mentioned just now, some employers have only come to know that their FDHs have health problems, are unfit for work or need help with medical treatment after their assumption of duty. These problems occur because the employment contract only vaguely requires that the helper is physically fit for work, without clearly stating the detailed requirements and specifications of the pre-employment medical examination.

In order to reduce these ambiguities, the simplest way is to specify the physical conditions of fit for work, set out the items and standards of medical examination, and draw up a list of recognized medical examination organizations in Hong Kong.

There are many ambiguous terms and conditions in the employment contract, such as under what circumstances should the employer bear the cost of sending the FDH back to his/her place of origin? Can all rest days, statutory holidays and paid annual leave be waived by payment in lieu? Many employers are confused and may easily break the law without knowing it. These details can be clearly stated in the employment contract or in an annex to it, so that both employers and employees will have a better grasp of their respective interests and responsibilities to reduce any possible misunderstanding.

As for the problem of unscrupulous EAs overcharging or failing to fulfil their service pledges, the authorities can amend the Code of Practice for Employment Agencies to include substantial payments such as the costs of air tickets and medical examinations as mandatory disclosure items. In order to enhance the service quality of EAs, it is suggested that undertakings such as payment arrangements, terms of guarantee and refund arrangements be included in the service agreement. For the convenience of EAs, the Government may also consider adopting standardized forms with samples for their easy reference.

At present, fragmentation of responsibilities concerning policies on FDHs across different departments has not only caused a lack of efficiency in implementing and enforcing the measures but also confusion to the public, which is definitely unsatisfactory.

Therefore, I suggest that the Government should, by drawing reference from the practices of the Estate Agents Authority, the Property Management Services Authority and the Travel Industry Authority, establish an FDH Authority, which will be responsible for monitoring, processing applications, promoting the development of the industry, handling complaints and providing education and training. The FDH Authority may establish a standing policy committee, comprising representatives from the Bureau, FDH agencies, FDHs and employer groups. When the Government introduces new policies and measures, the committee can help disseminate information and discuss measures to be implemented in the industry.

In order to cope with the COVID-19 epidemic in the past two years, the Government has been frequently changing its policies on FDHs; many employers and EAs are unable to grasp them and information in the community is very confusing. I believe through the committee, stakeholders can be informed in a timely manner and have the opportunity to express their views to the Government, thus greatly reducing misunderstanding and confusion.

I hope that the current-term Government will really listen to the voices of the public and this Council and start preparing for the establishment of an FDH Authority as soon as possible, so as to formulate long-term measures for the policies on FDHs in Hong Kong in the future. I so submit.

President, I move that the motion, as printed on the Agenda, be passed.

Dr NGAN Man-yu moved the following motion: (Translation)

“That with the ageing of the Hong Kong society, an increasing number of elderly people and persons with chronic illnesses are in need of long-term care, and with more and more women joining the workforce, the duties of taking care of the family and performing household chores in many families have fallen on foreign domestic helpers (‘FDHs’), resulting in society’s growing demand for FDHs; statistics show that the number of FDHs working in Hong Kong has increased to about 400 000 in recent years; given the wide concern in the community over the regulation of FDH agencies, the premature termination of contracts and job-hopping by FDHs as well as their quality, this Council urges the Government to comprehensively review and improve the policies on FDHs, including establishing an FDH Authority, reviewing and amending the standard employment contract for FDHs and the Code of Practice for Employment Agencies, establishing a rating system for FDH agencies, setting up a dedicated information website for FDHs and employers, and providing training courses for FDHs, thereby enhancing the protection of the interests of both the employers and FDHs.”

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the motion moved by Dr NGAN Man-yu be passed.

IR LEE CHUN-KEUNG (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. In this Chamber, we have discussed subjects related to foreign domestic helpers (“FDHs”) time and again, which shows that the existing policies on FDHs have much room for improvement.

Next, I would mainly talk about the hardships faced by the employers in hiring FDHs. Very often, they have no choice but to rely on FDH agencies, but this will lead to many problems. I will leave it to Mr Frankie YICK, my party member, to explain various problems arising from the entry of FDHs into Hong Kong and their arrivals at the employers’ homes, as well as the inadequacies of the Government’s policies on FDHs.

President, the supply of FDHs in Hong Kong has all along fallen short of demand, especially now that our society is ageing and more elderly people need care, FDHs in Hong Kong whose contracts have been completed or terminated are

thus highly sought after. In fact, families in general may not have the experience and expertise in hiring people; besides, the Government has not provided any relevant support, such as guidance for employers on how to hire the right helper. When the employers are standing at the entrance to an agency, most of them cannot tell if it is an employment agency (“EA”) holding a valid licence or an intermediary. Therefore, most families hiring helpers basically just rely on luck or the word of mouth of their friends to find an FDH agency providing one-stop service. That is why many FDH agencies have become increasingly dominant.

Many families waiting to hire FDHs told me that they have to pay tens of thousands in agency fees before they can even meet the FDHs, they feel like “getting a good beating before seeing the magistrate”. In addition, the fees of some FDH agencies are not transparent. Some employers do not even know to whom they have paid, and after waiting for six to nine months and the FDH is still unavailable, they may even be asked by the FDH agency to pay extra for the so-called training fees, transport costs, etc. They are like dupes to be fleeced, but it is too late to back out and there is no way to avoid further payment. If they refuse to pay, the FDH will not be available; and if they ask for refund, the agency will make many excuses and the money paid will easily go down the drain. These problems have made many families in Hong Kong feel very helpless.

In addition, in order to earn more agency fees, some FDH agencies will encourage FDHs to induce dismissal before completion of their contracts so that they can be transferred to work in another family through the agency. The objective is to increase the turnover of FDHs, but this has baffled families in genuine need of FDHs.

Therefore, as I have proposed in my amendment, the Government must ensure that FDH agencies comply with the relevant legislation such as the Employment Agency Regulations, and follow the practices of real estate and insurance industries by establishing a mandatory licensing regime and a rating system for FDH agencies and practitioners, setting up a dedicated portal for FDHs and employers, drawing up a “blacklist” of FDHs engaged in premature termination of contracts and job-hopping, and most importantly, making public the “blacklist” as well as the various service fees charged by FDH agencies for public reference, in order to protect the interests of both employers and employees.

President, with the long-term shortage of FDHs, some unscrupulous FDH agencies have seized the opportunity and boasted about the celebrity FDHs they have on hand, saying that they are all-rounded, proficient in everything, cook well

and very presentable. But to the employers, their interviews with the FDHs are often video conferences lasting for 10 to 20 minutes only, which is inadequate for them to understand all about the FDHs. They do not know whether what is said is exaggerated, nor can they tell if it is true or not. Thus, the employers can only rely on the brief resume provided by the EA, and they have no way to verify whether the information is true or not. They can only believe in what is said.

Therefore, I suggest that the Government should establish a test centre of housework techniques and a skills assessment system for FDHs whereby FDHs are required to pass a skills test on performing household chores and taking care of the elderly and children before assuming duty, so as to ensure that the skills of FDHs reach a certain standard, and if FDHs do not meet the basic requirements, FDH agencies should be required to provide training courses for FDHs.

(THE PRESIDENT'S DEPUTY, MS STARRY LEE, took the Chair)

Deputy President, many employers only have a very humble and modest request when hiring an FDH, that is, they hope that the FDH will complete the term of employment for two years in accordance with the spirit of the contract and take care of the family members, including the elderly and the children at home, so that they can go out to work without worries. However, it seems that in Hong Kong nowadays, these wishes are hard to fulfil, and it may even be too much to ask. Therefore, I would like to take this opportunity to once again implore and urge the relevant government departments to ensure that FDH agencies comply with the relevant legislation, and protect the interests of FDHs and the employers in accordance with the law.

With these remarks, Deputy President, I hope Members will support the amendment I have proposed. Thank you.

MS JUDY CHAN (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President. First of all, I am also very grateful to Dr NGAN Man-yu for moving the motion on improving the policies on foreign domestic helpers ("FDHs"). In fact, the subject of FDHs or FDH agencies has been repeatedly discussed in this Council, but after many discussions, the Government has failed to make any headway in dealing with the

policies on FDHs for a long time; meanwhile, many measures that have not kept abreast with the times have been exploited by unscrupulous FDH agencies, thus undermining the interests of both FDHs and the employers.

Deputy President, as we all know, given the circumstances of the Hong Kong society, many families will only rely more on FDHs. As FDHs are important helpers in caring for the elderly or the children in the family, they have enabled more family members to join the job market without worries, thus unleashing more labour force to promote the economic development of Hong Kong.

The number of FDHs in Hong Kong reached a peak of over 400 000 in 2019. Although the number has fallen in the past few years due to the epidemic and various preventive measures, it is believed that the demand for FDHs from many families will gradually increase as the epidemic is now under control and normalcy is resumed. Therefore, it is time for the Government to seriously consider how to improve its policies on FDHs in Hong Kong.

In the past few years, many unscrupulous agencies have exploited some grey areas to make many families in urgent need of FDHs suffer without any channels of complaint. I have come into contact with many employers and learnt that some unscrupulous agencies have abetted FDHs in dismissal inducement or job-hopping which give the employers headaches. Since the employers cannot make alternative living arrangements with the sudden leave of their FDHs, they have even chosen to quit their jobs to take care of the daily household chores.

Deputy President, although the Government has continued to make great efforts in combating job-hopping by FDHs, basically, it will only address the symptoms of the problem rather than the root cause if unscrupulous agencies remain unregulated. In the final analysis, the conduct of unscrupulous agencies will make it difficult for the whole industry to have a normal and healthy development, and it will discourage FDHs from coming to work in Hong Kong in the long run. While it is not easy for the Government to “compete for talents”, it is no simple matter for employers to find good FDHs. If FDHs will not come to work in Hong Kong, families in need of their help will eventually be affected.

Besides, I have repeatedly mentioned to the Government that the so-called standard employment contract has been in use for decades; it is outdated in many respects, and unscrupulous agencies have exploited the loopholes in the contract to abet FDHs, making employers suffer unnecessary losses. However, I have not seen any action from the Government yet, which is quite disappointing.

Deputy President, the interests of FDHs and employers are being exploited every day, affecting hundreds of thousands of families and hundreds of thousands of FDHs in Hong Kong. To stop this never-ending vicious cycle and to protect the interests of all parties, the Government must actively introduce additional measures, such as providing more platforms for supporting employers and employees, reviewing the existing legislation and codes of practice, and raising the threshold for the operation of FDH agencies, so as to increase transparency and strengthen regulation to eliminate irregularities, thereby upgrading the service quality of the industry and responding to the expectations of society.

With these remarks, I hope Members will support my amendment. Thank you, Deputy President.

SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND WELFARE (in Cantonese): Deputy President, I would like to thank Dr NGAN Man-yu for proposing this motion debate and Ir LEE Chun-keung and Ms Judy CHAN for proposing the amendments, so that I can have a clearer understanding of Members' views and the opportunity to expound the Government's policies on foreign domestic helpers ("FDHs") and our work in enhancing the protection of the interests of FDHs and their employers, regulating employment agencies ("EAs"), combating job-hopping by FDHs, and so on.

Policies on foreign domestic helpers

Due to the shortage of local full-time live-in domestic workers, the Government has allowed the importation of FDHs to work in Hong Kong since the 1970s. FDHs and local employees enjoy the same labour rights and protection under the laws of Hong Kong. The Government has also prepared a standard employment contract for FDHs to protect the interests of both employers and employees.

FDHs have always played an important role in Hong Kong families, helping local families with household chores and caring for young children and the elderly. The Government is committed to ensuring reasonable protection for FDHs who have come to work in Hong Kong and their employers, and to formulating and reviewing the policies and measures on FDHs and a standard employment contract for hiring FDHs in light of the circumstances and needs.

Interdepartmental collaboration in handling matters on foreign domestic helpers

At present, there are about 340 000 FDHs providing services to families in Hong Kong. Government departments have been working closely to provide various support to FDHs and the employers in different areas.

To enhance coordination and liaison among government departments on FDH issues, the Labour Department (“LD”) has set up a dedicated FDH Division in 2020 to ensure effective coordination and implementation of measures to enhance the protection of FDHs and provide better support to FDHs and the employers. LD has also set up a 24-hour telephone hotline to provide support to FDHs and the employers with multilingual interpretation services. During the COVID-19 epidemic, the dedicated FDH Division has performed its role and worked closely with other government departments to formulate policies and measures to assist FDHs and the employers to cope with the epidemic. These include facilitating measures with the Immigration Department (“ImmD”) to allow FDHs and the employers to extend their contracts and defer their return to their places of origin by mutual consent, as well as making concerted efforts to combat job-hopping by FDHs. The dedicated FDH Division also works with the Department of Health, EAs and consulates to facilitate the arrival of FDHs in Hong Kong in a gradual and orderly manner and to arrange for FDHs to be quarantined at quarantine facilities. The above work fully reflects the effectiveness of the existing framework for handling FDH matters. The relevant departments are able to perform their respective duties while maintaining close liaison and cooperation to respond promptly and effectively.

Regulation of employment agencies and practitioners

The Government understands that employers of FDHs are very concerned about the professionalism and quality of services provided by EAs. LD regulates EAs in the following four ways, namely licensing, inspection, investigation and prosecution. A dedicated portal has also been set up for EAs to provide information related to them. Let me emphasize that LD regulates not only the licensees of EAs, but also their management and employees. When processing licence applications, LD will not only examine the records of the licensees of EAs, but also check whether the operator, management or employees of the EAs have breached the law or the Code of Practice for Employment Agencies (“the Code”), if so, their licence applications will be rejected. The Code lists more than 40 detailed requirements for operating an EA that all EA practitioners must comply with, otherwise, their licenses may be revoked. Licensees, nominated operators,

the management and employees of EAs are required to have reasonable knowledge of the relevant legislation, and FDH agencies should also be familiar with the Standard Employment Contract and documents relating to the employment of FDHs. The Code also requires licensees, directors, nominated operators, and persons in senior management of EAs to closely supervise all staff and they will be held accountable for all acts and conducts of their staff in relation to the provision of job-placement services. LD organizes regular briefings for EAs to ensure that practitioners are aware of the requirements of the laws and the Code.

In the past five years (i.e. from 2018 to 2022), LD conducted nearly 7 000 inspections of FDH agencies and successfully prosecuted a total of 39 of them, for overcharging commission from job seekers or committing serious offences such as operating without a licence where a licence has been revoked or an application for a licence/licence renewal has been rejected. Separately, there were 28 EAs the licenses of which were revoked or the applications for a licence/licence renewal were rejected due to violation of the Code or malpractices of the EA practitioners, such as failure to sign contracts with FDHs or the employers, failure to list specified fee items in the contract or receipt, failure to arrange for the employers to confirm that their interests and responsibilities have been fully explained and failure to keep proper records of transactions with FDHs and the employers. A significant number of cases of successful prosecution, revocation, refusal to issue or cancellation of licenses due to overcharging of commission from job seekers involved employees of EAs. This proves that the existing system provides adequate regulation of EA practitioners, and ensures that practitioners who have breached the regulations and the EAs to which they belong will not be allowed to continue with their business.

Combating job hopping by foreign domestic helpers

During the epidemic, the number of imported FDHs decreased significantly, resulting in an increase in the number of FDH job-hopping cases. LD and ImmD worked together to combat job-hopping by FDHs. ImmD's Special Duties Team will consider whether there is evidence of job-hopping, including the number of premature termination of contracts and the reasons for such termination, when processing visa applications from FDHs. ImmD will decisively reject applications of FDHs who have job-hopped and keep records of the rejections. Such records will become a factor for consideration in processing their applications for employment visas or extension of stay in the future. In 2021, 2 833 applications were rejected due to suspected job-hopping, about nine times of that in 2020.

LD has also stepped up its efforts to crack down on EAs suspected of abetting FDHs in job-hopping, including careful monitoring of the business practices of FDH agencies, inspection of EAs that offer cash rewards to FDHs and their referees for premature termination of contracts, and repeatedly sending letters to all FDH agencies warning them not to encourage or abet FDHs in job-hopping through business practices. LD has also strengthened communication and information exchange with ImmD to conduct joint operations to inspect EAs suspected of abetting FDHs in job-hopping. In the past three years (i.e. from 2020 to 2022), LD conducted 186 surprise inspections in response to complaints about EAs abetting FDHs in job-hopping, and issued a total of about 600 warnings to 195 FDH agencies involved, prohibiting them from abetting FDHs in job-hopping. The EAs concerned have stopped offering cash rewards to FDHs who prematurely terminate their contracts.

As the epidemic began to subside in the second half of last year, the number of imported FDHs gradually rebounded, and with the aforementioned vetting and inspections conducted by the Government, the situation of job-hopping by FDHs has improved significantly. Last year, LD received 47 complaints about EAs abetting FDHs in job-hopping, representing a drop of more than 70% from 177 in 2021, while the number of visa applications rejected by ImmD dropped to 1 760.

Skills and training courses for foreign domestic helpers

Regarding the skills and training courses for FDHs, under the current policies, FDHs are required to have at least two years of experience as domestic helpers before coming to Hong Kong, and the major places where FDHs come from also require them to receive relevant training or assessment before coming to Hong Kong. The Social Welfare Department has launched the Pilot Scheme on Training for Foreign Domestic Helpers in Elderly Care in district elderly community centres to train FDHs in elderly care skills. LD holds regular thematic seminars for FDHs and the employers on topics such as occupational health and safety.

Loan activities of foreign domestic helpers

We understand that the community is concerned about excessive borrowing by FDHs and that the employers should not be affected by their borrowing. The statutory interest rate cap under the Money Lenders Ordinance has been reduced since the end of last year, and the Code does not allow EAs to be involved in the

financial transactions of job seekers. LD will continue to work with employer groups and non-governmental organizations to educate and remind FDHs to be prudent in financial management and to carefully assess their repayment ability when taking out loans.

Conclusion

Deputy President, I will listen carefully to the views of Members and give a consolidated response later. I so submit.

IR CHAN SIU-HUNG (in Cantonese): Deputy President, I would like to thank Dr NGAN Man-yu for proposing the motion on “Improving the policies on foreign domestic helpers”, and I speak in support of his motion and the amendments of the two Members.

In many families in Hong Kong, both the husband and wife are working outside, and they often need to employ foreign domestic helpers (“FDHs”) especially if they have children in need of care, and FDHs will perform household chores and look after the children. Those who have elders or members with special care needs in their families also need to employ FDHs to help take care of them.

According to the statistics released by the Census and Statistics Department, there were 333 000 FDHs in Hong Kong as of the third quarter of 2022, representing 8.8% of our total labour force, serving hundreds of thousands of families. It is undeniable that FDHs play an important role in our society and they have even become members of the families. According to information from the Labour Department (“LD”), there are over 3 000 licensed employment agencies (“EAs”) in Hong Kong, most of which provide FDH agency services.

Unfortunately, the services provided by FDH agencies in Hong Kong are of varying standards, and it is particularly evident that some unscrupulous agencies caused distress to many families during the COVID-19 epidemic. Under the impacts of the epidemic and the quarantine arrangements in Hong Kong, employers who were hiring FDHs had to meet certain expenses; apart from the service fees charged by FDH agencies, they had to pay for FDHs’ nucleic acid testing and their quarantine hotel accommodation and meal expenses after they had arrived in Hong Kong, which easily amounted to nearly \$20,000. Employers already spent a lot

of time and money when their FDHs reached their homes in Hong Kong. They thought they would not have to worry at least within the term of the two-year employment contract. Yet, some unscrupulous FDH agencies would tell FDHs that other employers are willing to pay higher salaries and lure FDHs to engage in the premature termination of contracts and job-hopping in order to get agency commissions. This caused many employers to spend beyond their original budgets and they have to rush to find other people to help take care of their children and elderly people, or they may have to quit their jobs to take care of their families.

In fact, LD respectively received 208 and 334 complaints against FDH agencies for violation of the Code of Practice for Employment Agencies (“the Code”) in 2020 and 2021. Therefore, I am in favour of reviewing the regulatory system of FDH agencies. For example, the Government should consider establishing an FDH Authority and a licensing regime for practitioners, to better regulate the services of FDH agencies and protect the interests of both FDHs and the employers.

At present, the Employment Agencies Administration (“EAA”) of LD is responsible for administering the relevant provisions of the Employment Ordinance and the Employment Agency Regulations. Through licensing, conducting inspection and prosecutions etc., EAA ensures that EAs are operating in compliance with the relevant legislation. Members of the public can see on LD’s website the List of EAs whose Licences were Revoked/Refused Renewal and the List of EAs which were issued Written Warning(s) for Non-compliance with the Code. Members of the public only have information on whether an EA has such record, which is very inadequate. On the contrary, Singapore has done a good job in regulating EAs, which is worthy of reference.

Back in 2011, the Ministry of Manpower of Singapore already established a legal framework for regulating EAs, and implemented a set of service level indicators, as well as a rating and demerit points system. Moreover, the public can easily see the service level and ranking of each agency on a dedicated information website for FDHs and employers, and clearly understand the performance of each licensed company, which includes the FDH retention and transfer rates, number of FDHs successfully employed and their years of operation. As for the licensing system, the Ministry of Manpower of Singapore requires all key appointment holders and the practitioners they employed to complete a training course of more than 30 hours and they can only perform the related work after they have been certified under the Certificate of Employment Intermediaries course.

Deputy President, another distressing issue for the employers of FDHs is that FDHs have borrowed money but are unable to repay their debts. As some FDHs spend a lot of money in their daily life or need to send money back to their hometown for family emergencies, they may borrow from banks or finance companies. If an FDH borrows a large sum of money from a few finance companies and is unable to repay the debts or have even fled, the employer may receive a debt collection letter from the finance company or even suffer harassment when debt collectors visit his home.

These situations are unsatisfactory; if the authorities will establish an FDH Authority, they should also consider setting up an “FDH lending database”, requiring banks and finance companies providing loans to FDHs to submit information on FDH loans to the Authority when they have approved their loan applications. The Authority will set up a central database for banks and finance companies, enabling them to check whether FDHs have already taken out loans, and to calculate the length of FDHs’ contracts to assess whether loans will be granted to FDHs again, so as to avoid problems caused by excessive borrowing by FDHs.

Deputy President, I think the Government should review and improve the regulatory system of FDH agency services as soon as possible.

I so submit. Thank you, Deputy President.

MS NIXIE LAM (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President. I speak in support of the motion proposed by Dr NGAN Man-yu.

At present, 350 000 foreign domestic helpers (“FDHs”) are working in Hong Kong, accounting for 9% of the total working population. They play an important supporting role as they are taking care of children and the elderly for many local dual-income families, and also allow local married women to join the workforce, unleashing more potential workforce and contributing to the economic development of Hong Kong. In recent years, a low birth rate and an ageing population have become major issues that have to be dealt with in Hong Kong. In the face of an ageing population, it is anticipated that there will be a growing demand for FDHs in the community.

In the past, there were frequent complaints against FDHs and FDH agencies in Hong Kong, which led to heated discussions in the community. In fact, the current local policies on FDHs are mainly based on the measures formulated in the 1970s, which failed to keep pace with the times. I think the Government should comprehensively review and improve the related policies on FDHs and enhance the protection of the interests of both the employers and FDHs.

At present, the policies on FDHs in Hong Kong involve a number of departments, including the Labour and Welfare Bureau and the Security Bureau, while the Labour Department, the Immigration Department and the Consumer Council are responsible for the practical operation. In order to address the problem of fragmentation of responsibilities, we suggest that the Government should draw reference from the current regulation of estate agents and the tourism industry, etc. and establish an FDH Authority to be responsible for processing and approving applications from FDHs to work in Hong Kong, licence applications and renewals by FDH agencies, etc. The Authority should also have various functions, including dealing with arbitrations, regulating FDH hostels, conducting inspections, organizing training courses as well as education and publicity activities, to handle matters relating to FDHs in a comprehensive and one-stop manner.

As I said earlier, the existing standard employment contract for FDHs has been formulated many years ago and the provisions are rather vague. In particular, it has not specified the medical examination items and standards for FDHs before they come to Hong Kong, which led to a series of disputes and additional financial losses incurred by the employers. I suggest that the Government should review the standard employment contract, setting out the criteria for the physical fitness of FDHs and the medical examinations required, as well as the specific arrangements when the employment contracts of FDHs are terminated or expired. Specific provisions should be included in the contract to confirm that FDHs who have completed their contracts or whose contracts have been prematurely terminated should return to their places of origin, to further improve the relevant regulation.

Currently, it is specified that the minimum wage for FDHs is \$4,730 per month. Yet, under the impact of the epidemic in the past three years, there was a serious imbalance between the supply and demand of FDHs, resulting that the employers often had to pay more to hire FDHs, and the expenses borne by middle-class families increased. To cope with the rising cost of hiring FDHs, I

suggest that the Government should consider introducing new tax deductions, including the expenses on the medical examination of FDHs after their arrival in Hong Kong, the expenses on the mandatory training courses and the total expenditure on the salaries of FDHs, so as to alleviate the employers' pressure relating to the various expenses for hiring FDHs.

The policies on FDHs are not only linked with the well-being of thousands of families but also related to the labour market and the sustainable development of our economy and society. This is definitely not a trivial issue. The SAR Government should take it seriously and improve the policies on FDHs as soon as possible, to further protect the interests of both the employers and FDHs.

Deputy President, I so submit.

DR CHOW MAN-KONG (in Cantonese): Deputy President, according to the latest statistics of the Immigration Department, as at the end of 2021, there were around 339 000 foreign domestic helpers ("FDHs") in Hong Kong, with most of them being Filipino and Indonesian helpers employed by 12% of local households, accounting for about 10% of the total employment population. FDHs are generally responsible for taking care of young children or providing elderly care services and performing household chores, which has directly encouraged more married women to join the workforce, contributing to Hong Kong's economic development, and they are especially important to the Hong Kong workforce. Data provided by the Philippine Statistics Authority showed that 6.7% of overseas workers are working in Hong Kong, bringing in steady foreign exchange earnings. Evidently, FDHs have always had positive mutual effects on Hong Kong and the places concerned.

However, we should be vigilant that the discussions in both the community and the original motion are clearly more concerned about the Administration's regulation of FDHs and FDH agencies. Yet, even the supply is an issue right now, so it seems that we should consider what the community's prime concern is. In 2019, the number of FDHs in Hong Kong peaked at 399 000 but as I have just mentioned, the number dropped to less than 340 000 in 2021, representing a rate of decrease of about 15%, which demonstrated the serious impacts of the epidemic. In the face of the declining supply of FDHs from the Philippines and Indonesia, should the SAR Government, especially the Labour and Welfare Bureau, take the initiative to explore other sources of FDHs? We should know that the reduction

in the supply of FDHs means that there are fewer carers in families, which in effect restrains and reduces female workers in the local workforce and many mothers cannot join the workforce; in particular, they cannot fill the grass-roots vacancies in the retail and catering sectors. Consequently, this will impede the recovery of various sectors in Hong Kong after the epidemic, leading to far-reaching effects. In view of this, the authorities should expeditiously try to negotiate with Southeast Asian regions such as Burma and Cambodia to bring in more abundant and easily localized FDHs.

Our population is continuously ageing. The proportion of elderly persons aged 65 and over in the total population was about 20% in 2021, which will account for one third of the total population by 2039, and it is expected that the trend will continue for 30 years. According to the statistics provided by the Census and Statistics Department, more than 300 000 households are planning to employ FDHs, and 30% of them expect FDHs to take care of the elderly. Therefore, it can be anticipated that FDHs will substantially be responsible for elderly care in the future. To get better prepared for the challenges brought by an ageing population, it is imperative for the authorities to improve the quality of FDHs coming to Hong Kong, in a bid to enable the elderly to live a more dignified life. I urge the authorities to set up a mandatory short-term training programme and require enrolment by all newly arrived FDHs, and to model on the ElderCarer Foreign Domestic Worker Scheme in Singapore, focusing on providing knowledge and skills required for elderly care, to meet the needs of the community. The authorities can also provide FDHs with training in Cantonese, labour legislation and channels for community support to protect their interests.

Although we now have the Employment Ordinance and the Employment Agency Regulations for the regulation of FDH agencies, there have been frequent complaints against FDH agencies in recent years. Under the premise of protecting the interests of local employers, the authorities must strengthen their monitoring over FDH agencies. About two years ago, the Indonesian and Philippine governments introduced new provisions requiring employers to bear the costs of FDH training, application documents and documentation, which caused the service fees charged by FDH agencies to range from \$20,000 to \$30,000 or even more, which is unbelievable. We understand that it is important to protect labour rights but the problem is that most local employers are also workers, so this makes the lives of the sandwich class harder. In addition, some FDH agencies take advantage of their monopoly in the market over a long time and collect various charges, such as document fees, airport pick-up fees and quarantine fees, to rip

employers off. Worse still, some FDH agencies even instigate FDHs to engage in job-hopping so that they will be paid agency fees again, making exorbitant profits. In view of this, I support Dr NGAN Man-yu's original motion and the relevant amendments. It is time for the SAR Government to comprehensively review and improve the policies on FDHs to set things right. It may tackle the matters by improving the laws and regulations and taking the initiative to conduct investigations.

As for taking the initiative to conduct investigations, pinpointing the monopoly or oligopoly of FDH agencies that will most probably happen, I suggest that the Competition Commission should take the initiative to conduct investigations to find out more about the current operation of FDH agencies, especially items of charges and standards and the procedures involved. If there is conclusive evidence of violation of the Competition Ordinance, the authorities should take actions to protect the due interests of local employers.

Moreover, the authorities should review the Employment Agency Regulations and the Code of Practice for Employment Agencies to examine if there are outdated provisions or provisions affecting the interests of local employers. If such provisions are in place, we should make amendments in time and make FDH agencies bear heavier costs for violating the law.

Deputy President, I so submit.

MR LAI TUNG-KWOK (in Cantonese): Deputy President, I would like to thank Dr NGAN Man-yu for proposing this motion today and give support to the amendment proposed by my fellow party member, Ms Judy CHAN.

It is known that foreign domestic helpers ("FDHs") are in great demand in Hong Kong. In view of the ageing population and the prevalence of double-income parents, the demand for FDHs will only keep rising. When we can see that the demand for FDHs does exist, it is not easy for us to ensure a stable supply of FDHs because—we must not forget—Hong Kong is not the only place in need of FDHs. We have to compete with other places in the region, such as neighbouring Singapore and Dubai. According to some members of the public, FDHs may look for job opportunities in Europe after coming to Hong Kong. If they go to Europe, they may not necessarily work as FDHs. Instead, they may become farm workers who pick grapes or vegetable crops. In the face of fierce

competition, we must improve the policies on FDHs to benefit not only the employers but also the many FDHs working in Hong Kong, giving them better protection.

There is one point that has drawn my special attention. It was mentioned in the original motion and highlighted in the two amendments, that is, the relevant information websites should be enhanced in terms of content, especially data relating to FDH agencies. It is definitely a good idea as the quality of local FDH agencies varies. The disclosure of more useful information about FDH agencies will benefit both the employers and FDHs. Although there is now an employment agency (“EA”) portal under the Labour Department for members of the public to search for licensed EAs by name or by region, this portal is far from perfect and has much room for improvement.

Firstly, the EA portal has consolidated employment information covering a range of job types such as FDHs, local domestic helpers, imported workers, and clerical and administrative staff. Given the keen demand for FDHs in Hong Kong, it is worth setting up a dedicated website to provide information on FDH agencies.

Secondly, the existing data could have been consolidated in a better manner. For example, while there are already a few blacklists on the portal, including the List of EAs Convicted of Offence(s) of Overcharging or Unlicensed Operation, the List of EAs whose Licences were Revoked/Refused Renewal and the List of EAs which were issued Written Warning(s) for Non-compliance with the Code of Practice, the authorities have failed to go the extra mile to improve this portal. Normally, when using the database on the portal to look for an FDH agency, no one will not take the trouble to check whether the agencies that they come across have been blacklisted as the portal is not user-friendly enough to show the aforesaid blacklists on the same page. The failure of the authorities to well organize such readily available data on the portal has rendered useful data useless.

Thirdly, the portal should be beefed up to provide more useful data, such as the number of FDHs who have successfully secured an employment offer in Hong Kong through a particular agency in the past year, and among them, the percentage of those having served the same employer for at least six months, and the percentage of those having job hopped for more than twice in the past year.

As such data will help employers, or even FDHs, distinguish good FDH agencies from the bad ones, it should be put on the portal. Currently, the Ministry of Manpower of Singapore maintains a website of this kind to provide comprehensive information on employment agencies. I believe that Hong Kong is able to do the same.

Deputy President, I will stop here but I look forward to a comprehensive response from the authorities on how our policies on FDHs can be improved.

I so submit.

MR LAM CHUN-SING (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President. Foreign domestic helpers (“FDHs”), travelling from far away to work in Hong Kong, have helped Hong Kong people in sharing household chores and taking caring of the elderly and children, thereby unleashing the local labour force. The interests of FDHs should therefore be duly protected. As for employers, other than the expenses incurred, they have to spend much time and efforts each time in hiring FDHs. Employers will be filled with grievances if they find that FDHs are not matching the descriptions upon their arrival or that there are other hiccups in the process. Indeed, the interests of both employers and FDHs should be protected.

It seems that the complaints and discontent from both FDHs and employers in recent years have often pointed to certain unscrupulous FDH agencies. For example, there have been complaints from employers involving FDH agencies suspected of abetting FDHs to job-hop and the Labour Department (“LD”) has already received 177 complaints of this kind in 2021 alone. Meanwhile, according to a survey conducted by an FDH trade union, some FDHs were overcharged by agencies at a level far exceeding the amount as stipulated by law, which is “10% of the first month’s wages received after being placed in employment”, while some FDHs were charged under all sorts of pretexts such as miscellaneous fees. To protect the interests of both parties, I agree that the regulation of FDH agencies have to be strengthened, including the disclosure of various charges and information as suggested by Dr NGAN Man-yu.

LD has regularly updated the blacklist of FDH agencies which were issued warnings for non-compliance with the Code of Practice for Employment Agencies and the blacklist of FDH agencies committing offences of overcharging or

unlicensed operation. However, since only 12 agencies are blacklisted now, I wonder if this could really reflect the actual situation of the industry. If a more objective and transparent rating system for FDH agencies is in place, on one hand, it would allow members of the public and FDHs to assess clearly the merits and demerits of agencies; and on the other hand, the agencies would be more proactive in improving and maintaining their service standards in order to strive for a higher rating, which will be conducive to enhancing the overall quality of the industry in the long run.

The International Labour Organization has adopted the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189) on decent work for domestic workers. As stipulated in the Convention, to effectively protect domestic workers, including migrant domestic workers, each member country shall regulate private employment agencies in accordance with national laws, regulations and practice, including prohibition of those private employment agencies that engage in fraudulent practices and abuses against domestic workers. While Hong Kong has not ratified the Convention, it is hoped that the Government can draw reference from it and regulate the agencies effectively to protect the reasonable interests of FDHs.

As for suspected cases of job-hopping of FDHs, a special duties team has been set up by the Immigration Department (“ImmD”) to combat the problem. On the other hand, as pointed out by an FDH trade union, even if FDHs are treated harshly, they still will not initiate contract termination for fear that job-hopping will affect their future opportunities to work in Hong Kong. In addition to protecting employers, ImmD should also carefully review cases of job-hopping where FDHs are suspected to have been treated harshly or exploited, and proactively handle complaints. If there are other compassionate grounds, ImmD should also consider exercising discretion to give approval in accordance with existing regulations.

FDHs who work in Hong Kong are protected by the labour legislation and are entitled to the same protection as local workers in certain aspects, including undergoing medical examinations. Regardless of the results of medical examinations, employers cannot dismiss FDHs as long as they are able to fulfil the inherent requirements of the job, and the accommodation required by FDHs would not create unjustifiable hardship for the employers. Our main consideration is the past training, qualifications and experience of FDHs relevant to the job and we must adhere to this. Many FDHs are good companions and partners of families in Hong Kong, accompanying children as they grow up, from birth to entering

kindergarten and primary school. Many of them regard Hong Kong as their second homes. Therefore, I hope that the Government can formulate relevant policies with the goal of fostering a harmonious relationship between employers and FDHs.

Deputy President, I so submit.

DR PRISCILLA LEUNG (in Cantonese): Deputy President, I speak in support of Dr NGAN Man-yu's original motion and the two amendments.

As the saying goes, "it is valuable to have an old person in the family" but nowadays it is commonly said that "it is valuable to have a good helper in the family", which proves the importance of a helper to a family, especially when more than 400 000 families have now employed helpers. At gatherings, people are talking about how difficult it is to hire helpers and the problems they encountered. Those with young children often feel as if they are on the back of a tiger.

We may have learnt from news reports that many employers have been criminally prosecuted for the abuse of domestic helpers. Apart from these unpleasant cases, many employers have asked Members to set up concern groups to safeguard their interests. I held a press conference with the Hong Kong Employment Industry Association and a few employers of foreign domestic helpers ("FDHs") in 2020. During the conference, they complained that, in recent years, it was not rare for families, especially those with newborns, to spend several tens of thousands of dollars on hiring FDHs but these FDHs quit their jobs soon afterwards, which reflected that there were loopholes in our system. So, I very much agree that Hong Kong should draw reference from the practice in Singapore or Taiwan; records of job-hopping by FDHs within a short time should be kept, and FDHs should be required to come to Hong Kong from their places of origin, so as to reduce the abuse of job-hopping by FDHs for additional incomes.

Moreover, I agree with the proposals in the original motion and the amendments to establish a rating system for FDH agencies, and to amend and strictly enforce the Code of Practice for Employment Agencies. I would like to spend the remaining speaking time on the point that it is time for Hong Kong (especially young families) to rethink.

I am also a beneficiary of the policies on FDHs. I probably have encountered various types of FDHs, for example, an FDH worked outside for extra money, another used my residential phone for calls which cost me thousands of

dollars, and yet another requested to leave when I was pregnant but conversely accused me of forcing her to take leave, for which I eventually sought assistance from the Labour Department. I have come across these FDHs but I am also very lucky to have a few FDHs who worked stably and helped me take care of my children until they are grown. That is why many young people in Hong Kong have deep affection for certain countries, including the Philippines and Indonesia, and they regard FDHs as their relatives.

However, Hong Kong is really facing a problem, i.e. these countries have started to review their policies. While motherly love has been exported from these countries to Hong Kong or other wealthy countries, children in those countries are denied motherly love, leading to many social problems. When the economies of these countries start to take off ... taking the Philippines as an example, the Philippines has seriously reviewed the situation and considered that it should not continue to rely on the export of FDHs to support the local economy. In the past, some highly educated Filipinos also came to Hong Kong to work as FDHs but there are now suggestions that there should be diversified choices, and this trend may significantly affect the source of supply and number of FDHs in Hong Kong in 10 years' time. This is the case in the Philippines today, and it will be the case in Indonesia in the future. If Hong Kong families rely on foreign countries to provide FDHs with extremely low wages for a long time, middle-class families will not be able to afford it if their wages are not extremely low ... the consulates general of the countries concerned have already asked for higher wages for FDHs and I believe that equal pay for equal work will be realized one day.

In view of this, how should we unleash the potential of the local workforce? At present, many people are physically strong and some retirees are still capable of working, yet domestic workers belong to a sector that is not respected. Therefore, I think we need to make it professional and dignified to attract retirees, who are willing to work and are still capable of doing so, to join the sector. They may be paid by the hour and they may work as post-natal care workers, part-time workers or elderly care workers, etc. There is indeed huge potential of the local workforce to be unleashed. By 2034, 35% of the population will be aged 65 or over, and many of them have experience in taking care of families. Hence, I hope that we can encourage intergenerational care through education and we can nurture a quality workforce on our own to meet the needs of local families in the future.

Deputy President, I so submit.

MR YANG WING-KIT (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President. Deputy President, I speak in support of Dr NGAN Man-yu's motion on "Improving the policies on foreign domestic helpers".

At present, apart from the middle class, many low-income families have employed foreign domestic helpers ("FDHs") to take care of the elderly and children so that they can have peace of mind when they are working. As Hong Kong is becoming a super-ageing society, there will only be an increasing demand for FDHs. We mainly employ FDHs through agencies; unfortunately, some unscrupulous agencies exploited the legal loopholes to make profits. For example, they abet FDHs to engage in job-hopping, lure FDHs to take out loans, provide FDHs who do not match the specified requirements, overcharge commissions and fabricate excuses for charges. These problems were even more pronounced during the epidemic, and the most disturbing was that FDHs asked for higher salaries, engaged in premature termination of contracts and job-hopping and even disappeared. The employers were just like fish on the chopping board, at the mercy of the agencies and FDHs. If the Government would compile a book entitled *Emerging from the Trap of Foreign Domestic Helper Hiring* on employers' personal experiences or follow the example of *Police Report* and produce a film to reveal the unscrupulous business practices of agencies, I believe this would be very popular with employers.

The problem with Hong Kong's policies on FDHs stems from the lack of effective monitoring of agencies, and the measures that have been implemented since the 1970s have not been amended or updated so far. "Things and people change a lot in the space of 10 years", let alone 50 years. Although the Immigration Department set up a special duties team in 2013 to combat job-hopping by FDHs, and the Labour Department ("LD") introduced the Code of Practice for Employment Agencies ("the Code") in 2017 and amended the Employment Ordinance in 2018 to impose heavier penalties, the problem has yet to be solved. Nonetheless, the problem cannot be solved. Looking back at the statistics in 2020 and 2021, LD respectively received 290 and 396 complaints involving FDH agencies but successful prosecution was only made against 10 and 4 agencies respectively. In each of these two years, seven agencies were convicted of overcharging commissions or operating without a licence in violation of the Code, and their licences were thus revoked/refused to be issued or renewed; evidently, the deterring effect was limited.

There are currently over 1 500 FDH agencies in Hong Kong, and there were over 400 000 FDHs before the epidemic outbreak. It is time for the Government to take actions to regularize this industry. Singapore has been highly acclaimed for its policies on FDHs, which has already set up a licensing system for FDH agencies to enhance the community's recognition of the industry and reduce the impact of unqualified agencies on the image of the industry. In addition to establishing an agency licensing system, the Government may also introduce a demerit point system, a "blacklist" system and a certification scheme similar to the Q-mark scheme to help the public identify quality agencies.

In order to enable the Government to regulate FDH agencies meticulously and efficiently, I agree with Dr NGAN Man-yu's suggestion of establishing an FDH Authority to provide one-stop services such as licensing, vetting and approving of applications, training, handling of complaints and inspection. These departments concerned should have sufficient manpower to enforce the law, deal with reports from the public and carry out decoy operations, so that the agencies will not falsely believe that they will not be caught. The objective is to catch and convict the culprits, thereby achieving deterrent effect. Moreover, the Government should expedite the handling of repeated engagement in premature termination of contracts and job-hopping by FDHs, and strengthen liaison with the consulates general of the relevant countries to ensure that FDHs will return to their places of origin after termination of contracts.

Of course, the Government should amend the legislation to strengthen the regulation of FDH agencies; firstly, the penalties should be sufficiently severe, especially for abetting FDHs to engage in job-hopping; secondly, the Code should be revised, without leaving grey areas for profiteering by these agencies, e.g. specifying the types of fees that agencies can charge employers of FDHs and the ceiling of such fees. In short, it should clearly set out the fee items. Furthermore, the Government may formulate guidelines on FDH loans and set up a financial rating database for FDHs to prevent excessive borrowing by FDHs, which may affect their employers' families.

The most important thing is that hiring a good FDH should not depend on our luck. The Government should have a skills assessment system for FDHs to assess their language proficiency and performance of household chores, and provide ongoing skills training courses to ensure the quality of FDHs. In fact, employers badly wanted a list of good FDHs and a "blacklist" so that they will not be always trapped when hiring FDHs.

Lastly, the public has always expected the Government to introduce “tax deductions for the expenses of employing FDHs” to relieve the financial pressure on middle-class families and unleash the potential of the local workforce. We, the “A4” Alliance, proposed earlier to the Financial Secretary that a tax deduction of \$60,000 should be introduced for this purpose, and we would like to hear good news in the Budget next week, to help the middle class meet their expenses of employing FDHs.

Deputy President, I so submit.

MR LEUNG MAN-KWONG (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President. According to the statistics released by the Labour and Welfare Bureau last year, the number of foreign domestic helpers (“FDHs”) in Hong Kong exceeded 400 000 during the peak period. FDHs perform day-to-day care duties in many local families, especially those with children, the elderly or family members with special care needs. FDHs also help perform household chores in dual-income families, which facilitates the unleashing of the potential of the local workforce.

With an ageing population and a shortage of places in residential care homes and day care centres, the demand for FDHs is expected to increase in the foreseeable future and there have been more and more disputes over FDH hiring. Therefore, I agree that the policies on FDHs should be improved and the regulation of FDH agencies should be strengthened to protect the interests of both the employers and FDHs.

In hiring an FDH, fees such as those relating to immigration and entry visa application, handling charges, air ticket, medical examination, agency commission, will be borne by the employer. If the FDH performs unsatisfactorily and the contract is subsequently terminated, the employer needs to provide the FDH with the wages in lieu of notice and the single return ticket. These actually amount to tens of thousands of dollars. Since most families are unfamiliar with the relevant formalities or do not have time to handle them, they rely on the help of agencies and their role as employers is relatively passive. FDH agencies are of varying standards and some of them have failed to play a gatekeeper’s role for the quality of FDHs. Some FDHs have poor performance and some FDH agencies have concealed the genuine health conditions of FDHs from the employers. Recently, we have even heard that some unscrupulous agencies have instigated FDHs to falsely accuse their employers in a bid to engage FDHs in job-hopping and

premature termination of contracts. When employers consider that their FDHs are unsuitable, a replacement will have to be hired afresh, wasting time and money. Therefore, to improve the policies on FDHs, it is necessary to properly monitor FDH agencies.

I agree with the proposal in the motion to establish an FDH Authority to monitor FDH-related operations. Taking Singapore as an example, FDH agencies in Singapore are regulated by law, with licensing criteria and conditions, ceiling of charges and consequences of violating the relevant provisions being legally specified. In the event of violation of the relevant legislation, in addition to fines, suspension or non-renewal of licence, the agencies will have personal legal liabilities, and all employees of the agencies performing agency duties are required to complete the Certificate of Employment Intermediaries course and obtain the relevant qualifications to ensure the standards of the FDH agency industry. Now that insurance agents, real estate agents, travel agents and property management agencies are all required to be licensed in Hong Kong, why are FDH agencies not required to do so? I agree with the proposals in the motion and the amendments to establish an independent licensing and rating system for FDH agencies to legally monitor the quality of agencies and practitioners, so as to protect the interests of both the employers and FDHs.

Moreover, I suggest enhancing the transparency of information. The motion and the amendments propose setting up a dedicated information website for FDHs and employers, drawing up a “blacklist” of FDHs engaged in premature termination of contracts and job-hopping, as well as making public the “blacklist” and the various service fees charged by FDH agencies. I suggest that further information on the duration of operation of FDH agencies, the number of FDHs hired and the rate of premature termination of employment contracts should be provided, so that employers can choose suitable, reputable and competent FDH agencies basing on such information.

In addition, agencies mainly assist in the recruitment process. After the employment of FDHs, disputes about work arrangements may arise between employers and employees. Yet, agencies seldom deal with such disputes and they may even advise employers to dismiss their FDHs and hire a replacement in a bid to get more commissions. In fact, agencies rarely intervene by way of mediation; therefore, I suggest that the Government should strengthen mediation services relating to FDHs to help employers and FDHs establish a long-term cooperative relationship through positive communication.

FDHs can relieve the pressure of carers in local families and help further unleash the potential of the local workforce which will be of enormous help in improving our economy. Society has resumed normalcy after the epidemic, but economy recovery has yet to be attained. The Government should improve the policies on FDHs—echoing the proposal put forth by Mr YANG Wing-kit just now, I would like to put forward the suggestion of the “A4” Alliance—I proactively suggest that the Government should consider introducing tax deductions for the expenses of employing FDHs to relieve the financial pressure on the families concerned.

With these remarks, Deputy President, I support the original motion and the amendments. Thank you, Deputy President.

MR EDMUND WONG (in Cantonese): Deputy President, Hong Kong is a highly commercialized society and many women will continue working after they have got married for various reasons. In the past 30 to 40 years, there was a surge in the number of dual-income families which needed to employ foreign domestic helpers (“FDHs”), commonly referred to as “sisters” to take care of the elderly, children and perform household chores. Taking my family as an example, “Sister” Julie has been serving us for 40 years, and she started working for us before I was born.

The Legislative Council published an information note yesterday, which pointed out that the labour force participation rate of women in Hong Kong in the prime working age group of 25 to 54 was 72.7%, far below the corresponding figure of 93.4% for men. Evidently, “sisters” helped unleash the potential of the local female workforce; they should be given credit for that and they are inextricably linked to the promotion of our economic development. However, a number of problems with FDHs have emerged, such as unsatisfactory performance of FDHs, overcharging by FDH agencies and job-hopping by FDHs. During the COVID-19 epidemic which persisted for three years, these problems were exacerbated by the drastic reduction in the supply of FDHs. Many middle-class families who have hired FDHs have told me that it is so difficult to hire capable and competent FDHs without causing problems or troubles to employers, and it is an even more difficult than winning the Mark Six lottery.

Now that Hong Kong is emerging from the gloom of the epidemic and has fully resumed normalcy, with all isolation measures that prevented FDHs from working in Hong Kong during the epidemic lifted, it is time to rectify the

irregularities in the FDH market. In particular, I would like to thank Dr NGAN Man-yu, my fellow party Member, for proposing this motion, and I also thank Ir LEE Chun-keung and Ms Judy CHAN for their amendments which allow us to pool our wisdom to eliminate the chaos in the FDH market.

Dr NGAN proposes in the motion to review and amend the standard employment contract for FDHs and the Code of Practice for Employment Agencies (“the Code”), which are very helpful to eliminating the chaos in the FDH market. The current standard employment contract for FDHs does not contain any restrictions on either the FDH medical examination items, standards and charges, or the approved medical institutions. As a result, many FDHs are found to be suffering from serious diseases or even pregnant after their employment and arrival in Hong Kong, which imposes further burdens on employers rather than relieving their worries. Furthermore, the current standard employment contract for FDHs does not explicitly specify that FDHs who quit their jobs must leave Hong Kong and return to their places of origin; thus, job-hopping happens very often.

Therefore, it is necessary for the authorities to amend the standard employment contract for FDHs to specify that FDHs who have arrived in Hong Kong must undergo medical examinations at medical institutions approved by the Hong Kong Government and they can be formally employed only after they have passed the relevant examinations. In addition, after FDHs have quit their jobs, they must produce valid proof that they have air tickets to their homeland to confirm that they will return to their places of origin after leaving their jobs, so as to eradicate situations including their failure to pass medical examinations, being physically unfit for work and engaging in job-hopping.

In addition, the authorities should also amend the Code to explicitly require FDH agencies to specify in their service agreements the charges for each item and provide payment arrangements, warranty clauses as well as refund and/or other arrangements. This will clarify the services and undertakings that FDH agencies must provide, thus preventing them from overcharging as well as enhancing protection of the interests of employers.

With these remarks, I support the original motion and the amendments.

MR EDWARD LEUNG (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President. I speak in support of the original motion proposed by Dr NGAN Man-Yu, my fellow party Member, as well as the amendments proposed by other colleagues.

I believe we all agree that foreign domestic helpers (“FDHs”) provide very important support to Hong Kong as they have unleashed the potential of the local workforce and made tremendous contributions to improving the financial circumstances of families. For many families, especially middle-class families, it is a must to employ FDHs; otherwise, if both the husband and wife are professionals and one of them is forced to stay at home to take care of the children and perform household chores, there will be a huge loss in terms of family income; it will also adversely affect the Hong Kong Government which is actively competing for talents. Therefore, it is very important to improve the relevant policies so that the families concerned can smoothly and willingly employ FDHs, thereby unleashing the potential of the workforce.

However, families who have hired FDHs know that hiring FDHs is sometimes like playing a game of chance and we indeed have to try our luck. Just like a game of chance, the results can be “big”, “small” or “a specific number appearing on all three dices”. We used to hear FDHs say during interviews that they knew how to do all the chores, yet we came to know that they did not have such skills upon their arrival. They claimed that they knew how to speak Cantonese, but it turned out that they only knew how to say “Good morning” in Cantonese. They were considered capable of speaking Cantonese despite their poor proficiency in it. Under such circumstances, some employers have obviously been duped.

During the epidemic, many “sisters” could not come to Hong Kong because of the relevant restrictions; as a result, “sisters” in Hong Kong had potential for profiteering and they asked their employers for a substantial pay rise; otherwise, they would engage in job-hopping. Under such circumstances, their employers could only succumb to their requests as there was basically no way for them to back down.

In fact, apart from FDHs, there are also a lot of problems with FDH agencies. As they earn commissions through facilitating deals, they always encouraged, persuaded or even instructed FDHs to engage in job-hopping in a bid to earn more commissions.

Unfortunately, the existing regulatory measures are very limited. In 2021, for example, the Labour Department received 390 complaints against FDH agencies, and it was found after investigation that 62 agencies violated the

Employment Ordinance and 334 violated the Code of Practice for Employment Agencies; yet, only 4 of them had been successfully prosecuted, which shows that the deterrent effect of the existing legislation is limited. Worse still, it is very easy for an agency to apply for a new licence after its original licence has been revoked; thus, those concerned will very often set up another company to continue to dupe people. As it is not specified under the existing legislation that employment agencies operating in Hong Kong must obtain officially recognized certificates as required in foreign countries, the entry threshold is not high and a new company can be set up at any time.

Therefore, I strongly support establishing an FDH Authority by drawing reference from the existing practice of establishing the Estate Agents Authority or the Property Management Services Authority, etc. An FDH Authority should be tasked with appropriate responsibilities, in particular, strengthening the management of the licensing of the companies concerned. For example, it should enhance checks of application documents and require applicants to declare whether they have applied for or run relevant businesses in the past, so that track records can be used as reference when vetting licence applications by new companies, thereby plugging the loopholes in the existing legislation.

Lastly, I would like to seize this opportunity to explain to FDHs watching television who are concerned about this issue that the an FDH Authority advocated by Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong will not lopsidedly assist employers and it can also assist FDHs. In the past, there were cases of FDHs abused by their employers in society. The most classic one was the Erwiana case, which remains fresh in our memory. We certainly abhor such behaviour and we therefore hope that an FDH Authority can also enhance the protection of the legitimate interests of FDHs and prevent them from being oppressed by unscrupulous employers.

All in all, to many families, FDHs are not only wage earners but also family members. Therefore, we hope that the policies on FDHs can be improved to better protect the family members concerned. Hence, I am going to vote for the motion.

I so submit. Thank you, Deputy President.

MR CHAN KIN-POR (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President. Foreign domestic helpers (“FDHs”) have been coming to Hong Kong since the 1970s. Back then, FDHs mainly took care of families and children, so a large number of women could continue to work after they got married with the help of FDHs, resulting in the flourishing development of the Hong Kong economy. Therefore, the contribution of FDHs to Hong Kong should be recognized. Nowadays, with the emergence of a large number of middle-class families in Hong Kong, the demand for FDHs has been increasing, and FDHs, apart from taking care of children, are also looking after the elderly and the chronically ill. Consequently, the number of FDHs has gradually increased to about 400 000. While the number of FDHs continues to grow, a lot of problems have naturally emerged; thus, it is time to comprehensively review and improve the policies on FDHs.

In recent years, under the impact of the epidemic, FDHs were not allowed to come to Hong Kong during a certain period of time, causing many families who were eager to hire FDHs to feel helpless. As a result, some unscrupulous agencies encouraged some serving FDHs to engage in job-hopping for higher salaries, causing impacts on many families. The year before last, the Immigration Department (“ImmD”) received more than 5 800 suspected cases of job-hopping, more than double of the number in the preceding year. With ImmD’s crackdown operations against such cases and gradual resumption to normalcy, it is learnt that the situation has been mitigated and toned down; yet, the community is dissatisfied with various loopholes in the existing system.

Deputy President, one of the reasons why I support reviewing the policies on FDHs is that FDHs directly affect the lives of the families concerned and whatever happened to FDHs will directly affect the families they serve. Taking job-hopping as an example, the premature termination of contracts by FDHs will make their employers feel helpless. In order to achieve their objectives, some FDHs have even lodged complaints against their employers for violation of the Employment Ordinance, causing great distress to the families concerned.

Another issue that has substantial impact on employers’ families is that FDHs are borrowing money from finance companies. Although there is no official statistics, it is very common for FDHs to borrow money from finance companies. In many cases, FDHs borrow money to assist families and friends in their hometown but they will very often take out loans continuously. When they are unable to make repayments, finance companies will cause harassment at the employers’ residence. Some employers even said that they had directly received

messages from finance companies, reminding FDHs to make repayments. Although employers do not have to shoulder responsibilities for the debts of their FDHs, the harassment caused by finance companies definitely puts enormous psychological pressures on law-abiding citizens. In addition, there are problems with many FDH agencies. For example, they recommended FDHs who failed to match the specified requirements to the employers. Some agencies falsely claimed that FDHs could speak Cantonese or knew how to do all the chores. Yet, the employers found that those FDHs did not have such skills after they had arrived in Hong Kong. These problems actually have huge impacts on the employers' families.

At present, an agency intending to start operation is only required to hold a business registration certificate and an employment agency licence and to be given accreditation by the relevant consulates, without being subject to any regulation. As the formalities for importation of FDHs involve a lot of legal procedures, approval from the relevant countries and immigration arrangements, the agency services are rather professional. The relevant legislation was mostly enacted in the 1970s and failed to keep up with the times. Moreover, the agencies are of varying standards and many agencies on the market are operating as intermediaries, causing chaos in the market.

Therefore, the Government should set up an effective regulatory mechanism but not necessarily a regulatory body because I am worried that a regulatory body may usually incur excessive regulatory costs which will be transferred to employers. So, it is most important to have a good regulatory system; at the same time, it is worth the Government's consideration to formulate a code of practice and a standard contract for FDH agencies, and to study the introduction of restrictions on lending to FDHs.

Thank you, Deputy President.

MR ROBERT LEE (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President. I would like to thank and support Dr NGAN Man-yu for proposing the motion on comprehensively reviewing and improving the policies on foreign domestic helpers ("FDHs") to actively address the existing problems relating to the regulation of FDH agencies as well as the premature termination of contracts and job-hopping by FDHs, so as to enhance the protection of the interests of both the employers and FDHs.

There is a huge demand for FDHs in Hong Kong. Currently, around 400 000 FDHs are working in Hong Kong. They play an important supporting role in many local families, especially in helping perform household chores and take care of the elderly and children. They also help unleash the workforce potential of dual-income families, making significant contributions to our economic development.

However, under the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic, the number of FDHs coming to Hong Kong has decreased. As the supply of FDHs does not meet the demand, FDHs' salaries have risen sharply, exacerbating the problems of premature termination of contracts and job-hopping. Coupled with the unsatisfactory performance of FDHs, there is widespread concern in the community about the regulation of FDHs and FDH agencies.

I have three suggestions to further improve the policies on FDHs. First, to enhance publicity and education to allow FDHs to understand the risks of premature termination of contracts and job-hopping. The Immigration Department and the Labour Department ("LD") should strengthen coordination and communication, to explain the risks of premature termination of contracts and job-hopping to FDHs through various channels, e.g. premature termination of contracts without reasonable grounds and frequent changes in employers may result in unsuccessful application for new visas and loss of job opportunities.

Second, the transparency of information on the employment of FDHs should be enhanced. It is suggested that the contents of the existing "Employers' Corner" and "Employment Agencies Portal" of LD should be consolidated for dissemination of information in a one-stop manner to enable employers to make enquiries and obtain the latest information on the employment of FDHs. However, while enhancing the transparency of information on FDHs, there should not be excessive regulation of FDHs and FDH agencies, so as to avoid substantial increase in the cost of regulation, which will eventually lead to a substantial increase in the expenses on hiring FDHs.

Third, the training of FDHs should be enhanced to improve the quality of services. It is suggested that LD and FDH agencies should provide training courses for FDHs to enhance their skills in performing household chores and taking care of the elderly and children. Besides, additional contents should be introduced, such as Hong Kong's lifestyle and culture, and labour rights, to make it easier for FDHs to understand and adapt to the working environment in Hong Kong and enhance their sense of belonging.

We hope the above measures can help solve the existing problems of FDHs and FDH agencies. More importantly, in order to maintain Hong Kong as a place that attracts FDHs, efforts should be made to provide FDHs with a friendly working environment and offer them suitable living support, thereby fostering harmonious relationship between employers and FDHs.

With these remarks, Deputy President, I support the motion.

MR TONY TSE (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President. Deputy President, foreign domestic helpers (“FDHs”) have become indispensable members of many Hong Kong families. They help perform household chores, take care of children and the elderly, etc., so that their employers, especially female employers, can work outside to make money and contribute to society. Therefore, the stable and satisfactory supply of FDHs and their services is crucial to improving the quality of life of many families, expanding the workforce and promoting economic development.

There are 400 000 FDHs in Hong Kong, accounting for over 10% of the total workforce. The current minimum wage for FDHs is about \$4,700 per month, much lower than our statutory minimum wage in terms of hourly rate. However, I have seldom heard from Members and trade union members who are earnestly concerned about labour rights that the number of FDHs to be imported should be restricted, the hours of work of FDHs should be reduced, or the minimum wage of FDHs should be increased to the same level as the statutory minimum wage of local workers.

I believe we all know that it is unrealistic to do so. Even if the relevant wage rate is raised above the statutory minimum wage rate, it is still difficult to find enough local people to take up domestic work. Many housewives will not be able to work outside because they cannot afford to hire “sisters” to help them out, resulting in reduced household incomes and lower quality of life, as well as a reduction in the total workforce.

I, in principle, support the original motion proposed by Dr NGAN Man-yu and the amendments of the two Members, which urge the Government to improve the policies on FDHs and the related agency system, thereby enhancing the protection of the interests of both the employers and FDHs.

Apart from the policies on FDHs, I think that the overall policy on importation of labour in Hong Kong should be reviewed and improved. Some members of the labour sector often say that the importation of foreign workers will take away the rice bowls of local workers and may have impacts on certain work types. However, for industries in which there is already a serious manpower shortage and local people are unwilling to join, especially for industries that many young people are reluctant to join even if higher wages are offered, I believe the importation of foreign workers in an appropriate and regularized manner will have a positive role to play in developing the economy and improving people's livelihood.

FDHs are a case in point, and care workers in residential care homes ("RCHs") for the elderly and RCHs for persons with disabilities serve as another example. Few local people are willing to take up the work of domestic helpers but given an ageing population in Hong Kong, I think the demand for the services will continue to grow. The COVID-19 epidemic has further highlighted the serious shortage of manpower in RCHs and the Government is going to amend the legislation to increase the manning ratio of RCHs. Therefore, I think it is necessary to increase and accelerate the importation of nursing staff to RCHs to take better care of the elderly and unleash the workforce potentials of the families concerned.

The Construction Industry Council released the latest Manpower Forecast for Hong Kong Construction Industry last week. It is anticipated that as the number of public and private sector projects in Hong Kong has not decreased, there will be a shortage of varying degrees of frontline construction workers, middle-level technicians, site supervisory personnel and professionals in the next few years, which will have impacts on the construction time, cost, quality and industrial safety of various housing and development projects.

I hope that the construction sector will rationally and pragmatically consider the appeal to expand the importation of labour using the same criteria, so as to continue to create strong impetus for growth as emphasized in the speech delivered on 1 July, and achieve the housing construction goal of "enhancing speed, efficiency, quantity and quality" of the current-term Government.

Deputy President, I so submit.

MS CHAN HOI-YAN (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President. According to statistics released by the Census and Statistics Department, the number of foreign domestic helpers (“FDHs”) of different nationalities in Hong Kong was 340 000 in 2021, i.e. nearly 340 000 families employed FDHs to take care of the elderly and children. The policies on FDHs are important, not only because they affect FDHs but also because they affect more than 300 000 families.

In fact, my family is also a dual-income family, and I am grateful to my “sister” for helping me take care of my family members and perform household chores. I am also grateful that I have a very good “sister” though many friends of mine have different experiences in the employment of FDHs. There are also many media reports about how unscrupulous FDH agencies outrageously treated employers and FDHs.

I personally agree that it is an indisputable fact that FDH agencies are of varying standards, and, of course, I will now focus on FDH agencies of inferior quality. For example, during the epidemic in the past few years with a pressing demand for FDHs, some agencies were found to have abetted FDHs to engage in premature termination of contracts, job-hopping, etc. There had been quite a number of complaints from members of the public that FDHs were suspected of avariciously asking for nearly double their salaries to renew contracts due to financial inducement. While the agencies could make more money, the FDHs concerned, who became the so-called “local FDHs having their contracts completed”, were also capable of earning higher salaries as they were exempted from quarantine and able to report duty within a short time.

I personally agree that there should be a dedicated department and a rating system for FDHs, as mentioned in the original motion and the amendments, to protect the interests of both the employers and FDHs. I also think that apart from strengthening regulation, it is also very important to improve the flow of information and provide sufficient support to employers through the use of information technology. For example, it will be a feasible option to set up a “support platform for employers of FDHs” to provide employers with one-stop information accessible via a mobile application and on the Internet, for reference, complaint and support purposes.

For instance, first-time FDH employers may unknowingly patronize agencies with previous violations and fell into a trap. In fact, the Labour Department currently has a dedicated website that publishes a list of FDH agencies

which have been issued written warnings for violation of the Code; but is that known by many people? If there is a one-stop platform and all employers are encouraged to participate, employers who have signed contracts can rate the performance of agencies and have access to the “blacklist” and “rating list” of agencies. This may allow first-time FDH employers to make fewer pointless trips.

If technically feasible, the one-stop platform should also be equipped with artificial intelligence functions for handling complaints and seeking assistance, so that the platform can regularly collate data received to improve the rating of agencies, thus providing employers with sufficient information to make appropriate choices and better protect their own interests.

Another example is that some online information has been consolidated by netizens and shared on some social media platforms or mom groups, which mainly includes simple work agreements in different languages, such as time to start and finish work each day, major daily tasks and taboos in local families. If such information and notes to first-time employers can be provided on a unified platform, the risk of future disputes can be reduced to a certain extent.

Yet another example is what employers should do under certain circumstances, e.g. their FDHs had borrowed money and even absconded, and they encountered debt collection from finance companies. Generally speaking, FDH employers may be at a loss as to what to do. However, they can fill out form ID407E and submit it to the Immigration Department to confirm that FDHs have quit their jobs. In that case, the finance companies cannot collect the debts from the employers or else their licences will be revoked. This information should also be provided on a unified platform.

Certainly, I must especially point out that, though we should be concerned about the interests of FDH employers, many FDHs were treated unfairly or unkindly in the past. Therefore, I think it is all the more important to support the original motion and all the amendments today, so as to protect both the employers and FDHs and ensure reasonable treatment for them. I hope that the Government will consider all the relevant contents.

I so submit. Thank you, Deputy President.

MR FRANKIE YICK (in Cantonese): Deputy President, first of all, I would like to thank Dr NGAN Man-yu for proposing this motion, which is of great concern to many middle-class families, so that this Council can have a debate on it again.

As Ir LEE Chun-keung said just now, there are currently about 340 000 foreign domestic helpers (“FDHs”) working in Hong Kong, and the supply of FDHs has all along been insufficient to meet the local demand. However, the SAR Government has not enacted legislation specifically for the regulation of FDHs, but only relies on local labour legislation for enforcement. As a result, many members of the public have reflected to us that the Government takes the side of FDHs rather than local employers, with its policy being tilted merely towards the protection of the interests of FDHs.

Some people may argue that the Government is duty-bound to protect the basic rights and interests of FDHs who leave their hometown to work in Hong Kong and have to separate from their families for a long period of time. We, the Liberal Party, certainly have no objection to this. However, I believe we have learnt from news reports from time to time that there are a small number of FDHs with illness coming to Hong Kong in a bid to receive medical treatment in our public hospitals. They even conceal their medical history until having a job secured in Hong Kong. However, being restricted by laws and regulations, dismissal is not allowed in such cases, leaving employers with no FDH to serve them after payment. Worse still, employers have to take care of their FDHs the other way round.

In recent years, some FDHs may even try to induce dismissal by not complying with their employers’ reasonable work requirements, or wilfully ignoring instructions on meal preparation or breaking household appliances. These FDHs simply want to force their employers to dismiss them, so that they can change employers through FDH agencies. This will in turn enable FDH agencies to get commissions afresh and keep making profits by luring FDHs to engage in job-hopping.

In fact, quite a number of employers have relayed to the Liberal Party that whenever FDHs encounter the so-called unfair treatment, they will readily make a big deal out of it and bring it before the Labour Tribunal, hoping that their cases can be dealt with by the court—as we all know, how such cases will be handled in court—I believe many of us have probably come across stories made up by some FDHs who deceive employers that their home has been destroyed, or their relatives fall ill and are urgently in need of money for medical treatment. Some FDHs even

make up an excuse that an accident has occurred in their hometown, so, they not only ask employers for relief but even borrow from banks or finance companies; yet, they are actually unable to repay their debts or have no plans to do so. They even disappear as soon as they get the money. Such scam is not revealed until a letter from the debt collection agency is sent to or debt collection is carried out at the employer's residence, causing great distress to the employer.

Of course, some FDHs may have their reasons in taking out loans, and we are in no way to stop them or impose any restrictions on them. Therefore, as proposed by Ir LEE Chun-keung in his amendment just now, the Government should study how to prevent employers from suffering harassment when their FDHs who have borrowed from banks or finance companies are unable to repay the debts, so as to protect innocent employers from being unnecessarily troubled.

Deputy President, to many families, FDHs are very important and may even be regarded as a family member of them. Employers do hope that when they go out to work, they can feel at ease in entrusting their family members to the care of FDHs. They also hope that FDHs can complete or even extend the contract with them and serve their families for a long time. However, at the same time, we notice that many FDHs are lured by unscrupulous agencies to engage in job-hopping and try to induce dismissal. Therefore, we hope that the SAR Government will address this problem squarely and study how to regulate the practice of FDH agencies.

Lastly, I would like to take this opportunity to urge once again the relevant government departments, especially the Labour and Welfare Bureau, the Labour Department and the Immigration Department, to step up inspection, enforcement, education and publicity, and strive to protect the interests of both FDHs and employers to which they are entitled under the law.

Deputy President, I so submit.

MS YUNG HOI-YAN (in Cantonese): Deputy President. I speak in support of the motion on “Improving the policies on foreign domestic helpers” proposed by Dr NGAN Man-yu.

We note that two Members, namely Ir LEE Chun-keung and Ms Judy CHAN, have proposed their amendments today, and I support these amendments.

According to the current figures, there are almost 340 000 foreign domestic helpers (“FDHs”) working in Hong Kong, so the policies in question precisely affect the 340 000 Hong Kong families hiring FDHs. Why are such policies so important? What we are talking about is not just the number of FDHs, but also the number of families, involving the needs of these families as well.

Just now, Members have mentioned a lot about FDHs in respect of their engagement in job-hopping and intention to induce dismissal. We have also noticed such situation. According to the figures in recent years, 2 833 employment visa applications by FDHs suspected of job-hopping were rejected in 2021, representing almost a nine-fold increase in the total number of applications rejected as compared with 319 cases in 2020. As of the first quarter of 2022, the Special Duties Team has rejected 612 applications suspected of job-hopping.

The Labour Department (“LD”) and the Immigration Department (“ImmD”) are always in close contact and liaison with each other and have obtained various kinds of intelligence. We have also reminded many employer groups that they can relay to ImmD and LD the problems faced by employers in hiring FDHs. There are channels for this purpose, but how to implement it as a policy? Should a more effective telephone hotline be set up for handling complaints from employers, or do we need to take care of the interests of employees as well? Ir LEE Chun-keung has added in his amendment the expression of “adopt the following measures to enhance the protection of the interests of both the employers and FDHs”, and I would like to focus on the word “both”.

We have just heard many voices concerning the protection of the interests of employers, which we understand, and do hope that the Government will step up its efforts to provide assistance and support to employers. For example, what can employers do if their FDHs suddenly quit for job-hopping? Are there any other arrangements to meet the needs of the families concerned? In this regard, I hope LD can provide the relevant information so that employers can approach certain FDH agencies for such arrangements.

I notice that Dr NGAN Man-yu has proposed in his original motion to establish a rating system for FDH agencies. I think this is worthy of support. Currently, the monthly salary of an FDH is some \$4,000, and the amount is stipulated in both the employment contract and the labour legislation. I am handling a number of cases and have reflected to the Bureau that some FDHs have been told in advance by intermediaries or employment agencies in their place of

origin that they will be renumerated at \$3,000 a month upon arrival in Hong Kong. These are precisely unscrupulous agencies, but we in Hong Kong can never locate these overseas agencies or know who they really are, thus making it difficult to enforce the law. I hope the Government will, through its global network, investigate and identify these unscrupulous agencies because they not only undermine the reputation of Hong Kong but also deprive employees of their interests. I think the Government should pay more attention to this.

Assuming that the monthly salary of an FDH is \$3,000, can the FDH really get \$3,000 after coming to Hong Kong? In some cases, the employer does not pay the full amount, or even does not pay the salary at all. Such cases are eventually referred to LD for mediation. Should there be any labour or employment disputes, they would be resolved through mediation. If it is substantiated that the employer has not paid the wages to the FDH for three months, a compensation of \$9,000 should be provided. I think LD should face up to this problem and conduct an in-depth investigation to find out whether there are unscrupulous agencies engaging in such practices in different regions and countries.

We hope that while offering help to employees, the interests of employers in Hong Kong can also be protected. Therefore, I support Dr NGAN Man-yu's original motion and all the amendments. Thank you.

MS ELIZABETH QUAT (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President. Deputy President, over the years, I have received countless complaints from employers. Almost every day—practically every single day—I do receive complaints from employers about either job-hopping by foreign domestic helpers (“FDHs”) or their quality—what I mean is, some FDHs, who are originally claimed to be competent in a number of areas, do not have such skills at all; worse still, they even do not know how to speak or understand Cantonese, rendering them unable to communicate with their employers. Some other FDHs, after arrival in Hong Kong, are found to be pregnant, and some are even found to have serious illness, thus failing to serve their employers' families. I receive such complaints almost every day. This explains why I have repeatedly raised questions in the Legislative Council over the years, asking the Government how it would deal with these situations.

I remember that I have had heated debates with the former Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr LAW Chi-kwong, in this Chamber many times. After each debate, I received even more complaints because to employers, it seemed that the Government had not cared about their feelings. The existing employment contracts or policies only favour the side of FDHs and fail to offer any help to employers. This is the conclusion I have drawn over the years. In dealing with the problem of FDHs, the Government basically adopts an ostrich policy, that is, doing nothing at all. It is obvious that something has gone wrong, but the Government simply turns a blind eye to it. It just keeps hiding the problems and resorts to the tactic of procrastinating. Therefore, regarding the motion on “Improving the policies on foreign domestic helpers” proposed by Dr NGAN Man-yu today, I definitely give my full support to it, and I also support the amendments proposed by Ir LEE Chun-keung and Ms Judy CHAN.

Deputy President, Secretary, the initiative on “Improving the policies on foreign domestic helpers” was put forward by Dr NGAN Man-yu and we, the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong, in August last year. It took a lot of time and effort for Dr NGAN Man-yu to meet with many organizations and employers to sort out the issues and come up with a consolidated list of problems encountered over the years, and then put forward some recommendations that we consider practical and feasible, all of which are highly targeted in nature.

Deputy President, whenever I propose to further improve the policies on FDHs in this Council, there are often criticisms from the public, alleging that this Council is not on the side of FDHs and discriminates against FDHs and exploits of their interests; and some even denounce employers as unscrupulous. However, as we all know, there are 340 000 FDHs in Hong Kong, serving 340 000 families. FDHs are our good helpers, and to many families, FDHs have indeed been regarded as a member of them for many years. My family does not have an FDH, but my mother’s FDH has been serving us for decades and has now become a family member of ours. The FDH has all along been performing household chores and providing childminding services in our family, and when the children have grown up, the FDH continues to look after my sister’s children. FDHs are indeed very important to families in Hong Kong, and there is no reason for us to discriminate against them or treat them badly. As we all know, FDHs also play a pivotal role in Hong Kong’s economy. Therefore, we have put forward these proposals in order to resolve the problems and protect both employers and employees.

I would like to reiterate that employers and employees are not in opposition to each other, but are mutually beneficial. We provide job opportunities for FDHs, so that they can get a higher pay and improve the livelihood of their families in the hometown. Therefore, I very much hope that our society will not put FDHs and employers in an opposition position. For the proposals we put forward today—in fact, Dr NGAN Man-yu has already made a very detailed speech, so I am not going to repeat what he said—I hope the Secretary can take heed of them and will put them in practice. Hiring a FDH is a big deal for some middle-class families, for which they have to spend tens of thousands of dollars, ranging from \$20,000 to \$30,000. But if the helper tries to “job-hop” after a week or so, or even disappears after two to three months, it will indeed deal a very big blow to the family.

In view of this, we propose to establish an FDH Authority and review the standard employment contract for FDHs. Indeed, these are tasks that should be tackled a long time ago. They should have already been completed rather than being discussed now. I really see no reason for the Government not doing so. If the Government has its reason, I hope the Secretary can give us a detailed explanation today so that we can give an account to these employers. In Hong Kong, it is necessary for FDHs and employers to maintain a harmonious relationship. With a good employment contract and a sound system in place, a better social atmosphere will then be fostered.

Deputy President, I so submit.

REVD CANON PETER DOUGLAS KOON (in Cantonese): Deputy President, since the introduction of foreign domestic helpers (“FDHs”) in the 1970s, despite a lot of social changes, FDHs have been playing an important role in many families, from assisting in performing household chores to taking care of the elderly and children, which has further unleashed the potential of the female workforce. FDHs have made far-reaching and significant contributions to our economic development. There are currently around 340 000 FDHs in Hong Kong, serving local families. With an ageing population and the continuous increase in people who need care, the demand for FDHs is expected to continue to increase. In fact, the existing policies on FDHs can be described as rather backward and somewhat inadequate, and we often hear FDHs, employers, agencies making complaints. I think the Government should expeditiously review and improve the policies on FDHs.

In particular, under the existing policies, FDH employers, when faced with some unscrupulous agencies and FDHs engaging in job-hopping, are often in an unfavourable position. It is difficult to affix responsibilities when things go wrong and there are very limited channels for complaints. For example, the Consumer Council may only receive complaints from FDH employers and agencies relating to the scope of services but it cannot handle and coordinate labour disputes between employers and FDHs. If employers find that the quality of the services provided by FDHs are different from what they heard at interviews, i.e. FDHs do not match the specified requirements, and if FDHs have borrowed money, become pregnant or have other serious problems, their employers will be at a loss as to what to do and have no channels for complaints. In view of these problems, the Government should formulate appropriate solutions and policies.

Deputy President, the problem of borrowing by FDHs has always existed, and the number of cases has increased along with the increase in the number of FDHs. Under the existing legislation, even if an employer discovers that an FDH has a debt problem, no dismissal is allowed, and even if the employer is implicated and being harassed or illegally pursued by debt collectors, the only option is to report to and seek assistance from the Police. If the employer intends to dismiss an FDH with a debt problem, everything should be done in accordance with the labour legislation. In the light of the increasingly serious problem of borrowing by FDHs, a credit reference agency launched an FDH background check and credit report service last year. The credit report allows employers to get detailed information on the identity of FDHs before hiring them, which includes their personal information, credit history and other details. Employers can also verify and confirm the identity of FDHs through customer representatives and obtain information on their borrowing history. This will indeed help employers feel comfortable when they hire FDHs to work for them, and allay the concerns of employers and their family members. This is similar to the application procedures for private loans by members of the public and is worth thorough study by the Government. In addition, the Government can consider setting a loan ceiling for FDHs, e.g. finance companies can only lend to FDHs amounts that do not exceed two to three times their monthly salary, in order to reduce the likelihood of default on repayment.

It can be said that the current policies on FDHs in Hong Kong is plagued with problems. Apart from policy imbalance, the varying quality of agencies and some agencies operating in an unscrupulous manner have always been criticized. In fact, our neighbour Singapore has already strengthened the licensing system for

the industry, which can not only clearly protect the interests of both the employers and FDHs but also enhance the community's acceptance of agencies, which is definitely worth adopting by us. Furthermore, the Government can explore the formulation of a mechanism for assessing FDH agencies, and improve the Employment Agency Regulations and the Code of Practice for Employment Agencies, so as to enhance the service quality of FDH agencies, increase the transparency of their operation, and eradicate operation by non-compliant FDH agencies.

Lastly, I hope that the Government will practically handle the matter such that this long-standing problem can be solved as soon as possible, thereby enabling FDHs to make greater contributions to Hong Kong families and society as a whole.

Deputy President, I so submit.

MS DOREEN KONG (in Cantonese): Deputy President, I would like to thank Dr NGAN Man-yu for proposing the motion on “Improving the policies on foreign domestic helpers”.

It has been 50 years since the introduction of policies on foreign domestic helpers (“FDHs”) coming to work in Hong Kong. Since the 1970s, FDHs have been deeply involved in Hong Kong's dual-income families, helping to take care of the elderly and children, thus contributing positively to the unleashing of the productivity of Hong Kong, and in particular, allowing room for female family members to compete in the workplace.

Over the past 50 years, while FDHs have contributed to the development of Hong Kong, various problems have arisen too. However, the Government's policies on FDHs have not been updated in accordance with the actual situation. The latest figures show that the total number of FDHs in Hong Kong is now over 400 000; and among them, FDHs from the Philippines account for the highest proportion of more than half of the total, followed by Indonesian FDHs, whose share in the FDH market has been growing in recent years. Changes in the composition of FDHs is one of the causes of problems in the market, and it is imperative for the Government to help regularize the FDH market and strengthen the regulation of agencies, so as to achieve the effect of protecting the interests of the employers and the treatment of FDHs at the same time, thus bringing about the positive effects of its policies on FDHs to benefit the development of Hong Kong.

Regarding regularizing the FDH market in the Hong Kong, I particularly suggest that the Government should introduce a plan or policy for FDHs to participate in taking caring of elderly singletons and assist residential care homes for the elderly (“RCHEs”) in Hong Kong, in view of the escalating number of elderly persons in Hong Kong. On the one hand, it is projected that in 10 years’ time, elderly persons aged 65 or above will account for one third of the local population, and the demand for long-term care in the community will rise exponentially, it is thus evident that there will be pressure on the caring of the elderly. In particular, the proportion of elderly singletons or doubletons in the community will increase significantly. The ageing population will lead to an increasing need for elderly care, especially in elderly households without young family members. On the other hand, the long-term shortage of manpower in local RCHEs continues to be a significant problem. In the long run, the Government should nurture elderly care personnel and enrich the resources of the elderly care sector in Hong Kong. In the short run, in order improve the situation of RCHEs in the next few years, we should expeditiously supplement the supply of care workers, especially the experienced ones, in a targeted manner. In view of the above, if the Government will take the lead to bring in FDHs to take care of the elderly in Hong Kong, it will be an effective measure to alleviate the pressure of our ageing population.

The Government once intended to subsidize elderly singletons to employ FDHs by means of community care service vouchers, but the response from society was not positive. The main criticism from the public was that the Government relied too much on outsourcing and failed to provide specific guidance on the details of employing FDHs for the elderly. The Government also launched the Pilot Scheme on Training for Foreign Domestic Helpers in Elderly Care, but it was limited to organizing elderly care courses taken by FDHs on the recommendation of the employers; the scope of the scheme was not broad enough and it lacked continuity. Engaging FDHs to participate in local elderly care cannot be achieved overnight. The Government should set clear objectives and directions, take the actual situation of our society into account and formulate corresponding policies at the macro planning level. Under the premise of ensuring that the basic demand for FDHs in Hong Kong is met and scientifically regularizing the development of the industry, a certain degree of FDH manpower should be introduced to inject vitality for alleviating the problem of an ageing population in Hong Kong.

All in all, the 400 000-plus FDHs currently working in Hong Kong are a huge human resource available to us. The Government should strengthen the regulation of the existing employment agency industry, and appropriately boost the

work vitality of the FDH community through formulation and improvement of policies. On this basis, it is suggested that the Government should conduct an in-depth study on how to encourage job diversification of FDHs and, on the basis of ensuring that the demand for employing FDHs in the private market is met, study how to establish channels to engage FDHs in helping to alleviate the problem of an ageing population in Hong Kong.

Deputy President, I so submit.

MR PAUL TSE (in Cantonese): Deputy President, this is indeed a colourful debate. Although our discussion is about foreign domestic helpers (“FDHs”), Ms Doreen KONG has strayed from the subject to FDHs in different sectors, including that of care workers, while Mr Tony TSE mentioned foreign construction workers. It does not matter, as we are talking about the same thing anyway.

Nevertheless, if we want to focus on today’s subject, and given the limited time, I think I will not talk about my personal experience or the benefits that FDHs bring to Hong Kong, nor will I discuss the nature of the complaints, the job-hopping situation or the problem of FDHs taking out loans from various borrowers. These points, being only common sense, sound all too familiar. The only things which I can talk about are some observations and unusual views.

I remember last time when we discussed the same subject or a similar one on 19 January 2022, I mentioned that it would be better to provide more alternatives and study the option of employing Mainland helpers or domestic helpers in addition to FDHs. As Ms KONG said earlier, many local families have the need to take care of elderly persons. Employing someone who speak the same language to take care of the elderly in the family can be a politically correct decision. The reason is that it will obviate the need for the family to learn English, and learning Putonghua is more important anyway. Under the circumstances, this will really be another option worthy of the Government’s consideration.

However, to be fair, I have to discuss the various views which I have heard today. Of course, as Members of the Legislative Council, whether we are representatives of the middle class, the local communities or the industries, we may still be inclined to protect the employers of Hong Kong, because our voters are our boss and some of them are employers. There are also some louder and more organized representative groups that occasionally speak out on behalf of FDHs in certain cases, and even stage demonstrations and protests. Employment agencies,

except those which have been labelled as unscrupulous, are also stakeholders and play an important role. Yet, it seems that we have not heard anyone expressing views from their perspectives so far. In addition, the Government has been criticized over the years for not doing much, or being slow and dilatory, and perhaps the officials can later speak in defence of the Government and give explanations. However, I would like to discuss this point from several perspectives.

First, the issue is in fact complex because many stakeholders are involved. As the Chinese saying goes, “Meeting up is easy; living together is not”, and it is even more difficult for people of different backgrounds and languages to live under the same roof, thus, problems will occur. Second, we cannot only consider the situation of Hong Kong because we have many competitors and other countries are also competing for FDHs. For a period of time in the past, due to rapid economic development and relaxation of restrictions on the Mainland, the Mainland’s demand for domestic helpers greatly increased, and employers were even willing to hire Filipino maids to work on the Mainland at a salary of ten thousand of dollars or more. That happened, but of course, before the outbreak of the epidemic. Therefore, we have to take many factors into consideration.

In fact, when we look at some of the cases, figures, or incidents involving unlawful or outrageous “abuses”, they may all sound scary or obnoxious, whether the case is about an employer who has assaulted an employee or a helper who has job-hopped or taken out loans. However, it is important to consider the whole matter in perspective or in proportion, and we should not conclude that the problem is very serious just by looking at individual cases.

To be fair, the FDH system in Hong Kong is already relatively good. Some people praise the system in Singapore, but do not forget that Singapore has over a million foreign workers working in different types of jobs, so it has established a licensing system and done a lot of work under its unique background. However, as far as FDHs are concerned, I think the Government has already started to deal with the problem in view of the development in Hong Kong over the years. Even in respect of job-hopping, although there is no official “blacklist”, statistics show that if FDHs have unreasonably terminated their contracts prematurely, the authorities will not approve their applications for visa renewal.

Therefore, we have to consider the matter from a holistic perspective. I agree with the proposals made by many Members today, but we must be more

impartial in reviewing the matter and look at all aspects and the actual situation, so as not to impose too many restrictions, introduce too many licensing mechanisms and bring about too many constraints under the current difficult business environment in Hong Kong, which will undermine the interests of all parties.

Thank you, Deputy President.

DEPUTY PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Does any other Member wish to speak?

(No Member indicated a wish to speak)

DEPUTY PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Dr NGAN Man-yu, you may now speak on the amendment.

DR NGAN MAN-YU (in Cantonese): Deputy President, I am very grateful to Ir LEE Chun-keung and Ms Judy CHAN for proposing their amendments.

As Ir LEE said, many employers have experienced the problem of foreign domestic helpers (“FDHs”) taking out loans. This problem is very complicated. Most FDHs have borrowed money because they have to pay a considerable amount of introduction fees and training fees to come to work in Hong Kong, and some FDHs need money to pay medical expenses for their family members who have problems or to pay for their children’s further studies. Only FDHs themselves know if the reasons are true, but there is no denying that some FDHs have financial difficulties in their lives.

At present, there is no law in Hong Kong to prevent FDHs from borrowing money, and employers cannot withhold identity cards or passports from FDHs to prevent them from taking out loans. To address this problem, I suggested in my proposal that the authorities should explore the possibility of introducing regulation on FDHs’ borrowing, such as setting an annual borrowing limit, and the amount of each loan should not exceed two months’ salaries, with a view to reducing the amount borrowed as far as possible, so that FDHs can afford to repay their debts and when they fail to do so, the employers will not have to shoulder the responsibility.

The amendment also raises the issue of poor performance of FDHs. As I mentioned in my main speech just now, one of the questions in the survey conducted by the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong (“DAB”) is “Does the FDH meet employer’s expectations?”, and 47% of the employers have expressed disappointment. Therefore, I have mentioned in my proposal that training courses for FDHs should be provided to help them better understand the local culture and living habits of Hong Kong, especially when many employers expect that FDHs can help take care of the elderly and children. Consideration can be given to provide courses on caring for the elderly and children, which I believe will provide practical help to many families and employers.

Ms Judy CHAN’s amendment puts forward the proposal of “establishing an independent licensing system for FDH agencies”. DAB’s position is open in this regard. Since licensing often involves functions such as processing applications, monitoring the agencies and imposing sanctions, if the proposal is adopted, it is all the more necessary for the authorities to set up an FDH Authority as proposed by me, which I believe will be conducive to promoting uniformity in making the relevant administrative arrangements.

On the other hand, regarding the establishment of a rating system for FDH agencies, I suggest that FDH agencies should be rated according to four criteria, including the retention rate of FDHs, their turnover rate, the number of FDHs under employment and the number of years the agency has been in operation. Each agency should be rated separately by the employers and FDHs and the ratings under the system will directly affect the reputation of the FDH agencies.

Deputy President, DAB supports the two amendments.

I so submit.

SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND WELFARE (in Cantonese): Deputy President, let me extend my thanks again to Dr NGAN Man-yu for moving the original motion, and Ir LEE Chun-keung and Ms Judy CHAN for proposing the amendments. A total of 23 Members have spoken in this motion debate. I would like to take this opportunity to give a consolidated response to the many valuable views expressed by Members.

Proposal of establishing a Foreign Domestic Helper Authority

Many Members who have spoken say that they consider this to be an apparently feasible direction, but I would like to examine carefully with Members here the proposal of establishing a Foreign Domestic Helper (“FDH”) Authority. I fully comprehend Members’ intentions, but one thing that Members should understand is that domestic helpers are different from real estate agents or tourism industry practitioners. The Authority proposed by Members will not regulate a profession, nor will it not be a licensing system. I said this because I noticed that in Dr NGAN Man-yu’s proposal, the functions of the Authority include processing and approving applications for FDHs to come to Hong Kong. All applications for FDHs to come to Hong Kong must be handled in accordance with the Immigration Ordinance, and the authority is vested in the Director of Immigration (“the Director”). If FDHs are to be excluded from the coverage of the Immigration Ordinance and applications in relation to FDHs will not be handled by the Director, it will be a very complex issue. I think it will have very complicated and far-reaching implications because the authority to handle matters including visa applications for FDHs to come to Hong Kong, like those for other foreign workers, is based on the Immigration Ordinance and the applications are handled by the Director.

In addition, there is the suggestion that the Authority should handle licence applications from FDH agencies; the situation is actually very similar. Licence applications are processed and inspections concerning FDHs are carried out under the authority of the Employment Ordinance in accordance with the provisions therein. At present, implementation of the Employment Ordinance is mainly monitored by the Labour Department (“LD”), and prosecution will be instituted by it where necessary. If this part of the work is reassigned to the Authority, Members can imagine that not only will the workload be increased, but also the manpower required, because apart from the need for the general staff, there will be a need for management staff too. I understand the reasons for the proposal by Members, but if the Authority has to deal with the interface with all the legislation of Hong Kong relating to FDHs, the areas affected and the complexity involved will be significant. Since it will be a major change with far-reaching implications for various pieces of legislation, the Government consider that careful deliberation is required. We do not think it is appropriate to make such a major change for the time being.

Protection for domestic helpers in Hong Kong

In the speeches delivered just now, Mr Paul TSE, for example, mentioned at the end of his speech that, to be fair, Hong Kong's FDH system is actually quite good when compared with the other places in the region. As Members may have noticed, the first places I visited after assuming office are Singapore and the Philippines. I chose the Philippines because I fully understand that it is the place of origin of over 55% of FDHs in Hong Kong. We need to establish good communication with the Philippine Government to ensure a reliable supply of FDHs for us.

The most rewarding experience in my visit to the Philippines is that Hong Kong, in the eyes of the Philippine Government, is the best employer in the region. We have the standard employment contract for FDHs, and we treat FDHs equally and their rights are the same as those of the local workers. Any changes in our labour rights apply to FDHs. The Philippine Government has recently established the new Department of Migrant Workers to consolidate FDH matters that were previously handled by a number of departments, including the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Department of Labor and Employment, under a single department. When I met with the Secretary of Migrant Workers, she appreciated the protection provided to FDHs by the Hong Kong Government and its overall efforts in implementing policies on FDHs, so I would like to share it with Members here.

The Government will continue its efforts and strive for excellence with regard to implementing policies on FDHs, including processing employment visa applications, monitoring employment agencies ("EAs"), and protecting the interests of FDHs—and I agree with Members that—publicity is the area in which we really need to work harder to achieve better results. We fully appreciate that with the establishment of the dedicated FDH division under the Labour Department, coordination of the Government's work has obviously improved, especially during the COVID-19 epidemic. Back then, we had to fight against the epidemic and there were many needs arising from it, posing many challenges to both FDHs and the employers. The dedicated FDH division, particularly colleagues at the Immigration Department ("ImmD"), spared no effort in solving many major problems.

At present, LD has a dedicated FDH portal which explains the policies and provides information and links relating to employment of FDHs to the employers and FDHs. In May last year, the new Employers' Corner was added to the

dedicated portal with a view to providing the employers with more information to facilitate understanding of their responsibilities and rights. It is also hoped that through this portal, more information will be provided, including the relevant forms, sample receipts and records. LD will continue to enhance its work and strengthen publicity in this area.

Standard employment contract

In the debate just now, a number of Members have raised the suggestion of reviewing the standard employment contract (“SEC”). The Government has been reviewing whether there is a need to make changes to the application of SEC. In fact, changes have been made, for example, in 2017, the Government added a new clause on cleaning outward-facing windows. Members would understand that there was a period of time back then when many FDHs fell to their death while cleaning windows, so we considered it necessary to set out in SEC the occupational safety requirements in this regard to provide better protection for FDHs.

(THE PRESIDENT resumed the Chair)

The requirement to sign SEC has been in place for a long time. As an important contract, consistency of the terms and conditions in SEC is in fact very important. As Members will understand, SEC can have a great impact on the stakeholders including FDHs, the employers and EAs. At present, there are about 340 000 FDHs in Hong Kong serving more than 300 000 families at the same time, and the needs of each family are different. Therefore, when considering whether it is necessary to change the terms and conditions in SEC, we must be careful to ensure that FDHs and the employers are protected and there is room for negotiation between both parties, so as to strike a better balance.

Members have mentioned the possibility of including medical examination requirements in SEC. At present, the Government has not regularized pre-employment medical examinations for employees in general. The employers and FDHs are not required to submit medical reports of FDHs to government departments. According to Clause 17 of SEC, it is required that the helper has been medically examined prior to his/her arrival in Hong Kong and his/her medical certificate has been produced for inspection by the employer. The prospective

employer can inspect the medical certificate to find out the physical condition of the FDH he/she intends to employ and determine whether the FDH is capable of performing the work of a domestic helper. If the FDH refuses to be medically examined or to provide the medical certificate to the employer, the employer can refuse to sign the employment contract with the FDH.

At present, the sample service agreement attached to the Code of Practice for Employment Agencies (“the Code”) lists a number of medical examinations for employers’ reference, including chest X-ray and hepatitis B. The Code requires EAs to ensure that the information provided to the employers, including medical certificates, is consistent with the facts made known to them. If there is a suspicion that the information provided by a job seeker is inaccurate or incomplete, the EA should seek clarification and additional information from the person concerned. If an EA is in breach of the Code, LD may consider revoking its licence or refusing to renew it.

Reviewing the Code of Practice for Employment Agencies

During the motion debate, Members have put forward many views on the proposal of reviewing the Code. At present, LD is reviewing the implementation of the Code, including its effectiveness in regulating and combating unscrupulous EAs, and LD is seeking views from employers and job seekers, as well as collecting opinions of EAs. We also need to explore whether there is room for improvement in enforcement. We will collect views on the Code from various sectors of the community, analyse and summarize our past experience in implementing the Code in light of the changes and developments in society since its promulgation, and make recommendations for improvement.

LD intends to consult the Committee on Employment Services under the Labour Advisory Board in March this year before submitting a paper on the review of, and the proposed amendments to, the Code to the Panel on Manpower of the Legislative Council. Among other things, LD will actively study the need to require EAs to specify the charges for the relevant fee items in the service agreements, especially the charges for the fee items agreed by the EA and the employer, and to require that the service agreement to be signed between the EA and the employer to include the specific items in the sample forms attached to the Code, so as to enhance the protection of the employers’ interests.

Proposal of establishing a rating system for employment agencies

Separately, I noticed that in the motion debate, many Members mentioned Dr NGAN Man-yu's proposal of establishing a rating system for EAs. As I said in my opening speech, LD regulates EAs in four aspects, namely licensing, inspection, investigation and prosecution, to ensure that practitioners in EAs comply with the law and the 40-odd requirements of the Code and provide professional services. In case of non-compliance, LD will follow up and impose appropriate sanctions on a case-by-case basis, including issuing warnings, conducting follow-up inspections, and even instituting prosecution or revoking licences. When processing licence applications, LD will also check the records of the licensee, the operator, the management or employees of the applicant to ensure that an EA which has violated the law cannot reapply for operation under another name.

To make the past records of EAs more open and transparent, LD has systematically published on the dedicated EA portal records of convictions, revocations/refusals of licence renewals and written warnings against overcharging of commission and operating without a licence since 2018, so that job seekers and employers can make informed decisions when choosing to use services of EAs. The dedicated EA portal also contains information on the year in which the licence was issued, the place of business of the EA and the number of branch offices it has for interested parties to check. Since employers have different requirements and expectations of EAs and FDHs referred by them, it is difficult to set objective and fair criteria. If a separate rating system is to be established, it may easily cause disputes and so, we think it may not be desirable.

Dr NGAN Man-yu also pointed out the possibility of using the rate of changing employers by FDHs as an indicator for rating EAs. However, we should note that there are many reasons for FDHs to change employers, and examples which Members may think of include emigration of the employer, failure of the employer to continue with the contract due to financial reasons and so on. Since the situation of each case of employment is different, it would seem impetuous to establish a rating system for EAs based solely on the extent of completion of contracts by FDHs. In addition, when FDHs change employers, they may not use the services of the same EA. Therefore, it seems that determining the merit of an EA merely on the basis of the turnover rate of FDHs may not be objective and it may not be fair.

Combating job-hopping by foreign domestic helpers

In the motion debate, Members are all very concerned about the problem of job-hopping by FDHs. As I said in my opening speech, we are actively and seriously dealing with this problem. Among other things, ImmD's Special Duties Team will carefully process visa applications of FDHs, and if there is evidence of job-hopping, ImmD will decisively reject the application. As Members can see, the number of applications rejected by ImmD in 2021 due to job-hopping by FDHs has increased significantly by about nine times compared to that in 2020. LD will continue to monitor EAs to see if they are suspected of abetting job-hopping by FDHs and will take joint actions with ImmD. After the epidemic has subsided, we have noticed that the number of FDHs has gradually rebounded to about 340 000 now, and the number of complaints about job-hopping received by us has also decreased significantly. Nevertheless, the Government will continue to closely monitor the situation.

Proposal of drawing up a blacklist of foreign domestic helpers

In addition, some Members, including Ir LEE Chun-keung, have proposed to draw up a blacklist of FDHs. I would like to point out that with this proposal, there is a need to ensure compliance with the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance. Generally speaking, information on the identity of an individual cannot be disclosed without the consent of the data subject. That said, if FDHs has committed an immigration offence or breached the terms and conditions of SEC, their visa applications will not be approved by ImmD in general. After rejecting the applications of FDHs suspected of job-hopping, ImmD will also keep the relevant records for future reference in visa processing. It is hoped that such practice will increase the deterrent effect and discourage FDHs from job-hopping.

Skills and training courses for foreign domestic helpers

Some Members asked whether the skills and training courses for FDHs could be enhanced. As I said in my opening speech, FDHs are required to have relevant working experience and undergo training or assessment before coming to Hong Kong. The employers can require the job seekers to provide supporting documents and supplementary information if necessary. Some EAs also provide skills training for FDHs to help them adapt to the job.

Loan activities of foreign domestic helpers

During the discussion, quite a number of Members were very concerned about the loan activities of FDHs. The Government will continue to educate and appeal to FDHs to manage their finances prudently and avoid borrowing. These efforts include producing publicity publications, organizing briefings for FDHs, and distributing leaflets on Sundays and holidays in places where FDHs often gather. We also encourage FDHs to discuss frankly with their employers if they need to consider borrowing money or encounter financial difficulties, so as to refrain from excessive borrowing and becoming unable to repay the debts, or even affecting their employers as a result of borrowing.

Supply of foreign domestic helpers

In the debate just now, Dr CHOW Man-kong, Mr LAI Tung-kwok and Dr Priscilla LEUNG have all expressed worries about the long-term supply of FDHs. At present, about 56% of our FDHs come from the Philippines and about 40% from Indonesia. The Government must first ensure a stable and reliable supply from these two major suppliers of FDHs. We are also actively seeking other sources of FDHs, including Cambodia and other places. However, as Members will notice, the Philippines and Indonesia have remained the major sources of FDHs coming to Hong Kong over the years. Even though we have strived to make promotional and other efforts elsewhere, the people there are not as interested in coming to Hong Kong as the two places. However, the Government understands that faced with the problem of an ageing population, it seems that our demand for FDHs will only increase, and we will make continuous efforts to ensure a stable and reliable supply of FDHs.

Proposal of introducing a tax deduction for expenses on hiring foreign domestic helpers

Separately, a number of Members including Mr LEUNG Man-kwong, Mr YANG Wing-kit and Ms Nixie LAM mentioned in the debate the proposal of introducing a tax deduction for expenses on hiring FDHs. I understand that some Members have also submitted their proposals to the Financial Secretary. When considering whether to introduce a recurrent tax measure such as a tax deduction, the Government must carefully examine the impact of the proposal on public finance and whether the proposal is consistent with the principles of simplicity and fairness of the tax system, and strive to strike a balance between reducing the tax burden on taxpayers and maintaining stability in public finance. In addition, if

the proposal is about introducing a tax deduction for expenses on hiring FDHs in particular, the Government needs to examine very carefully the policy and administrative aspects of the proposal, such as how to deal with the situation of local domestic helpers and whether the implementation of the proposal will create administrative complexity.

Conclusion

President, the Government will continue to improve the policies on FDHs and protect the interests of FDHs and the employers through inspection, law enforcement, education and publicity, with the aim of promoting harmonious employment relations and enabling Hong Kong to remain as an attractive place for FDHs to work. The Government will review the arrangements relating to FDHs in a timely manner on the premise of striking a reasonable balance between the interests of employers and employees, and will also take into full consideration the views of various stakeholders.

President, I so submit.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now call upon Ir LEE Chun-keung to move an amendment.

IR LEE CHUN-KEUNG (in Cantonese): President, I move my amendment.

The amendment moved by Ir LEE Chun-keung (See the marked-up version at Appendix 3)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the amendment moved by Ir LEE Chun-keung be passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you as stated. Will those in favour please raise their hands?

(Members raised their hands)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Those against please raise their hands.

(No hands raised)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I think the question is agreed by a majority of each of the two groups of Members present, that is, those returned by the Election Committee and those returned by functional constituencies and geographical constituencies.

I declare the amendment passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Ms Judy CHAN, as Ir LEE Chun-keung's amendment has been passed, you may move your further amendment.

MS JUDY CHAN (in Cantonese): President, I move my further amendment.

The further amendment moved by Ms Judy CHAN (See the marked-up version at Appendix 4)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the further amendment moved by Ms Judy CHAN be passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you as stated. Will those in favour please raise their hands?

(Members raised their hands)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Those against please raise their hands.

(No hands raised)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I think the question is agreed by a majority of each of the two groups of Members present, that is, those returned by the Election Committee and those returned by functional constituencies and geographical constituencies.

I declare the amendment passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Dr NGAN Man-yu, you still have 2 minutes 16 seconds to reply. Then, the debate will come to a close.

DR NGAN MAN-YU (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. I would like to thank the Members who have spoken. Although the Secretary's response is quite disappointing to me, Members have illustrated various bizarre problems faced by families employing foreign domestic helpers ("FDHs") with real-life examples in their speeches.

The analysis of a survey on FDHs published by the Hong Kong Baptist University in 2021 shows that the demand for FDHs by married couples in Hong Kong has continued to rise over the past 40 years. Married couples are hiring FDHs for longer and longer periods of time, and simply put, they are becoming increasingly dependent on them, and FDHs are becoming a necessity. More interestingly, employment of FDHs is associated with fertility rate. According to the survey, couples with one child who have employed FDHs have a 43.3% chance of being willing to have a second child, which is higher than the rate of 29.9% for families which have not employed FDHs.

I hope the Government will not simply consider this issue as a matter of policies on FDHs, but also handle it from various perspectives such as population policies to encourage childbirth, labour policies to unleash the potential of our workforce, and welfare policies to facilitate the caring of the elderly and children. Policies on FDHs are important public policies in Hong Kong, and making improvements to them will not only protect the interests of the employers, but also those of FDHs and the agencies.

Thank you, President.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you and that is: That the motion moved by Dr NGAN Man-yu, as amended by Ir LEE Chun-keung and Ms Judy CHAN, be passed. Will those in favour please raise their hands?

(Members raised their hands)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Those against please raise their hands.

(No hands raised)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I think the question is agreed by a majority of each of the two groups of Members present, that is, those returned by the Election Committee and those returned by functional constituencies and geographical constituencies.

I declare the motion as amended passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Member's motion with no legislative effect.

Prof LAU Chi-pang will move a motion on "Making Chinese History a compulsory subject at senior secondary level".

Revd Canon Peter Douglas KOON will move an amendment to the motion.

This Council will proceed to a joint debate on the motion and the amendment.

Later, I will first call upon Prof LAU Chi-pang to speak and move the motion. Then I will call upon Revd Canon Peter Douglas KOON to speak, but he may not move the amendment at this stage.

The joint debate now begins. Members who wish to speak please press the "Request to speak" button.

I now call upon Prof LAU Chi-pang to speak and move the motion.

MOTION ON “MAKING CHINESE HISTORY A COMPULSORY SUBJECT AT SENIOR SECONDARY LEVEL”

PROF LAU CHI-PANG (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. In Hong Kong, the new academic structure for secondary education has been implemented since 2009, under which Chinese History has become an elective subject in the senior secondary curriculum. Yet, only around 10% of senior secondary students have taken Chinese History over the years. In other words, 90% of senior secondary students have studied Chinese History for only three years at the junior secondary level during their 12 years of basic education. This is obviously not conducive to achieving the learning outcomes of national education. In this connection, I move that a compulsory subject of Chinese History, Geography and Culture be introduced to the senior secondary curriculum to enhance and strengthen national education in secondary schools on the whole.

Chinese History, Geography and Culture would enable students to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the history of our country and understand the inseparable relationship between us and the country, develop their sense of identity with the nation, the Chinese race and our society, and help them respect, appreciate and inherit the Chinese culture. This subject, coupled with senior secondary Citizenship and Social Development (“CS”), which has been implemented since the new school year, would help students understand Hong Kong, the country and the contemporary world from multiple perspectives and become informed and responsible citizens with a sense of belonging to the country and a global perspective.

In the 2022 Policy Address, the Chief Executive has proposed initiatives relating to national education, including the adoption of a multi-pronged and coordinated approach in schools to promote national education within and beyond the classroom, so as to strengthen students’ sense of national identity and national pride. Regarding the support for teaching and learning, the Government will, among other things, encourage schools to regularly review the primary and junior secondary school curricula and enrich them with learning elements such as the history and geography of our country.

This aspiration is also conveyed in the current Senior Secondary Chinese History Curriculum and Assessment Guide, which states that our national history provides important teaching materials for national education and the learning of

Chinese history can enhance students' sense of identity with our country and our people.

The aims of the compulsory Chinese History curriculum for Secondary One to Secondary Three are to enable students to learn about important historical periods of China, deeds of significant historical figures in China, the development of the Chinese race as well as Chinese society and culture, gain, understand and analyse relevant historical information, acquire the ability to study history and develop an interest in learning history, thereby enhancing their sense of identity, belonging and responsibility towards the nation, the Chinese race and our society. In recent years, the implementation of compulsory Chinese history education at the junior secondary level has indeed been able to foster junior secondary students' interest in learning Chinese history. On this basis, I believe if senior secondary students continue to better understand our national history, as well as Chinese geography and Chinese culture, which are closely related to Chinese history, the learning outcomes of national education in their junior secondary years will definitely be further consolidated, and senior secondary students will stay motivated to continue to explore Chinese history, geography and culture throughout their lives.

President, Confucius said: "Is it not pleasant to learn with a constant perseverance and application?" This means continuous and regular learning gives one joy. If senior secondary students study Chinese history, geography and culture continuously and regularly, they will definitely find pleasure during the learning process.

As to whether there would be overlap or even conflict between the curriculum of senior secondary CS and that of the suggested Chinese History, Geography and Culture, I can tell from my years of experience of working on the CS subject and the Chinese History subject that not only would there be no overlap or conflict between the two curricula, but they would be interconnected. The former mainly focuses on Hong Kong, China and the world in contemporary times, while the latter precisely provides a historical and cultural perspective on the background and their development. By studying the two subjects in parallel, students can attain the intended learning outcomes more easily.

I know that the Education Bureau ("EDB") has an established mechanism in place for curriculum changes, and it is impossible to introduce this new subject overnight. However, all sectors of society should make concerted efforts to promote the positive development of young people through national education.

As the saying goes, “a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step”. I suggest that EDB join forces with representatives from the school and education sectors, parents, students and members of the community to study the feasibility of introducing the new subject, examine various details such as learning content, teaching methods, teacher training, learning outcomes, time allocation and other implementation details, establish a consultation mechanism, and formulate plans for pilot implementation, with a view to ensuring that the new subject will be implemented smoothly and will effectively help young people develop a sense of belonging to our country, an affection for the Chinese people and a sense of national identity.

In terms of timing, the latest changes to the senior secondary curriculum happen to create the conditions for introducing this new subject. Of the 15% of lesson time released from the optimization of the four senior secondary core subjects in the 2021-2022 school year, an appropriate proportion (say, one to two lessons per week) can be allocated to the new subject. This would have double benefits, that is, achieving the objective of providing national education continuously while not compromising schools’ flexibility in resource deployment.

Some fellow members of the education sector have relayed to me that the existing elective subject of Chinese History need not be replaced by the new subject, when implemented, in order to ensure that students interested in studying Chinese History in greater depth may choose to engage in specialized study to prepare themselves to major in Chinese History at university. I fully agree with this view. Compulsory subjects such as moral education, physical education and arts are implemented in primary and secondary education for balanced learning, and while less lesson time is allocated to these subjects each week, general knowledge is promoted through them. The new subject can be modelled on them in nature. The senior secondary Chinese History, Geography and Culture can be categorized as a subject that imparts general knowledge, and one or two lessons may be allocated each week to mainly broaden students’ horizons and increase their knowledge so that those who do not take Chinese History as an elective can also learn more about our country’s development in class.

Moreover, there are views that introducing a new compulsory subject will increase students’ study stress. Having considered this issue, I have suggested in my motion that a grading system of “attained” or “unattained” be adopted for Chinese History, Geography and Culture to alleviate students’ examination stress. I think the team to be entrusted with the task of developing the new subject will

definitely come up with a satisfactory proposal on the appropriate method for evaluating students' learning progress and outcomes in the new subject.

President, in order to promote national education in a more comprehensive and effective manner and implement measures relating to national education as set out in the Policy Address, I urge EDB to rename Chinese History in the senior secondary curriculum as Chinese History, Geography and Culture, and make it a senior secondary compulsory subject. Through an integrated study of Chinese history, Chinese geography and Chinese culture, as well as a stress-free grading system, senior secondary students would be able to gain a deeper understanding of the past of our country from historical, geographical and cultural perspectives during this critical stage of their growth. As a result, they would acquire more in-depth knowledge and understanding of the history of our country, which would in turn cultivate in them the right attitude and perception towards the past and present of the country.

President, with these remarks, I move that the motion, as printed on the Agenda, be passed. Thank you.

Prof LAU Chi-pang moved the following motion: (Translation)

“That in order to cultivate in secondary school students a sense of belonging to our country, an affection for the Chinese people and a sense of national identity, and enable them to have a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the development process of the country, this Council urges the authorities to, against the backdrop of optimizing the four senior secondary core subjects to release lesson time, rename Chinese History, which is currently a senior secondary elective subject, as Chinese History, Geography and Culture and make it a compulsory subject, so that secondary school students can understand and explore the development and various facets of Chinese history and examine the inter-relationships between culture, geography and history, thereby gaining an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the country, which will in turn cultivate in them the right attitude and perception towards the past and present of the country; this Council also proposes that the authorities should adopt a grading system of ‘attained’ or ‘unattained’ for the subject in question to ensure that the learning process and outcomes of the curriculum will meet its learning goals.”

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the motion moved by Prof LAU Chi-pang be passed.

REVD CANON PETER DOUGLAS KOON (in Cantonese): President, first of all, I thank Prof LAU Chi-Pang for proposing a motion relating to Chinese history. I believe every Chinese present here will never object to learning Chinese history. There exists a consensus in our society on deepening young people's understanding of history and cultivating in them a sense of belonging to our country and national identity. The only issue we may disagree on and need to discuss today is the best way to guide students to study Chinese history. We should not only approach this matter rationally, but also focus on how the relevant plans can be executed in a practicable manner, with a view to dealing with the matter pragmatically and fostering students' interest in Chinese history.

Of course, the simplest way is probably making Chinese History a compulsory subject at the senior secondary level, but is it the best way? At present, learning elements of Chinese history, geography and culture have been incorporated into the curricula from kindergarten to secondary levels. What is more, the revised junior secondary Chinese History curriculum has been implemented since the 2020-2021 school year, and elements of Chinese history have been incorporated into various subjects in the senior secondary curriculum. Students are able to acquire China-related knowledge from quite a number of subjects, in addition to Chinese History. For example, the teaching of classical Chinese texts in the Chinese Language subject helps nurture students' cultural literacy and moral character.

President, I agree with the objective of the suggestions in the original motion. Nevertheless, the suggestion of making the subject compulsory would give rise to a few problems. Firstly, the content of the new subject would very likely overlap with the content currently scattered across Chinese History, Geography, Chinese Language, and Citizenship and Social Development. Moreover, this would set off a chain reaction, rendering it necessary to revise the content of the relevant subjects. Not only would the curriculum structure be affected, but the effectiveness of learning and teaching of the various subjects would also be undermined.

Secondly, the past experience of preparing for the curricula of the core subjects under the new academic structure for senior secondary education shows that if a new subject were to be introduced now, it would definitely be necessary to

make changes to some systems and address issues relating to supporting resources. An issue right off the bat is whether there are sufficient teachers for the implementation of specialized teaching. Besides, it takes time to ascertain the effectiveness of the optimized senior secondary curriculum, which is being implemented. If a hasty decision is made to introduce a new subject now, I am afraid it will backfire and worsen the situation.

Thirdly, students' life experiences should form the basis of history education. If their motivation and interest in learning are aroused, they will be able to connect the knowledge they acquire in the classroom with the history around them. As our society now hopes to tell the world the good stories of China, the curriculum should focus on the interaction between China and the world, so that students can identify with this cause and feel involved and committed. To enhance students' interest in learning Chinese history, the teaching of it should not be limited to the classroom or an individual subject. Rather, a lively, interesting and holistic approach should be adopted to achieve diversity. For example, students may be arranged to visit the Hong Kong Palace Museum, where they may learn from the exhibits and guided tours. Moreover, schools may work with innovation and technology enterprises to develop VR (virtual reality) games to let students experience the three major battles in the Three Kingdoms period, thereby enhancing their understanding of Chinese history as well as cultural identity.

The last thing I wish to share with Members is that as a priest, I often encourage people to read the Bible more often to find out the meaning of the various stories therein. We need to digest them and apply the teachings to our daily lives. That way, we hear the Word, believe in the Word and carry out the Word. If we merely learn the Bible by rote, even if we memorize the whole Bible, it does not mean we know Jesus and the meaning of the Bible is actually lost. The same is also true for Chinese history. I hope students will fully understand the lessons of Chinese history and, most importantly, be able to apply what they have learned. Therefore, I hope every Member will support my amendment.

President, I so submit.

SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION (in Cantonese): President, I thank Prof LAU Chi-pang and Revd Canon Peter Douglas KOON for proposing the motion and the amendment respectively and expressing their concern and valuable views on Chinese history education in secondary schools.

Like the two Members, the Government attaches great importance to cultivating in students a sense of belonging to our country, an affection for the Chinese people and a sense of national identity. National education is a key area of the Government's work. In recent years, the Education Bureau ("EDB") has been strengthening national education by making every effort to promote education on Chinese history, our country's development, Chinese culture, Chinese geography, the Constitution and the Basic Law as well as national security, so that young people can gain a more comprehensive and deeper understanding of the history and latest development of the country and learn more about its past and present and various facets.

At present, Chinese history, geography and culture are indispensable parts of the school curriculum, and learning elements and experiences relating to them have been incorporated into the kindergarten, primary and secondary education curricula in Hong Kong. For example, in the learning area of "Self and Society" in kindergarten education, students will have a basic understanding of Chinese culture and their national identity. In the Primary Education Curriculum Guide (Pilot Version) released in 2022, it is clearly stated that schools should enhance students' sense of belonging to our country from an early age, and help them understand the latest development and conditions of our country, develop a correct understanding of Chinese history, and appreciate Chinese culture and traditional values, with a view to cultivating in them a sense of national identity as well as enhancing their national pride and sense of being the masters. The Secondary Education Curriculum Guide released in 2017 indicates at the outset that "reinforcing the learning of Chinese history and Chinese culture" is a major renewed emphasis of the curriculum. At present, both the junior and senior secondary Chinese History curricula place an emphasis on enhancing students' understanding of significant historical events in various periods as well as the social and cultural aspects of Chinese history, and enhancing their ability to study history as well as their sense of identity, belonging and responsibility towards the nation, the Chinese race and our society.

Furthermore, to enable students to study Chinese History in a systematic manner, EDB has made Chinese History an independent compulsory subject at the junior secondary level since the 2018-2019 school year, and implemented the new curriculum progressively starting from Secondary One in the 2020-2021 school year. This ensures that all students in Hong Kong are given an opportunity during their junior secondary years to learn Chinese history in a holistic manner, including

the modern history of China and the development history of the Communist Party of China (“CPC”). At the moment, EDB is focusing its efforts on the implementation of the curriculum and the relevant support work to enhance the effectiveness of learning and teaching, with a view to laying a foundation for students to develop an interest and ability to study Chinese History as an elective at the senior secondary level.

Prof LAU has suggested renaming Chinese History as Chinese History, Geography and Culture, and making it compulsory for senior secondary students to study this subject and take an examination, with results to be reported as “attained” or “unattained”. EDB has reservations about these suggestions for the following main reasons:

Firstly, the suggested changes would inevitably compress the learning of senior secondary Chinese History and make the subject easier, which would not be conducive to meeting the objective of the motion. The senior secondary curriculum of the elective subject Chinese History comprises “historical development through the ages”, which is a compulsory part, and “special topics in Chinese history”. They help students broaden their horizons, gain an in-depth understanding of various facets of Chinese history and grasp the development of the history, geography, society and culture of the motherland as well as the inter-relationships between them. Senior secondary Chinese History plays a vital role in nurturing history professionals. The motion obviously undermines the current functions of senior secondary Chinese History. Abolishing the elective subject of Chinese History would, in effect, deprive students of the chance to take the subject, and undermine articulation to history education, especially Chinese history education, at the university level. In order to attract more students to take Chinese History, we should work on the teaching approaches and optimization of the subject, rather than making it a compulsory examination subject in a broad-brush manner.

Secondly, in order to meet the objective of the motion, i.e. cultivating in students a sense of belonging to our country, we cannot merely rely on the Chinese History subject, and making it a compulsory examination subject at the senior secondary level may not be effective in enhancing students’ affection for the Chinese people and sense of national identity. On the contrary, their interest and ability to learn Chinese history can be enhanced through relevant learning experiences and diversified activities in different subjects and key learning areas.

For example, in General Studies for primary schools, the strand “National Identity and Chinese Culture” covers major features in Chinese culture, the geographical location, physical characteristics and territory of China, and important dynasties and significant historical figures and events in Chinese history. As for Chinese Language education, its main objective is to enable students to identify with Chinese culture. The newly added classical set texts are a combination of Chinese literature and culture which fosters moral and affective development and preserves Chinese virtues. A multi-pronged approach is more effective in strengthening students’ cultural confidence and nurturing national and cultural identity in them.

Thirdly, if a new compulsory subject of Chinese History, Geography and Culture were to be introduced to the senior secondary curriculum, there would be overlap among the curricula of various senior secondary subjects, and the learning burden on students would be exacerbated. At present, the History subject also contains elements of Chinese history and geography. For example, the junior secondary curriculum covers the Huanghe Valley, enabling students to learn about the characteristics of Chinese ancient civilization. The senior secondary History curriculum includes the happenings in 20th century Chinese history, such as the 1911 Revolution, the May Fourth Movement, the communist revolution and socialist modernization after the founding of New China. The junior and senior secondary Geography curricula cover quite a number of topics related to the natural and human environments of China, such as climatic processes, population movements, natural resources and agricultural and industrial development. Moreover, students are exposed to Chinese arts, culture and sports through diversified activities under the key learning areas of arts education and physical education, and get to know and appreciate the meaning and value of Chinese culture and customs from multiple perspectives.

In addition, Citizenship and Social Development (“CS”), a senior secondary compulsory subject which has been implemented since the 2021-2022 school year, covers themes like “Hong Kong under ‘One Country, Two Systems’” and “Our Country since Reform and Opening-up” to help students gain an in-depth and detailed understanding of the meaning of “one country, two systems”, the development history and process of CPC, and its contributions to the development of modern China. The Mainland study tour and project learning in CS enable all senior secondary students to gain a first-hand understanding of our country, and its urban landscape and latest development. This shows that students learn about the history, geography and culture of our country from an early age through various subjects and life-wide learning, thereby getting to know the past and present of the

motherland from multiple perspectives. This kind of learning is more lively, interesting, multi-dimensional and comprehensive, as opposed to making Chinese History, Geography and Culture a compulsory subject at the senior secondary level.

Fourthly, if a fifth compulsory core subject were introduced now, the overall structure of the senior secondary curriculum and students' whole-person development would be affected. We encourage schools to endeavour to offer senior secondary students a wider choice of subjects and learning activities with a view to catering for learner diversity and broadening students' knowledge. This enables students to develop different skills and unleash their potential, thus laying a solid foundation for further studies and career pursuits. We have also accepted the recommendations of the Task Force on Review of School Curriculum, and optimized the four senior secondary core subjects (i.e. Chinese Language, English Language, Mathematics, and CS in lieu of Liberal Studies), with a view to creating space and providing multiple pathways for students. Students may, according to their aspirations, interests, abilities, etc., consider taking an additional elective subject and participating more in Other Learning Experiences.

The measures to optimize the senior secondary curriculum came into effect from Secondary Four in the 2021-2022 school year and have been gradually extended to Secondary Five and Secondary Six in the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 school years respectively. Preliminary data show that upon the implementation of the optimizing measures, more students have taken an additional elective subject, including science subjects, technology-related subjects and Applied Learning subjects, about which there have been general concerns in the community and the relevant sectors. This reflects the positive impact of the optimizing measures. We are collecting information and data through various channels to understand how schools utilize the released lesson time to enrich students' learning experiences and foster their whole-person development. Therefore, it is not appropriate to make significant changes to the overall structure of the senior secondary curriculum and the assessment of certain subjects at this juncture so as not to affect the implementation and effectiveness of the optimizing measures.

As a matter of fact, having comprehensive and real-life learning experiences within and outside the classroom can better enable students to be keenly aware of the trends in both China and the world, enhance their sense of being the masters, and nurture a sense of belonging to the country, national pride and national identity. EDB has been adopting the approaches of “organic integration”, “natural connection”, “diversified strategies”, “mutual coordination”, “learning within and

beyond the classroom”, and “whole-school participation” to enhance students’ learning experiences in Chinese history, geography and culture in a systematic manner. Furthermore, the above learning elements and experiences have been integrated and subsumed into various key learning areas and life-wide learning activities, and are thus not confined to the classroom or any individual subject.

EDB collaborates with schools, academic organizations and community organizations to organize various kinds of activities and competitions for students. They include the Constitution and Basic Law Territory-wide Inter-school Competition, the Constitution and Basic Law Student Ambassadors Training Scheme, Take a Spark, Pass it on: The Territory-wide Primary Schools Quiz Competition on Chinese History and Culture, and the Chinese Classic Sayings campaign. EDB also makes good use of information technology to develop various kinds of online learning and teaching resources and activities, such as an online self-learning platform to promote Chinese classic sayings and Hong Kong’s Intangible Cultural Heritage Online Carnival, enabling students to extend classroom learning and gain exposure to Chinese history, geography and culture anytime and anywhere. Besides, EDB has compiled the “National Education—Event Planning Calendar”. Schools are advised to connect the present and the past by integrating major historical events into school life, thus planning learning activities within and outside the classroom in a systematic manner, with a view to enhancing students’ learning effectiveness.

In addition, EDB has implemented the Students Mainland Exchange Programme and the Sister School Scheme to provide life-wide learning experiences for students, enabling them to learn about various aspects of the country’s development from multiple perspectives through personal experience as well as exchanges and interaction. With the full resumption of normal travel between Hong Kong and the Mainland, EDB will arrange senior secondary students to participate in CS Mainland study tours from April this year, and resume Mainland exchange programmes for primary and secondary students in a progressive and orderly manner. At that time, the on-site learning opportunities in the Mainland will allow primary and secondary students in Hong Kong to see for themselves the thriving development and extraordinary achievements of our country in recent years, thereby gaining a deeper understanding of the development process of our country.

President, Chinese History has all along been an elective subject which all senior secondary students may choose to take according to their interest and

abilities. Moreover, senior secondary compulsory subjects, including Chinese Language and CS, contain elements of Chinese history, geography and culture. Schools can make use of the flexibility allowed under the existing school-based management framework to strengthen the elements of Chinese history, geography and culture with due regard to their own context and students' abilities. Adding a compulsory examination subject to the senior secondary curriculum in a broad-brush manner would not only affect the overall structure of the curriculum and make the total lesson time of core subjects longer than before, but also reduce the chance for students to take an additional elective subject, participate in Other Learning Experiences and life-wide learning activities, and engage in other personal pursuits, which runs counter to the optimizing proposal's objective of creating space and nurturing diverse talents. As for the suggestions of adding a compulsory subject to the senior secondary curriculum so shortly after the optimization and replacing senior secondary Chinese History with Chinese History, Geography and Culture, there are diverse views in the education sector, and teachers, students and parents may not give their support. So, taking forward these suggestions hastily without adequate supporting measures may end up with unfavourable results.

Anyway, Chinese history education has always been "core learning experiences" for primary and secondary students. The education sector has been making concerted efforts towards the goal of enhancing senior secondary students' understanding of Chinese history, geography and culture. EDB will continue to work tirelessly to optimize the curriculum and activities. At the moment, taking into account the school curriculum framework, learning and teaching arrangements, choice of subjects and pathways for students, study stress, teacher training, the development of teaching materials and teaching support, etc., we have reservations about the suggestion of introducing an additional compulsory examination subject under the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination.

EDB is gradually implementing measures to optimize the senior secondary curriculum. In the future, it will continue to review and improve the curriculum in the light of students' learning and development needs. It will also follow the curriculum development mechanism of the Curriculum Development Council, and conduct in-depth discussions and make continuous improvement in a professional-led approach. At the same time, it will actively promote Chinese history education and national education to enrich the "core learning experiences"

of students so that they will gain a more comprehensive and deeper understanding of our country's history, geography and culture, thus helping our country and society nurture a new generation that loves the country and the city.

I so submit. Thank you, President.

MS LILLIAN KWOK (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. I am very grateful to Prof LAU Chi-pang and Revd Canon Peter Douglas KOON for proposing the original motion and the amendment respectively, giving us a chance to have a discussion at the Council meeting.

President, although 25 years have passed since Hong Kong's return to the motherland, Hong Kong people generally still have insufficient knowledge of Chinese history and a very weak sense of national identity. That is why during President XI Jinping's visit to Hong Kong last July, he highlighted the need to guide young people to be keenly aware of the trends in both our country and the world and enhance their national pride and sense of being the masters. Elsewhere, significant importance is attached to education on national history in many countries where universal education is implemented. In many overseas countries, even international students are required to study their national history and pass an examination in order to graduate. This shows that education on national history is really very important for a country. Therefore, I would like to express my support. In my view, it is imperative to strengthen Hong Kong students' learning of Chinese history and deepen their understanding of Chinese geography and culture, which will enable them to gain a comprehensive understanding of the development process of the country, and in turn enhance their sense of identity with the Chinese race and the nation.

In recent years, in order to enhance students' sense of identity with the nation and the Chinese race, the Government has introduced a series of education policy initiatives, especially making Chinese History a compulsory subject at the junior secondary level again. However, I still see much room for improvement in the curriculum. It is not only necessary to strengthen students' learning of China's contemporary history, modern history, geography and culture in secondary schools, but also require students to learn the history of the Communist Party of China ("CPC"), so that they can understand our national history after the founding of New China, as well as the country's various magnificent achievements since its reform and opening up. I believe that such a curriculum can enable students to better

understand the national affairs, adopt the national perspectives, and keep abreast of the development of the country.

On the other hand, the number of senior secondary students taking Chinese History as an elective has been on the low side over the years, with only about 10% of candidates sitting the examination in Chinese History in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination this year. This shows that nowadays, students are not very interested in taking Chinese History as an elective. Students will take an interest in Chinese history only if we can enhance their interest in learning. In order to enhance students' knowledge and interest in Chinese history, the Education Bureau ("EDB") has introduced a series of education policy initiatives, such as requiring students to gain first-hand experiences through Mainland exchange tours. Besides, schools are encouraged to design various kinds of activities to make it more fun for students to learn, such as making use of technology in a traditional teaching setting, exploring the "guochao culture" and organizing activities to promote Han clothing. In the course of education reform, EDB has, in particular, "trimmed down" the senior secondary curriculum earlier. The four senior secondary core subjects now take up 50% of the total lesson time, as opposed to 65% in the past. This measure aims to release more lesson time, allowing more room for students' development. Nevertheless, teachers still have a very heavy workload at present and insufficient time to teach. One cannot make bricks without straw. While knowledge in every discipline and education reform is very important, I think it is crucial to enhance students' understanding of Chinese history, geography and culture on all fronts, and help our country nurture talents who love the country and Hong Kong for the future development of Hong Kong.

President, in the report to the 20th National Congress of CPC, President XI Jinping has particularly mentioned that we should value talented people, nurture them, and put them to good use, and they must have both integrity and professional competence. Patriotism is precisely the right and essential attitude. Therefore, I strongly support enhancing and consolidating students' knowledge of the history, geography and culture of the motherland so that our next generation can preserve the culture and wisdom of the great Chinese nation. Only then will the whole country work together towards the goal of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

I so submit. Thank you, President.

MR CHAN KIN-POR (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. I am very grateful to Prof LAU Chi-pang for proposing the motion today, which suggests making Chinese History a compulsory subject at the senior secondary level and adding elements of Chinese geography and culture to the subject to cultivate in students a sense of belonging to our country, an affection for the Chinese people and a sense of national identity. I always think the best way to inculcate patriotism is to enable students to have a correct and adequate understanding of Chinese history. That is why I fully agree with Prof LAU's rationale. However, there are more practical issues to consider regarding the way to achieve the objective.

Currently, there are four senior secondary core subjects, among which Liberal Studies has been replaced by Citizenship and Social Development ("CS"). As a matter of fact, the CS curriculum comprises three major themes, namely "Hong Kong under 'One Country, Two Systems'", "Our Country since Reform and Opening-up" and "Interconnectedness and Interdependence of the Contemporary World", while the Mainland study tour of the subject is linked to the theme of "Chinese Culture and Modern Life". Their content in fact already includes knowledge about the modern history of China, and Chinese geography and culture. Therefore, there are views that the CS curriculum already contains elements which can enhance students' sense of belonging to our country and affection for the Chinese people, and if the content is not sufficient, it can be further enriched as appropriate. Given that CS is a new subject, if the objective of today's motion can be achieved by fine-tuning its curriculum, I believe the Government should consider it.

In addition, some members of the education sector have pointed out that given the tremendous pressure from the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education ("HKDSE") Examination, replacing Liberal Studies with CS has reduced the lesson time significantly from 250 hours to 150 hours and in turn considerably alleviated students' study and examination stress. This measure has been well received by the education sector, parents and students. If the lesson time freed up is spent on a new compulsory subject, students' study stress will not be relieved. Besides, schools are now focusing their efforts on CS. They strive to teach the subject properly, get prepared for the first HKDSE CS Examination, and arrange Mainland study tours for students. As schools cannot afford any mistakes in these tasks at all, they are already under massive pressure, so the concerns of the education sector are understandable.

President, I would like to say in particular that in order to cultivate in students a sense of belonging to our country and an affection for the Chinese people, the traditional method of rote learning should not be adopted for any subject whatsoever. Rather, multi-dimensional, flexible and heuristic approaches should be adopted. Teachers should give students care and guidance to arouse their interest in learning. As a matter of fact, the first step has already been taken in relation to CS, for which the grading system of “attained” and “unattained” has been adopted, thus greatly reducing examination stress. Besides, participation in Mainland study tours enables students to gain real-life knowledge outside the classroom. At present, the secondary subject Chinese History and the junior secondary subject Life and Society are rather traditional and academic subjects, requiring students to memorize a lot of information. This rather boring mode of learning is indeed not conducive to engaging students’ interest. In fact, these subjects cover many interesting matters. If schools adopt more soft, flexible and multi-dimensional teaching approaches to minimize rote learning and relieve examination stress, students’ interest will definitely be aroused. If students enjoy learning, they will easily learn what is taught, and naturally develop an affection for the country and the Chinese people from the bottom of their hearts.

Thank you, President.

MR DUNCAN CHIU (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. As a Chinese, I believe that no matter whether Chinese History is a compulsory subject, there is no doubt students should spend a certain amount of time on learning our national history at school. However, I would like to discuss the current teaching focuses and purpose of education. Apart from imparting basic knowledge, I believe the most important objective is to foster students’ interest in lifelong learning.

As we all understand, technology and our world are changing very rapidly nowadays. If we do not continue to study for a few years after leaving school, our knowledge may not be up to date. If we do not acquire new knowledge for a decade, we may be excluded by society. As we can see, what can be achieved with artificial intelligence today is vastly different from before. If we do not cultivate a lifelong learning attitude in our next generation, will they remain competitive?

Let me go back to the topic of Chinese history. I am very fond of learning history. Like many of my peers, I knew *Sanguo Yanyi* (*Romance of the Three*

Kingdoms) like the back of my hand in my junior secondary years. I believe I was one of the few who even finished *Zizhi Tongjian* (*Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government*) back then. While I have read many history books, it is probably the influence of my family or my father rather than the teaching approaches of my school teachers that made me interested in history or Chinese history.

Despite having read so many books about Chinese history, I might not get an A in Chinese History. Even though the school I went to is long-established and prestigious, some of our History teachers only asked us to read from textbooks in class and tested our memory of the textbooks in examinations. We could only rely on rote learning. Back then, we wondered why this was the way history was taught to us, who loved history so much. Did we study Chinese history just for getting good grades?

The Xia, Shang, Zhou, Qin, Han, Sui, Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties, the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, the Wei-Jin period, the Southern and Northern dynasties and the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period are full of fascinating historical stories as well as stories about many unique historical figures. However, these stories were not taught at school. Sometimes, we were probably just asked to study some chapters of the textbook, which is not a coherent learning approach. What were the examination questions? How long is the Great Wall? In which years did the Tang dynasty start and end? How many times did the Western Han empire relocate its capital? I believe even history buffs do not understand why students had to memorize such details.

A few decades have elapsed. Both of my children are now secondary students. I am very disappointed at the way Chinese History is taught and tested in their secondary schools, which is actually not much different from 30 years ago. Last year, they had to memorize the routes of Emperor Wu of Han's military campaigns for the examination. In fill-in-the-blank questions, they were asked with whom CHEN Sheng mounted a popular uprising against the Qin empire towards the end of the dynasty, and which city Emperor Wu of Han chose as the capital after ascending the throne. Basically speaking, after over 30 years, students still have to rely on their memory and rote learning to get through Chinese History examinations. Is this subject meant to arouse their interest in Chinese history or test their rote learning ability? Besides, as so many years have passed, everything students need to know can virtually be found on the Internet, and they can find many answers on the Internet within two seconds. While rote learning might be justified back in our school days, there need to be more compelling

reasons to convince me and my children why rote learning should be the approach for studying history nowadays.

Therefore, I absolutely support strengthening the learning of Chinese language and Chinese history. However, in this day and age, if no drastic change is introduced to the learning approach, textbooks and assessment of the Chinese History subject, even if it is made a compulsory subject, students may not become interested in learning Chinese history. Thus, I wish to say that regarding the Education Bureau's approaches to Chinese history education, while the Secretary has set out many just now, I can tell from the experience of my children, who are still secondary students, that no noticeable improvements have been made to the way Chinese History is taught and tested. I hope that beneficial changes will be introduced in the future to make it interesting to study Chinese history so that students will develop a greater sense of belonging to the country and become more interested in learning about the past of our country.

Thank you, President. I so submit.

DR CHOW MAN-KONG (in Cantonese): President, it is crucial to strengthen Chinese history education, thereby enhancing students' sense of identity and responsibility towards Hong Kong and China. Therefore, the intent of Prof LAU Chi-pang's original motion is worthy of support.

As I understand it, Members think many issues would arise from making Chinese History a compulsory subject at the senior secondary level. In fact, so long as all technical issues are properly addressed, it is actually not difficult to successfully include more elements of Chinese history in the senior secondary curriculum. Since the 2021-2022 school year, the Education Bureau ("EDB") has implemented measures to optimize the four senior secondary core subjects, with a view to releasing around 250 hours of lesson time to allow students to engage in in-depth study of each subject, and introducing the Citizenship and Social Development ("CS") subject to enable students to understand our country from a broad perspective. As we can see from this, it is not true that there is no room to incorporate more elements of Chinese culture, history and geography into the curricula of Chinese Language and CS at present.

EDB has made Chinese History an independent compulsory subject at the junior secondary level since 2018, and implemented a new curriculum framework

since 2020, with the aim of helping junior secondary students develop a comprehensive and holistic understanding of Chinese historical development. In particular, the curriculum subsumes elements of “Cultural Characteristics” and “Hong Kong Development” into different topics of Chinese historical periods to be taught. For example, teachers, through introducing women’s way of life in the Tang dynasty or the social and cultural development in the Republican period, provide students with political, cultural, and social perspectives on Chinese history, thereby broadening their horizons. Thus, Members need not worry that the learning of Chinese history is boring now, especially given that Prof LAU Chi-pang, as the subject committee chairman, has made considerable efforts on diversifying teaching strategies. Since students have already built a solid foundation for learning Chinese history in their junior secondary years, it is actually unreasonable to discontinue their learning at the senior secondary level. Even though it still takes time to deal with the preparatory work for introducing an independent subject as advocated in the motion, the Administration is well positioned to incorporate the relevant elements into the curricula of existing senior secondary compulsory subjects.

In the past, Chinese Language and Culture was a subject in the Hong Kong Advanced Level (A-Level) Examination. Students gained knowledge of Chinese culture through an in-depth study and examination of six thematic articles such as “Discussing Chinese Culture with Young People” (與青年談中國文化) by TANG Junyi as well as a book on general knowledge of Chinese culture. Such reading also stimulated their thinking and nurtured their moral character. As a matter of fact, EDB now attaches importance to enhancing students’ language competence through the Chinese Language subject, but it should not neglect cultural literacy, which has a significant bearing on language competence. Emphasis must be placed on both aspects to instil students with a comprehensive set of correct values and enhance their sense of responsibility towards Hong Kong and the country. Therefore, I suggest that the Administration should seriously consider strengthening the positioning of senior secondary Chinese Language, renaming it as Chinese Language and Culture, and increasing lesson time accordingly.

The opening of an announcement in the public interest on the national anthem produced by the Home and Youth Affairs Bureau runs like this: “The Mainland and Hong Kong are connected. Like the mountains and rivers, we belong together. I take pride in being Chinese.” These lines make me wonder how our students can experience the beauty of the amazing mountains and rivers in our country. Under the curriculum of CS, the examination result of which is

currently reported as “attained” or “unattained”, Mainland study tours are arranged for students to gain a first-hand understanding of the country’s current development and the lives of the people in the Mainland. The Administration should seize the opportunity of the resumption of normalcy to arrange longer study tours (for example, three to five days or five to seven days) and include visits to world heritage sites such as Tai Shan, Lu Shan and Wuyishan so that students can experience the conservation and inheritance of Chinese culture in society. This would be different from those existing whirlwind tours or half-day Guangzhou tours which are cursorily done just to meet the requirement of the curriculum guide. Moreover, there is quite a lot of room to incorporate elements of Chinese history into the CS curriculum. Thus, the Administration should explore ways to add more elements of geography.

In this last minute, I must stress that it is a heavy responsibility to implement national education and national security education, especially in the context of the History subject. We cannot afford to have succession problems or sleight of hand under the present education system. In particular, I wish to alert Members to the fact that more and more public or private universities are seeking higher global rankings, especially by blindly pursuing internationalization. Many Chinese History courses and even studies are conducted in English. For example, some professors have relayed to me that they are required to prepare their research proposals on the An Lushan Rebellion in English. How can national sentiments be nurtured under such circumstances? Worse still, teaching effectiveness is severely compromised. I very much hope that EDB and the University Grants Committee will take action immediately to put things right and stop such questionable practice of the institutions concerned, which can be likened to putting the cart before the horse.

President, I so submit.

MR SUNNY TAN (in Cantonese): President, using history as a mirror allows one to see the future trends. President XI Jinping often stressed that “history is the best textbook and the best dose of sobriety”. I agree that secondary school students should cultivate a sense of belonging to our country, an affection for the Chinese people and a sense of national identity through studying Chinese history.

The serious lack of Chinese history education in Hong Kong over the past few decades has caused students to have a weak sense of belonging to our country.

I believe that we must start with education and emphasize both the past and the present, so that students can have a comprehensive understanding of the history of our country, Chinese classics and the national affairs, and understand its current system, constitution and development, particularly the historical background leading to the founding of “new China”.

As President XI said, “Without the Communist Party of China, there would be no new China and no national rejuvenation. The Party was chosen to lead by history and the people.” The Chinese nation faced unprecedented hardships after the Opium War. During the difficult period, under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, national independence was achieved, the basic institutional framework of new China was established, and great achievements of reform, opening up and socialist modernization were attained, and the country became prosperous and powerful, and the living standards in China were raised from bare subsistence to a basic level of moderate prosperity. Only when we better understand this context of national development and the past, present and future of the country will we understand that the more firmly the “one country” principle is upheld, the more clearly visible are the strengths of “two systems”. We will thereby consciously respect and safeguard the fundamental system of the country, and cherish the hard-earned development.

On this basis, I agree with Revd Canon Peter Douglas KOON’s proposal in his amendment to include Chinese history as “essential learning experiences” throughout the entire secondary education. The studying of history must be consistent, so I believe that it should be taught according to students’ ability in primary schools and continued to be taught at the junior secondary level, so that students will have the opportunity to study Chinese history, geography and culture in a comprehensive manner.

Having said that, it is arguable whether Chinese History should be made a compulsory subject at the senior secondary level. First, results of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (DSE) Examination have a significant impact on students’ further education opportunities and prospects. There are already four compulsory subjects at the senior secondary level, namely Chinese Language, English Language, Mathematics, Citizenship and Social Development. If Chinese History is made the fifth compulsory subject, it will definitely affect the class schedule and increase the pressure on students. Second, if a grading system of “attained” or “unattained” is adopted for the Chinese History compulsory subject, arts students who wish to take Chinese History as an elective will lose the

chance to attain “5**” in this subject. Meanwhile, science students who are afraid of rote memorization will encounter difficulties.

In fact, Chinese History is already a compulsory subject at the junior secondary level. It covers China’s important historical events, historical figures and their deeds, an overview of national development as well as social and cultural features. If the Chinese History curriculum at the primary to junior secondary level can be enhanced to cover all the relevant contents, then it is not necessary to make it a compulsory subject at the senior secondary level. In our motherland, for example, History is a compulsory subject at the junior secondary level but it is not a compulsory subject in the national college entrance examination. In Singapore, History is a compulsory subject only at the junior secondary level.

Students should not only learn history from textbooks. As the saying goes, “it is better to travel ten thousand miles than to read ten thousand books”. Instead of staying in the classroom, students should have outing experience in place of assessments to strengthen their interest in Chinese history. I suggest that we may refer to the practice of the Citizenship and Social Development subject and organize exchange tours to the Mainland, so that students may personally experience the culture and development of our country. Moreover, schools may arrange field trips to places such as the Hong Kong Palace Museum and the Xiqu Centre in the West Kowloon Cultural District for on-the-spot visit, studying and learning, with the aid of exhibits and guided tours, to enhance students’ understanding of and identification with the history and culture of our country.

Education can definitely cultivate in students a sense of belonging to our country, an affection for the Chinese people and a sense of national identity. I hope that all sectors of the community can work together to nurture the sense of national identity of the next generation, so that they will be proud of being “Hongkongers in China”.

I so submit.

MR DENNIS LEUNG (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. President, the Member’s motion today is not intended to have legislative effect but it arouses extensive discussions. If it is passed, does it mean that all senior secondary school students in the future will have to take Chinese History in order to enter university? If so, when will this be implemented? Will students and parents be worried?

How will school principals and teachers respond? How many resources must the Education Bureau deploy to accomplish this huge task? As a frontline teacher from the education sector, I would like to express my opinions.

At present, many students are worried that their results in the four core subjects may not meet university admission requirements. So, they choose to take other examinations and make a detour before entering local universities. If Chinese History is made a compulsory subject, will wastage of students be aggravated, thus affecting the staffing arrangement of school teachers? This is also one of our concerns. If that is the case, will it stir up students' resentment towards the subject of Chinese History?

Second, if it is said that issues such as patriotic education, the cultivation of a sense of belonging to our country, an affection for the Chinese people and a sense of national identity, and even comprehensive understanding of the development process of our country can be properly resolved through making Chinese History a core subject at the senior secondary level, I believe that it is not a scientific way to handle and resolve these issues. Handling these issues this way is too simplistic and hasty.

In fact, I have always been concerned about the development of innovation and technology in Hong Kong and I have been asking the Education Bureau to pay attention to science education at the primary level, making science an independent subject rather than part of the subject of General Studies, and deploy manpower and teaching resources to properly handle science education in Hong Kong. That being the case, should I propose another motion to make Computer Literacy and Science compulsory subjects in order to address this issue? I believe that this should definitely not be done as teaching methods and learning experiences are more important.

The subject of Liberal Studies ("LS") was replaced by the subject of Citizenship and Social Development ("CS") last school year. This is only the second school year since then and school teachers and principals are working hard to develop this subject in the hope of achieving the desired learning outcomes. The contents of the subject covers "one country, two systems" and the reform and opening up of our country, and also Mainland study tours. A lot of work is required to rationalize the overlapped contents of the subjects of CS and Chinese History, and things cannot be done overnight.

Curriculum development is a professional matter. Students have different abilities and interests and not everyone likes Chinese history. Elective subjects give students choices and nurture students with various abilities so that they can contribute to society. If Chinese History is made a compulsory subject simply because not many students are taking it, we do not have in-depth understanding of Chinese History per se. Chinese History involves memorization and recitation of a lot of information, which is why fewer students are taking this subject.

Fifth, if Chinese History is made a compulsory subject or included as “essential learning experiences” as stated in the amendment, it is questionable whether there are enough Chinese history teachers in Hong Kong. I recall that when LS was introduced, many teachers had to switch from teaching other subjects to teaching LS, to solve the shortage of teachers. The quality of teaching must be ensured. The effectiveness of teaching in Hong Kong schools is among the highest in the world mainly because we adopt specialized teaching. I am worried about the effectiveness of introducing the subject of Chinese History, Geography and Culture if there are insufficient teachers who studied Chinese history in Hong Kong.

Sixth, when LS was first introduced, secondary schools jumped the gun to teach LS at the junior secondary level in order to enhance their performance in LS, which seriously undermined the learning space and opportunities for students. I am worried that the same situation will repeat in Chinese History.

Seventh, the original motion proposed to rename Chinese History as Chinese History, Geography and Culture, which integrates Chinese geography and culture and covers more contents than the original syllabus of Chinese History. Can all the contents be covered within the limited lesson time? This is also a question. Last year, students also took this subject, but the contents were so extensive that not every student could handle it. When the CS subject was introduced last year, the lesson time of the three other core subjects were adjusted to release some time for it. Many students now choose three electives instead of two. If Chinese History is made a compulsory subject, lesson time will have to be re-scheduled and the regular development of schools will be continuously affected.

President, education demands a stable environment. It is fine to make timely improvements and fine-tuning but if the curriculum is to be drastically revised and a certain subject is made a compulsory subject, in-depth and extensive

consultations and professional studies must be conducted so as to do a good job and achieve our desired objective.

President, I so submit.

MR KENNETH LAU (in Cantonese): President, I speak in support of the proposal in the original motion to make Chinese History a compulsory subject, instead of an elective, at the senior secondary level, so as to enable students to have a deep understanding of the historical development, changes, as well as national and cultural background of our country. Based on the principle of placing equal emphasis on ancient and contemporary periods, we should also strengthen the teaching of the development history of the Communist Party of China, the process of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, as well as the Party's contributions to the development of modern China, thereby enhancing students' pride and sense of belonging towards the nation, and reinforcing the younger generation's affection for the country, so as to pass on the patriotic spirit of the Chinese nation and realize President XI Jinping's remarks in his important address made on 1 July that advocates "carry[ing] on the mainstream values, which are characterized by the love of both the motherland and Hong Kong as the core and are in conformity with the principle of 'one country, two systems'".

If you wish to know the Great Way, you must first know history. The significance of history lies in its role as a guide. By drawing historical lessons from the experiences of our predecessors, we are enlightened to create the future with wisdom of sizing up the situation. In this way, learning from the past enables us to understand the present. I attach great importance to education on history and national affairs because Hong Kong cannot afford another ravage by "black-clad violence". I was very disheartened to see that thousands of young people, due to their lack of understanding of the country and national affairs, were easily incited by external forces and distorted history. Some of them are left hanging in the balance after being arrested for attempted subversion of state power. As we have already lost some young people, we must avoid repeating the same mistake and bring things back to order by making Chinese History a compulsory subject at the senior secondary level to guide students in understanding clearly the historic roles of contemporary China and Hong Kong as well as their positions in the international political system, so that they will realize that the more firmly the "one country" principle is upheld, the greater strength the "two systems" will be unleashed.

China has a long history spanning thousands of years. However, due to limited lesson time, ancient history has not been given much attention. Meanwhile, the curriculum of modern history has all along been criticized for being too fragmented for students to grasp the evolution of history. I agree with Prof LAU's advocacy for adopting an enquiry approach in learning which, instead of focusing on rote memorization, allows students to explore the cause and effect of historical events through project-based learning in the spirit of truth-seeking, understand the development and facets of history in a holistic manner and broaden their historical horizon. I believe that senior secondary students, being capable of thoroughly mastering knowledge and distinguishing right from wrong, can grasp and reflect on the meaning of history in depth. Hence, it is sufficient to adopt a grading system of "attained" or "unattained" for the subject in question.

In terms of curriculum design, I suggest that more emphasis should be put on the relevance of each Chinese historical period to Hong Kong, such as the fact that Hong Kong has been part of the Chinese territory since the Qin dynasty, the arrival of fallen emperors in Hong Kong during the Song dynasty, and the heroic deeds of the New Territories indigenous inhabitants in bravely defending against the Japanese invasion during the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression ("the War of Resistance"). All these can help strengthen students' collective memory and make them understand that our country and Hong Kong are an inseparable community with shared weal and woe. There are many relics of the War of Resistance in Hong Kong, including the Hong Kong Sha Tau Kok Anti-War Memorial Hall, the LIU Chunxiang Anti-Japanese War Hero Group at Lung Kwu Tan in Tuen Mun, and the monuments to anti-Japanese aggression martyrs in Wu Kau Tang and in Tsam Chuk Wan of Sai Kung. They are all vivid materials for teaching history, which should be actively promoted by the Government to enhance students' sense of identity and belonging to the country and the nation. Mainland study tours that were suspended due to the epidemic should be resumed as soon as possible, and schools should encourage students to participate in these tours. As for the design of study tours, more emphasis should be put on the part on exchange with Mainland schools. These tours should not be reduced to brief superficial visits conducted in a perfunctory manner.

The younger generation is the inheritor of history. The SAR Government must act as a guide to cultivate in students an accurate understanding of the history of our country and let them take pride in it, so as to equip them to tell the good stories of Hong Kong and China to the international community in future.

MR KENNETH LEUNG (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. I thank Prof LAU Chi-pang for proposing the motion today so that we have the opportunity to discuss how Chinese history should be integrated into our education.

The famous thinker LIANG Qichao wrote in his works, *Xin Shixue*: “The scholarship of historiography is the greatest and most urgent one. It is the mirror of the people of the nation and the origin of a patriotic heart.” This statement pinpointed the relationship between history and patriotism: understanding history is the origin and starting point for cultivating patriotism.

All countries around the world attach great importance to their history. Therefore, they all let their people correctly understand and pass on their history and culture through education, so that their people genuinely develop a sense of belonging to the country, a sense of national identity and national confidence.

Unfortunately, due to historical reasons, Hong Kong did not pay much attention to Chinese history education in the past. Thus, the younger generation has a weak or even biased understanding of the history of our country. Although the situation has significantly improved since Hong Kong’s return to the motherland, there is a lack of interactive or multi-perspective education as study and exchange tours to the Mainland have been suspended due to the closure of borders amidst the epidemic in recent years.

As the saying goes, “travelling brings about far greater benefit than mere book learning”. When it comes to enabling students to master Chinese history, nothing is better than letting them experience it in person. They will have a more stereoscopic understanding of the history in textbooks if they actually visit the Great Wall, the Forbidden City and the terracotta warriors.

President, with the full resumption of normal travel between Hong Kong and the Mainland, students finally have the opportunity to go to the Mainland for exchange and study tours again. However, organizing study and exchange tours for students is not as simple as organizing leisure trips. The organizers, planners and teachers behind the scene must put a lot of efforts into designing the itineraries and enriching the contents so that the tours will be effective and that young people will achieve a sense of gain.

Unfortunately, a “succession gap” has emerged in the organization of exchange and study tours in the past three years. This is because, on the one hand,

some planners or teachers have left and successors may not be experienced, and on the other hand, many study tours with good reputation or positive comments no longer exist because study tours have been suspended for three years. Students might ask their seniors for recommendations on study tours, but their seniors have no idea because they have not joined any study tours either. Besides, students' mode of learning and living has changed, and they have got used to online learning. Therefore, teachers may have to make extra effort to encourage students to set off from home again.

President, I am very supportive of all historical exchange and study tours to the Mainland, be they a one-day tour to Dapeng ancient city in Shenzhen or a one-month tour to the Silk Road in Gansu province, on the premise that they are of high quality and have substance. Hence, I very much hope the SAR Government will provide more support at the resumption of the exchange tours, including strengthening the training of planners and the transfer of experiences, and allocating more resources to enhance publicity to students, so that the study and exchange tours can really help students learn history and understand the national affairs.

President, in the Youth Development Blueprint, the Government has proposed to “nurture a new generation of young people with an affection for our country and Hong Kong and equipped with global perspective, an aspiring mind-set and positive thinking”. To achieve this vision, we must strengthen our education and enhance students' interest in understanding our country. However, in my opinion, whether the current mode of assessment or the curriculum content should be revised requires further deliberations. The authorities should study the issue in detail with members of the education sector before implementation.

President, strong historical confidence is the solid spiritual force for a nation to move forward. I believe that through history education and field trips, the sense of belonging to our country among young people in Hong Kong will definitely be strengthened. They will thus become a new generation that loves our home, treasures our country and contributes to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

President, I so submit.

MR ANDREW LAM (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. I thank Prof LAU Chi-pang for proposing the original motion and Revd Canon Peter Douglas KOON for proposing the amendment.

My interest in Chinese history began with JIN Yong's "Yuan Chonghuan Pingzhuan" ("A Critical Biography of Yuan Chonghuan"), an addendum to *Bi Xue Jian* (*Sword Stained with Royal Blood*). Although my strong interest was not accordingly reflected in my grades in Chinese History, learning about China and its relationship with the world through history has become my hobby in the past 50 years.

Looking back, the Chinese history I studied in my youth invariably centred on politics, such as the rise and fall of dynasties and system changes. It rarely examined "the inter-relationships between culture, geography and history" as proposed by Prof LAU Chi-pang. I understand that the four great inventions of ancient China are not "congee, rice noodle, egg noodle and rice". However, in the teaching of Chinese history, noodles could have served as a starting point for a discussion on the history of cultural diplomacy between China and Italy or how tomatoes and pepper took root in China. This would have aroused my interest in geography and climate. I could also have been asked to consider a 230-year-old incident in which Emperor Qianlong dismissed innovative products brought by the British ambassador George MACARTNEY as diabolical tricks and wicked craft and its impact on the technology development in modern China.

It is undoubtedly necessary to give students a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of Chinese history, geography and culture in order to provide more comprehensive background information and broader perspectives for students to ponder the development and prospect of the country. However, given China's long history, vast territory and considerable ethnic and cultural diversity, we cannot expect students to learn everything by rote memorization. Instead, we should make use of interesting content to arouse their desire to learn continuously and stimulate their thinking, so as to cultivate in them a sense of belonging to our country, an affection for the Chinese people and a sense of national identity through hard knowledge.

While it should certainly be compulsory for students to take Chinese History, making it an independent subject at the senior secondary level involves more extensive implementation issues. The specific situation of our basic education

must be taken into consideration to avoid overloading students and hence affecting their grades or even making them uninterested or resistant to learning.

There has all along been little coverage of modern history in Hong Kong's education. It is indeed necessary for us to address this issue after Hong Kong's return to the motherland. However, the truth of the matter is that the more recent a piece of history is, the more controversy it arouses in society over interpretation and choice of teaching materials. The academic sector and historians will have to conduct more research and discussions before compiling appropriate teaching materials. The matter cannot be finalized in a short time.

Currently, the Citizenship and Social Development subject provides a basic platform. There should also be room under the Chinese Language subject to enhance students' understanding of Chinese history, geography and culture. We should first conduct reviews and studies systematically and continuously to further improve the curriculum structure, design and content of these two subjects with a view to effectively achieving their respective curriculum aims, including "enhance understanding of society, the country, the human world, the physical environment and related knowledge" and "identify with Chinese culture and develop students' affection for their country and nationality".

In order to cultivate a sense of belonging to our country, an affection for the Chinese people and a sense of national identity among secondary school students, a passion for education is certainly needed. In addition, we may also make use of other soft channels outside the classroom, such as museums, historical buildings, customs and festivals, films, music and various cultural activities, to achieve more effective outcomes.

President, I so submit.

IR LEE CHUN-KEUNG (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. It has been 25 years since the Hong Kong SAR returned to the motherland. However, in the past decade, the "anti-national education" incident, the illegal "Occupy Central" movement and the "black-clad violence" incident occurred in Hong Kong in which a large number of young students were involved. In the past, some ill-intentioned people colluded with external forces to deliberately mislead young people about our country, causing serious problems to the values and perception of the country among young people in Hong Kong.

In fact, to cultivate in young people positive values such as respect for Chinese culture, a sense of national identity and a sense of belonging to our country, many in society believe that it is important to enhance the teaching of Chinese History in secondary schools. Currently, Chinese History is an independent compulsory subject only at the junior secondary level. In my opinion, the study of history must be coherent, and national history and national conditions are inseparable. Studying history helps students acquire an understanding of the social and international landscape. As a matter of fact, teachers and students should study not only ancient history, but also modern history, such as the development history and process of the Communist Party of China (“CPC”) and its contributions to the development of the country in modern times. This is because CPC, as the ruling party of our country, has made indispensable contributions to the development process of our country. In particular, under its leadership, our country has moved from poverty and backwardness to prosperity and strength, and further to the centre of the world stage.

Unfortunately, if we ask young people on the street the names of our past state leaders, I believe apart from well-known ones like MAO Zedong, DENG Xiaoping, JIANG Zemin and XI Jinping, very few of them can name the holders of other positions, such as Premier, Vice President and the seven members of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, or describe the responsibilities of the National People’s Congress and the National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, much less CPC’s contributions and the spirit of the national congresses held in the past. Do they know? Hence, we must deepen students’ understanding of CPC to help them better understand the country.

President, if you ask students who are currently taking Chinese History about their impression of the subject, I believe many of them will say that they have to memorize all kinds of materials. That is why, for them, studying history means rote memorization and boredom. Worse still, they refuse to study history and form a negative impression of it.

Therefore, many serving teachers opine that if the Education Bureau (“EDB”) is to make any changes to Chinese History, it must enhance students’ interest in learning and minimize rote memorization so that both teachers and students can truly understand the country through Chinese History, thereby cultivating a sense of national identity.

In fact, Chinese culture has 5 000 years of history. Studying Chinese History definitely does not mean rote memorization and boredom. Students may learn from the past by studying history, and embrace self-improvement by drawing lessons from the experience of our antecedents. In addition, Chinese history and culture covers culinary culture, local customs and moral values such as “benevolence, righteousness, propriety and knowledge”, “self-cultivation, family management, state governance, and bringing peace to all under heaven”, and “filial piety is one of the virtues to be held above all else”. It is very worthwhile for students to explore and learn about them.

Yet, should Chinese History be made a compulsory subject? Our society certainly has some reservations about it at this point because if Chinese History really becomes the fifth core subject at the senior secondary level, the pressure on students, especially science students, will increase as they may be worried that a poor grade will affect their chance of entering university.

Therefore, the Liberal Party supports the amendment proposed by Revd Canon Peter Douglas KOON. We hope that EDB will review the senior secondary curriculum and include Chinese history as “essential learning experiences” throughout the entire secondary education, with a view to delivering the content through a simple and interesting approach which will resonate with students and make them motivated and interested in learning.

On the other hand, in order to enhance students’ patriotic spirit, EDB may consider deploying large publicity vehicles on campus and organizing more quizzes and essay competitions on Chinese history and culture. It may also send Hong Kong students to the Mainland schools for in-depth exchanges and national education courses with a view to building a good learning atmosphere and actively cultivating patriotic successors of “one country, two systems”.

President, China has a long history, a vast territory and abundant resources. I hope EDB will review the future direction of Chinese History in a serious manner, so that senior secondary students can seriously learn and understand various aspects of our country; cultivate a sense of national identity, patriotic spirit and a sense of belonging to our country; tell the good stories of China and Hong Kong; and work together for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

Thank you, President. I so submit.

MR ROCK CHEN (in Cantonese): President, it has been 25 years since Hong Kong's return to the motherland, yet the sense of belonging to our country and the sense of national identity are still weak among some young people. Some young students, encouraged by external forces, even participated in the “black-clad violence” demonstrations against the Government in 2019.

Fortunately, Hong Kong has entered a new stage from stability to prosperity. It is necessary and essential to cultivate a sense of belonging to our country and an affection for our nation among young people. Chinese History, which can enhance students' understanding of the historical evolution of our country, is only an elective subject in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination curriculum with only 6 000 students taking it each year on average for the past two years.

Hence, in order to enable secondary school students to further understand the history, geography, culture and social development of our country, I strongly support including Chinese history as “essential learning experiences” throughout the entire secondary education against the backdrop of optimizing the four senior secondary core subjects, so as to enable students to learn about the development history of the Chinese nation from different perspectives in an objective and rational manner, and to cultivate a sense of national identity among them.

Including Chinese history as “essential learning experiences” can avoid making Chinese History the fifth core subject. The contrary will affect lesson time and increase the total lesson time spent on the core subjects, meaning that senior secondary school students may spend too much time on compulsory subjects and thus contravenes the original intent and philosophy of the previous curriculum reform. “Essential learning experiences” can enhance students' knowledge of Chinese history without either affecting the number of elective subjects or hindering the study of science students at the senior secondary level.

For “essential learning experiences” to achieve the desired results, I hold that we should take note of the following four points.

First, the subject should be taught by professional Chinese history teachers who know how to bring historical events to life through a storytelling approach, so as to draw students' attention and arouse their interest in learning.

Second, the learning experiences should contain less rote memorization and allows a larger degree of freedom, with more emphasis on students' abilities to analyse, comment, synthesize and infer, so as to cultivate students' interest in studying Chinese history.

Third, field trips should be included. For example, trips to museums can be arranged for students to appreciate historical exhibits and join guided tours, so that they can gain some first-hand experience.

Fourth, technology such as virtual reality ("VR") can be put into use. Students can be guided through historical figures, landmarks and important historical events through VR or online games. By using these technologies, students can learn history through realistic experience, hence enhancing their interaction and level of participation.

Lastly, I suggest that the SAR Government should consider and explore incorporating content of Chinese History into the curriculum of Citizenship and Social Development ("CS"). Currently, the reformed curriculum of CS consists of three themes, namely "Hong Kong under 'One Country, Two Systems'", "Our Country since Reform and Opening-up" and "Interconnectedness and Interdependence of the Contemporary World". Some of the content overlaps with the curriculum of Chinese History. Therefore, I suggest adding more Chinese history content in CS and adjusting its proportion in the curriculum. This arrangement will not affect the lesson time, i.e. maintaining the lesson time spent on core subjects at 50% of the total lesson time; nor will it affect the existing assessment mechanism. It is a solution worthy of examination by the Education Bureau.

President, I so submit.

DR TIK CHI-YUEN (in Cantonese): President, as Chinese, we should have an in-depth understanding of our country's history, culture and development in other aspects. We should not only know our history and culture, but also be aware of national development policies, as well as what we have done well and otherwise in the past, so as to cultivate an affection for and a sense of belonging to our country. It is reasonable to teach students or young people the geography, culture and history of our country through national education. I believe every country does actively implement civic education for its people because building a sense of national

belonging is fundamental for the development of a country. Hence, I have always supported the implementation of national education.

(THE PRESIDENT'S DEPUTY, MS STARRY LEE, took the Chair)

In 2012, the SAR Government introduced the proposal on national education, which caused great controversies in society. However, for me, it was important to work on the development of young people through national education. So, I actively supported the promotion of national education at that time. During the discussion on national education, some people were very concerned. At that time, we stressed that it was not brainwashing education and that critical thinking should be developed in the process. Take our country as an example. Our country has done a great job in poverty alleviation. Young people in Hong Kong should learn about the country's efforts in helping the poor gradually improve their lives. On the other hand, we may also examine whether there were any shortcomings in the policies of our country over the years. So, we should develop a three-dimensional understanding of our country through three-dimensional discussions, and at the same time cultivate critical thinking among young people. Having a critical mind does not imply an intention to hinder the development of the country or do anything destructive. With a critical mind, we can draw lessons from our strengths and inadequacies, hence continuing to promote the development of our country.

For this reason, our national education or understanding of the country should consist of three levels. The first level is knowledge, which means understanding our country, including its geography, history and culture, as mentioned by many Members. The second level is involvement, which means jointly promoting community work and participating in activities of the country, etc. The last level is a sense of belonging, which means having a sense of national identity and a sense of belonging to our country, and being willing to participate in promoting the development of our country.

There have indeed been a lot of discussions on national education in Hong Kong in recent years. I could see that national education has been strengthened on many fronts. For instance, national education has been taken forward in diverse ways in schools; more study tours and visits to the Mainland have been organized by schools. All these can facilitate young people's understanding of

our country and cultivate their affection for the country. However, I would like to stress that education is education. Going too far is as bad as not going far enough, and hard selling should not be adopted in education. We are not selling products here. What we want is understanding and a sense of belonging; and involvement will follow. So, our approach is very important. Simply having a large volume of work or launching large-scale projects does not mean that we are doing a good job in education. We hope that the authorities can allow more flexibility for schools to implement national education by adopting the most effective approach according to the conditions of students or the school environment, instead of requiring schools to adopt a fixed approach which may be counterproductive. Hence, I do not agree that excessive formalities should still be imposed on national education nowadays. I agree with Revd Canon KOON's views and find his amendment to be a more flexible approach to national education.

Thank you, Deputy President.

MR TANG KA-PIU (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President. This debate topic is about making Chinese History a compulsory subject at the senior secondary level. Just now, Dr TIK said at the end of his speech that he did not agree with certain approaches for implementing national education. But the topic in question at this Council meeting is Chinese History. If we solely talk about national education, I believe that most Members will undoubtedly support the original motion proposed by Prof LAU Chi-pang out of good intention.

The crux of the matter now is Chinese History. When I studied A-Level, the examination in Chinese History, which lasted for six hours, was really not easy. I like history very much. In my junior secondary studies, I already finished reading 80 volumes of *Zizhi Tongjian* (*Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government*) mentioned by Mr Duncan CHIU just now. However, I could only get a B grade in university, while my classmates who did not like Chinese history got an A grade because their handwriting was prettier than mine and girls were better at rote memorization than I was. This is where the problem lies. Chinese History, possibly being a source of many interesting stories, has been distorted into a subject resented by many people due to its examination mechanism and grading system because a great deal of rote memorization and writing is required. How to break from these perceptions? I know that Prof LAU has done a great deal of work, but I believe many colleagues who are more concerned about the actual situation, including Mr Dennis LEUNG sitting next to me, will question the

feasibility of making it a compulsory subject at the senior secondary level all of a sudden. Nevertheless, we do appreciate the good intent of his motion.

In my opinion, for Chinese Hong Kong citizens, Chinese history may not be as important as understanding China's national affairs. As compared to knowing the Xia, Shang and Zhou dynasties, as well as the historical and global significance of oracle bone script, mastering the gist of the 20th National Congress is far more important. Why? In the past few months, I have been giving talks on the modernization of China in primary and secondary schools in Kowloon East. I was not invited to do that as a Legislative Council Member. I actually implored them to let me give talks to their students. At the end, several schools agreed to open their doors to me. I started by asking why students should have knowledge in this regard. The reason is that there are many foreign-owned enterprises in Hong Kong as it is the most internationalized city in China. When hiring Hong Kong graduates, these foreign-owned enterprises may ask the candidates about the 20th National Congress, which is a topic frequently discussed these days. What will be the consequence if Hong Kong graduates fail to give an answer? They will simply hire "drifters in Hong Kong" or "returnees" who understand the national affairs because Hong Kong's value lies in, especially in the eyes of foreigners, understanding China through Hong Kong. If young people in Hong Kong are not able to play this role, we will lose our advantage. They will still hire people, but instead of hiring local young people, they will look for someone else through the Top Talent Pass Scheme. Therefore, frankly speaking, I believe that understanding the national affairs is more important than understanding Chinese history for the overall development of Hong Kong.

In my opinion, our understanding of the national affairs has to be multi-faceted. Let me give an example. Mr LIN Yifu, an economist whom I respect most, said that the capital of economics in the 18th century was the United Kingdom because it was the centre of global economy at that time. From the 19th to the 20th century, the capital of economics shifted to Chicago in the United States, because the centre of global economy was Chicago at that time. He predicted that China would be the capital of economics in the 22nd century. Is our Economics subject ready for that? Are we still using the theory by British economist Adam Smith in the 17th and 18th centuries or the Chicago school of economics? Is there any new school of thought to describe and understand the economic miracle of China? Hence, I think that we have to understand the national affairs and history in a comprehensive and multi-faceted manner. For example, can some high-quality patriotic articles be included in our Chinese Language curriculum? I

highly recommend an article entitled “DENG Jiaxian” by Nobel Prize winner Prof Frank YANG, which is an easy-to-read piece depicting the hardships encountered by China.

So, I hope we can work together to enhance patriotism and the sense of belonging to our country among Hong Kong people through different means. I also thank Prof LAU Chi-pang for his efforts. I have read many of his works which are all very well written.

My last suggestion is, instead of making Chinese History a compulsory subject at the senior secondary level, we should make it a compulsory subject in universities. I believe that university students are capable of grasping the essence of Chinese history and national affairs, and as the future pillars of society, they must have a sense of belonging to our country.

I so submit.

MR TOMMY CHEUNG (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President. Many papers published by the Education Bureau (“EDB”) in recent years, such as the Primary Education Curriculum Guide (Pilot Version) (2022) and the Secondary Education Curriculum Guide (2017), contain elements for enhancing students’ sense of belonging to the country and understanding of Chinese history, Chinese culture and national affairs. This approach is worthy of affirmation.

Our country has developed rapidly in some 40 years since the reform and opening up. We have to equip students to harness the opportunities brought about by its development. EDB and schools are duty-bounded to strengthen students’ learning of Chinese history and Chinese culture, and enhance their knowledge on Chinese history, geography and culture. Secondary school students can then understand and explore the development and various facets of Chinese history and examine the interrelationships between culture, geography and history. This is not only an unshirkable responsibility and a right thing to do, but also an urgent task for the education sector.

Having said that, the idea of making Chinese History a compulsory subject is quite complicated. Many people are of the view that the idea is premature and may not be favourable to students who wish to pursue further studies in Chinese history at the tertiary level.

At present, Chinese History as an elective at the senior secondary level is a specialized course that covers ancient and modern Chinese history, as well as some topics such as culture and thinking, history and geography, society, and religion. The curriculum is naturally more in-depth than that at the junior secondary level with a view to preparing students for specialized history courses at the tertiary level and becoming Chinese history scholars or teachers in the future.

If the new proposed subject is to be implemented, the content of Chinese history will have to be reduced in order to adapt to all senior secondary school students. This will hinder students from understanding Chinese history in a comprehensive manner and fail to enhance their skills in studying history, which may be counterproductive to enhancing the nurturing of our future history talents.

Deputy President, if a new compulsory subject is added at the senior secondary level, adjustments must be made to the system and other problems such as deployment of resources must be addressed. For example, will entry requirements of universities be revised? Will schools be able to release sufficient hours of lesson time? Will teacher training institutions be able to train enough qualified teachers? Is it necessary to contact publishers for publishing textbooks? These questions all have to be addressed through further communication with society, especially the education sector.

It also takes time to verify the effectiveness of the current proposal of optimizing the senior secondary curriculum. So, it seems too hasty to make the decision on a new compulsory subject at this juncture. Hence, I think this is not the right time to make such a decision.

Deputy President, I so submit.

MR LAM SAN-KEUNG (in Cantonese): I thank Prof LAU Chi-pang for proposing this motion. I support his motion on “Making Chinese History a compulsory subject at senior secondary level”, but I oppose the amendment to this motion.

Deputy President, when I was in secondary school, Chinese History was not a compulsory subject but why do I support making it compulsory at the senior secondary level today? The reason is simple, and it can be well explained by quoting the famous sentence of GONG Zizhen, a prominent scholar in the Qing

dynasty: “To subjugate a country, first eradicate its history; to destroy its people, first wipe out its culture.” As we have noticed, the British Government used this tactic to govern Hong Kong for over a hundred years.

Hong Kong was plagued with chaos, such as the Occupy Central movement and the “black-clad riots” and more outrageously, some Hong Kong people accepted being derogatorily called “Sheen-na” because of historical causes. We are desperate for development and we need to catch up. Let me quote a sentence by another scholar to elaborate why making Chinese History a compulsory subject will be conducive to Hong Kong’s development.

Historian QIAN Mu stated in his preface to *Outline of National History*: “One should believe that people of any country, especially those who claim to be well educated, should have some knowledge of the history of their own nation ... Those who know their country’s past will have an affection and respect for their national history ... Those who possess such affection and respect will at least not embrace radical nihilism towards their country’s past ... or show an arrogance of standing at the apex of history ... and blame the ancestors for their own sins and weaknesses ... One should believe that only when the proportion of people who fulfil the above conditions grows, a country can hope for taking forward its development.”

As “one country” is the prerequisite of “one country, two systems” implemented in Hong Kong, we must have some knowledge about the history of our country. A nation will prosper when its young people thrive but it is a shame that our younger generation do not know much about the history of our country and Hong Kong. Worse still, external forces have distorted our history and created an atmosphere of radical nihilism; thus, some people blame their ancestors for problems and even deny the Chinese culture. That is why there were chaos in the past and even the sophistry of missing colonial rule.

As Mr QIAN Mu said, those who claim to be well educated should be familiar with the history of their country. Therefore, Chinese History should be made a compulsory subject.

When implementing Chinese history teaching, we should also be mindful of the historical outlook. Chinese history, especially contemporary history, is often distorted by external forces due to political reasons. For instance, the so-called “China collapse theory” and “China threat theory” may give rise to radical thoughts

about Chinese history in Hong Kong people. When teaching Chinese history, we also have to educate our young people in Hong Kong to be affectionate towards and respectful of Chinese history.

I really hope that our education sector can uphold the spirit of Mr QIAN Mu and help students better understand our country. Therefore, I implore Members to support Prof LAU Chi-pang's motion to make Chinese History a compulsory subject at the senior secondary level.

Deputy President, I so submit.

MR TANG FEI (in Cantonese): Deputy President, should Chinese History and Chinese Geography be made an independent compulsory subject for public assessment, so that students can thoroughly and seamlessly learn Chinese history and geography during secondary years? My view is that they do need to acquire knowledge of Chinese history and geography but it must not necessarily be an independent compulsory subject. To put it simply, there is leeway; to put it precisely, different approaches should be adopted at different learning stages at the primary and secondary levels.

The stage of basic education at the primary and secondary levels is not only the stage of building a good knowledge foundation but also an important stage of establishing the right values, which is even more decisive than the stage of tertiary education in universities. Therefore, to cultivate students' knowledge of the history, natural beauty and geography of the motherland and enhance their sense of belonging to and passion for it, Chinese History and Geography should surely be taught throughout the primary and secondary curricula. The contents should be easier at lower levels to build a solid foundation, and more difficult at higher levels to enable an in-depth understanding. This is a professional arrangement and also common sense. Chinese History is currently compulsory at the junior secondary level, but Geography is not, let alone Chinese Geography. Adding Chinese geography content is rather simple; we can further modify the existing Chinese History subject at the junior secondary level by appropriately adding contents including the natural beauty and geography, and local customs and practices during the past dynasties. I wonder how students can learn history without maps but teachers frequently do not use maps when teaching Chinese History.

As for primary education, to alleviate the study pressure on students, back in the mid-1990s (probably in 1996), the original Social Studies, Natural Science and Health Education subjects were combined into General Studies. Since then, the main curriculum of primary education basically consists of four subjects, namely Chinese, English, Mathematics and General Studies. In other words, General Studies is nicely packaged as a combination of arts and science, and of course includes knowledge on history and geography. In my opinion, although mixing arts subjects, i.e. history and geography, with science subjects, and even social knowledge (equivalent to the former Economic and Public Affairs (“EPA”) in secondary education in one subject can reduce the study pressure on students, the name “General Studies” is a misnomer. Many arts and science subjects with abundant contents should not be merely considered as “general studies”. The name “General Studies” easily causes students to disregard or make light of the subject; in fact, it is always regarded as a less important subject. Rather, we should return to the basics and split the subject into arts and science contents again. The arts contents can become an independent Chinese History subject covering Chinese geography; the science contents can simply become Natural Science or STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics). The total lesson time of the two subjects will be equal to that of the original General Studies, so that no extra pressure will be put on students while getting the subject names right. Of course, if the Education Bureau can increase teaching manpower to enable specialized teachers to teach the arts and science subjects, a higher standard of professionalism in teaching will be achieved.

Lastly, at the senior secondary level, there are currently four compulsory subjects, namely Chinese, English, Mathematics, and Citizenship and Social Development (“CS”)—let me rectify one point, we frequently use the Chinese term “公民科” (meaning the Citizenship subject), and we seldom use the misleading term “公社科” (meaning the CS subject)—CS will replace the original Liberal Studies which is highly controversial. For students, adding one more compulsory subject will really bring on much pressure. Moreover, one of the main objectives for replacing Liberal Studies with CS and reducing the learning quantity and lesson time of the other two compulsory subjects, i.e. Chinese and English, is to allow more time for senior secondary students to study the elective subjects (especially Science subjects). Making another subject compulsory now will run counter to the original intention of the reform. The simplest way will be incorporating Chinese history and geography contents in the CS syllabus (actually, it already contains some relevant contents). To put it in a colloquial way, this is “adding new wine to an old bottle”. As a result, students will definitely learn Chinese

history and geography without additional burdens from making Chinese History an independent subject.

Thank you, Deputy President.

IR CHAN SIU-HUNG (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President. I would like to thank Prof LAU Chi-pang for proposing this motion on Chinese History, so that we have the opportunity to discuss how to facilitate learning of Chinese history among senior secondary students despite the demanding curricula. I support Revd Canon Peter Douglas KOON's amendment.

Deputy President, Chinese history enables us to know about our ancestors, learn from their experiences and good deeds, reflect on the lessons for reference of the present, and understand how mankind comes through the past and enters modernity. For these reasons, I strongly encourage students to learn more about history and their country.

However, I have reservations about the proposal in the original motion to rename Chinese History as Chinese History, Geography and Culture and make it a compulsory subject at the senior secondary level. I would like to look into the matter from several perspectives:

First, there is a lack of professional Chinese History teachers in Hong Kong. I have been told by frontline teachers that for Chinese History at the senior secondary level, which is currently an elective subject, it is taught by only an average of one to two teachers in a school; and in nearly 80% of schools, only one teacher is arranged to teach Chinese History for all three senior secondary forms. With a student population of around 15 to 30 per form, the burden on teachers is by no means light. Making Chinese History a compulsory subject at the senior secondary level implies that all students will have to take the subject; given the shortage of Chinese History teachers, how can they take care of all students? If other subject teachers are engaged, they will have to take up the extra workload on top of their own portfolios. Besides, if the subject knowledge is imparted by teachers without professional knowledge of Chinese history, the teaching and learning effectiveness will be doubtful.

Second, as many people question, will the proposal of making Chinese History compulsory increase the burden on students? Currently, the Hong Kong

Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (DSE) curriculum comprises four core subjects, namely Chinese, English, Mathematics, and Citizenship and Social Development (“CS”). If Chinese History becomes the fifth core subject, the allocation of lesson time will definitely be affected; increasing the total lesson time taken up by core subjects (i.e. compulsory subjects) implies that senior secondary students will have much time spent on core subjects and less time available for other elective subjects. Furthermore, the Government has been vigorously promoting the enhancement of STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts and Mathematics) education in secondary schools. All these factors are adding to the study pressure on senior secondary students.

In fact, the current CS curriculum at the senior secondary level already covers two pedagogical themes, namely “Hong Kong under ‘One Country, Two Systems’” and “Our Country since Reform and Opening-up”, which are both related to Chinese history. Admittedly, they are not directly comparable to an independent subject of Chinese History. Therefore, I support the proposal in Revd Canon Peter Douglas KOON’s amendment that the authorities should review the senior secondary curriculum and include Chinese history as “essential learning experiences” throughout the entire secondary education.

I believe schools should adopt lively approaches and make use of real-life elements to arouse students’ interest in learning about the history of various dynasties in China. From being impoverished and bullied by the great powers to a peaceful rise today, China has developed rapidly in terms of both infrastructure and technology. For instance, China has been promoting the construction of infrastructure under the Belt and Road Initiative; it becomes the third country in the world to independently send a manned spacecraft into space; and it notches up a complete victory in precise alleviation of poverty, lifting nearly 100 million poor people in rural areas out of poverty. All these achievements show that our country has made remarkable progress in socialist modernization with Chinese characteristics.

However, I believe that a compulsory Chinese History subject is not the only way to deepen students’ understanding of their country’s history and culture, thereby developing a sense of identity as Chinese. To enhance students’ interest in Chinese history and culture, apart from listening to lively stories in history told by professional Chinese History teachers, schools should also make good use of information technology and apply virtual reality (VR) or augmented reality (AR)

technologies to re-enact significant historic events, as well as economic situations, infrastructure, technological achievements and major battles in various eras, so that students can learn history with greater interest. Apart from that, schools should utilize facilities, such as the Hong Kong Palace Museum and the Hong Kong Museum of History, by arranging themed visits for students to learn from the exhibits and guided tours about history, thereby enhancing their knowledge and recognition of Chinese history and culture.

Deputy President, it is basic for people of any nationality or ethnicity to learn the history of their own country. Students should be able to learn in schools about their country's development in various aspects, including history, culture, economy, technology, and institutional and legal systems, so as to cultivate a sense of belonging towards their country. Being part of the Chinese people, we, especially the younger generation, should really deepen our understanding of Chinese history and culture with a multi-pronged approach, thereby fostering a sense of identity as Chinese.

With these remarks, I support the motion as amended. Thank you, Deputy President.

DR KENNEDY WONG (in Cantonese): Deputy President, I thank Prof LAU Chi-pang for proposing today's motion. I believe that secondary students in Hong Kong do need to get hold of the knowledge of Chinese history, so as to cultivate a sense of belonging to the country, an affection for the Chinese people and a sense of national identity, and have a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the development process of the country. As for what ways should be taken to achieve these objectives, I keep an open mind.

Chinese history education has great significance to both the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and students' personal development. For the former, it is only by making Chinese History compulsory that students can seriously learn about the 5 000 years of rise and fall of the Chinese nation in depth, and thus develop a genuine sense of identity, self-confidence and pride towards our country and nation, as well as a vision to promote national sentiments and strive for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

As for personal development, just as Francis BACON, the world-renowned scholar, said: "Histories make men wise". With compulsory history education,

students can develop a historical sense, understand the changes or evolution in history, learn lessons from the past, and develop thinking and analytical skills from multiple perspectives and levels, and ultimately strive for betterment in life.

In most countries around the world, national history education for secondary students is an integral part of personal growth and the cultivation of values; at the same time, it plays an essential part in passing on humanist spirit. In the United States (“US”), for example, US History is a compulsory subject for primary and secondary students until they graduate from high schools; in Canada, Canadian History is compulsory for secondary students; it is also the same case in Europe and other countries. If we deviate from the practice, we may face setbacks in terms of social development; the past incidents of “Hong Kong independence” and “black-clad violence” in Hong Kong are cases in point, showing us the importance of a correct understanding our country’s history.

Needless to say, curriculum reforms and specific curriculum design involve a number of issues concerning the education profession and need to be done in a progressive manner. Therefore, I support the amendment proposed by Revd Canon Peter Douglas KOON that at this stage, we should first enhance secondary school students’ knowledge of Chinese history, covering the aspects of geography and culture, and include Chinese history as “essential learning experiences” throughout the entire secondary education.

All in all, enhancing the education on Chinese history, culture and geography for secondary students in Hong Kong is a pressing issue. I hope that the entire education sector, from the Education Bureau, school managements, teachers, students, parents, to all sectors in the community, will take heed of the issue and join hands to nurture younger generations one after another for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and the practice of “one country, two systems” in Hong Kong.

I so submit.

MR CHAN PUI-LEUNG (in Cantonese): Deputy President, history education is an indispensable part of whole-person education. Chinese history is an important foundation of national education, and developing a holistic set of historical perspectives can help students enhance their understanding of the overall situation of our society and the country.

In order to develop a holistic set of historical perspectives in students, we need to start with education. In the existing Chinese History curriculum at the junior secondary level, the emphasis is placed on deepening students' knowledge of various historical events, historical figures and ethnic relations, and developing their ability and generic skills to understand history. The Chinese History curriculum at the senior secondary level enables students to get hold of historical perspectives in a deeper and more comprehensive manner, helping them understand the basic features and development trends of various historical periods.

The senior secondary Chinese History curriculum consists of two sections, namely “historical development through the ages” and “special topics in Chinese history”, discussing the evolution of Chinese history. Students can learn about the multiple facets of Chinese history, such as culture, geography, institutions and religions, thereby gaining a comprehensive understanding of it. Besides, the curriculum has introduced “source-based learning”, which can deepen students' sense of national identity and enable them to foster positive values and attitudes towards life. These essential attributes and attitudes will help better equip students for tertiary education in the future.

For these reasons, I believe that the Administration should provide students with diverse opportunities to learn about Chinese history and culture, so as to help them develop a holistic set of historical perspectives and enhance their sense of national identity and belonging to the Chinese race, history and culture.

That being said, I have noticed that the number of students taking Chinese History is falling year by year. According to the statistics on the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (“HKDSE”) Examination, the number of candidates taking Chinese History dropped from 8 617 in 2013 to 6 071 in 2022, and the total number of HKDSE candidates last year was nearly 50 000, which means only around 12% of them took Chinese History. From this, we can see that students know little about Chinese history and lack the interest in learning about it.

Why do our young people have little interest in learning Chinese history? Is it because of the dull and boring teaching approach and curriculum design, or is it due to our industrial pattern, under which no suitable pathways are available to Chinese History students? This is an issue that our society should ponder. The movement of opposition to the proposed legislative amendments in 2019 shows that our young people lack a comprehensive understanding of national history and

culture. Hence, they are prone to misinterpret and adopt an exclusive attitude towards everything about China.

As the old saying goes: “Reviewing the past enables us to learn about the law governing the evolution of history.” It is worth thinking how we can make good use of history as a textbook to enhance students’ national pride and sense of being the masters. I believe that school education is just the starting point for students to learn Chinese history. Learning national history should not be confined to textbooks and reading; more importantly, we should diversify learning activities and use various ways to create a positive atmosphere for the learning of Chinese history and culture, so as to arouse students’ interest.

At the same time, more supporting resources and manpower should be provided for educators to actively create a “second classroom”, so that students can have more opportunities to learn about history and culture. Reference can also be drawn from the curriculum design of Citizenship and Social Development to provide students with opportunities for Mainland visits, thereby enabling them to gain a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of the country and cultivating in them a deeper knowledge of and a greater appreciation for Chinese history.

Deputy President, I so submit.

MR KINGSLEY WONG (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President. Hong Kong has its roots and origins in our motherland, and we are bound by inseparable blood ties. Chinese history education must cover more historical facts of Hong Kong, China. Knowing them will not only enhance students’ sense of national identity and belonging to our country, but also help them develop the ability to tell right from wrong, cultivate care for the country, and reinforce their aspiration to foster the development of Hong Kong and contribute to the country.

Learning history is not just about memorizing textbooks for examinations, there are also lively ways, such as visiting historical sites and museums. However, there are still many inadequacies in the SAR Government’s promotion of the history of Hong Kong, China. For example, before and after the 1911 Revolution, Dr SUN Yat-sen frequently travelled by ship for the cause of revolution and spread revolutionary ideas on board, and that was how Hong Kong seamen began to contribute to the revolution. The General Industrial Federation

of Chinese Seamen was established with Dr SUN's tremendous support. Subsequently in 1922, it led a general strike of seamen, sending a wave of shock at home and abroad, and becoming a symbolic labour movement for anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism and patriotism which inspired the whole nation. This is a significant and historic event that Hong Kong people should take pride in. Yet, despite its close linkage to Dr SUN Yat-sen and great significance in the history of Chinese labour movements, this piece of history is little known among Hong Kong students. Even the original site of the federation has not been treasured by the SAR Government, which has been dragging its feet on matters as simple as erecting a visitor signage nearby to briefly introduce the site.

Another example is the Shek Kip Mei fire in 1953, in which thousands of squatter houses were burnt down and nearly 60 000 persons were made homeless. So, who actually solved the food problem for the victims at that time? It was not the British Hong Kong Government, but the People's Relief Association of China, which immediately delivered 700 000 catties of rice for distribution through the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions and the Chinese General Chamber of Commerce. This historical event, which occurred only some 60 years ago, manifests our close ties with the Mainland; can students learn about it from textbooks? Does any museum keep detailed records of it?

I once visited the Museum of Public Housing in Mei Ho House and saw an exhibition about the Shek Kip Mei fire. It was mentioned that the colonial government had started building public housing since then, but this piece of history, showing the love and care of our country for Hong Kong, went missing. As Chinese people share the same root and origin, all of us will render help when one of us is in need. While the British Hong Kong Government, for political concerns, deliberately invalidated or denied such camaraderie among Chinese people, it will be wrong for us to carry on with this historical perspective of British colonists even after the return of Hong Kong to the motherland, and that must be rectified.

We must cease to adopt the perspective of Westerners or British colonists in our education on Chinese history and Hong Kong history, as well as in the promotion of history across the territory. Today, the statue of Queen Victoria, a symbol of the ruling power of the British Empire, still sits in Victoria Park, but the Leisure and Cultural Services Department refuses to erect a monument for the centenary of the seamen's strike in Sun Yat Sen Memorial Park in Sheung Wan on the ground of failing to blend it in the surrounding atmosphere. To enhance our education on Chinese history, we must first improve education on Hong Kong

history. The whole SAR Government must first adopt the right attitude towards history, and tell the good stories of Hong Kong history from the perspective of Chinese Hong Kong—not British Hong Kong.

Deputy President, I so submit.

DEPUTY PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Members may wish to note that as it is unlikely that this Council will be able to complete this motion debate today, the President has decided to suspend the meeting at around 6:00 pm today.

Dr Priscilla LEUNG, please speak.

DR PRISCILLA LEUNG (in Cantonese): Deputy President, President XI Jinping said in his address made on 1 July, “Hong Kong will prosper only when its young people thrive; Hong Kong will develop only when its young people achieve well-rounded development”. In order to lead a bright future for Hong Kong, we must guide young people to be keenly aware of the trends in both our country and the world and enhance their national pride and sense of being the masters. In view of today’s development of our country and Hong Kong, we surely all agree with the objectives of Prof LAU Chi-pang’s original motion; the divergence of views is about how and by what means we can achieve those objectives.

I believe the main controversy of Prof LAU’s original motion is not about making Chinese History a “compulsory” subject, but having to take an examination on it. I have been following up on the implementation of Liberal Studies for many years. It has already been 14 years since the introduction of the subject was first proposed to this Council. Looking back, it was too ambitious to allocate a total of 250 lesson hours to this compulsory subject and to make it an important subject which must be taken in the examination at the senior secondary level. Consequently, many students complain that they are too occupied for science or other subjects of their own interest. Hence, I am generally very cautious about making a subject compulsory for examination.

The amendment proposed by Revd Canon Peter Douglas KOON is, however, too vague to me. We have been following up on the Chinese History curriculum design in Hong Kong; if Chinese history is to be included as “essential

learning experiences” throughout the entire secondary education, I think the description will be inadequate as a guideline.

Originally, I would like to support Ir LEE Chun-keung’s amendment, proposing to “study the feasibility of making it a compulsory subject in the future”, which in fact provides a pathway for Prof LAU Chi-pang’s original motion. I also appreciate the inclusion of the development history of the Communist Party of China in the amendment. But then, Ir LEE withdrew his amendment.

That being the case, let me just share my thinking process on this issue. I once consulted Principal HO Hon-kuen, who has taught Chinese History in secondary schools, on whether Chinese History should be made a compulsory subject for study and examination. We were both thinking: Since there are already so many compulsory subjects, what should we do? Students will resent the requirement to take an extra examination. That is why when discussing the inclusion of the Basic Law, which I am really fond of, in the secondary curriculum, I did not advocate public assessment, but rather a soft approach that would enable students to absorb knowledge.

At that time, Principal HO Hon-kuen shared his thoughts: How about making Chinese History an alternative subject? Liberal Studies, currently Citizenship and Social Development (“CS”), was a compulsory subject back then; Principal HO suggested that if Chinese History was to be made compulsory for study and examination, it could be offered as an alternative to Liberal Studies for students to choose. Subsequently, the Government decided to replace Liberal Studies with CS, which I think has eased most of our concerns. Having heard the speeches of many colleagues, and having followed up on educational issues for years, I believe adding more Chinese history content, of which Prof LAU Chi-pang finds inadequate, to the existing curriculum, for example, in the Chinese Language or CS syllabus, will be more practical than to suddenly adding a new subject.

Moreover, in order to enhance young people’s knowledge of Chinese history, I really think they should build a good knowledge foundation on, for example, the relationship between contemporary Chinese history and the entire Chinese history. If we also require young people to learn about the development history of our neighbouring countries and their relations with China, the curriculum will be compartmentalized, because there is no end to knowledge. The comparative approach is more suitable to be adopted by students with keen interest in history for in-depth research at university level.

On that account, Deputy President, I am caught in a dilemma between the motion and the amendment today. If I really need to show support, I can only vote for the amendment proposed by Revd Canon Peter Douglas KOON. Nevertheless, I have to point out that I am not very satisfied with the drafting of his amendment, the approach of which was used in the past to evade problems. I heard that some Members suggested, which I agree, that we can promote Chinese history with high technology in the future. Chinese history embodies not only stories in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, but also a very rich culture. If one day we have a museum in Hong Kong that adopts high technology which enables students to travel in a time tunnel, the experience will surpass that of viewing the painting “Along the River During the Qingming Festival” back then and they will have fun learning other things too. I look forward to development in this direction.

Deputy President, I so submit.

MR TONY TSE (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President. Deputy President, I was a Science or Engineering student, but still, I am quite interested in Chinese history. First, as a Chinese, we should learn more about our national history. Second, Chinese history is full of interesting stories—the Five Hegemons of the Spring and Autumn period, the Seven Warring States, the Qin’s wars of unification, the Three Kingdoms and the Opium War; in contemporary history, the Eight-Nation Alliance and the Eight-year War of Resistance, to name but a few. Indeed, history is about blood and tears, and love and camaraderie; it has far-reaching impacts on personal development as well as the cultivation of patriotism and moral values.

(THE PRESIDENT resumed the Chair)

Therefore, I support the general principles of Prof LAU Chi-pang’s motion to enhance the Chinese history education for secondary school students in Hong Kong, so as to cultivate in them a sense of belonging to our country, an affection for the Chinese people and a sense of national identity. However, I have strong reservations about making Chinese History a compulsory subject at the senior secondary level.

First, Chinese History is already a compulsory subject at the junior secondary level, and Chinese history content has been considerably added to General Studies at the primary level. Students at the senior secondary level have reached a certain degree of maturity in their mental capacity and thinking; will forcing them to learn Chinese history by making the subject compulsory for study and examination be the most effective way? Or will it be counter-productive?

In addition, one of the aims of reforming the New Senior Secondary curriculum is to reduce the number of subjects for study and examination, so that students can learn more happily under less pressure, and gain a better and deeper understanding of the six to seven subjects they take, either core or elective. If Chinese History is added to be the fifth core subject, we will go back to square one, with eight to nine subjects like the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination in the past. Will that go against the original purpose of the reform?

In fact, there are many other ways to enhance senior secondary students' understanding of Chinese history. For instance, the Citizenship and Social Development (“CS”) subject was introduced last year to rectify the problems with Liberal Studies, i.e. lacking prescribed teaching materials, giving teachers too much flexibility and overemphasizing critical analysis. Nonetheless, some parents have relayed that the CS syllabus and teaching materials are too rigid and boring; students are asked to memorize the Basic Law, and then the Constitution, and then the National Security Law. The unlively way of teaching eventually puts students off.

If we can incorporate some Chinese history content into the CS curriculum, make use of historical events and figures to teach students the importance of national security, social stability and national reunification, we will get twice the result with half the effort. The prerequisite is that we need adequate, quality and reliable teaching materials and teaching staff, otherwise we might get distorted outcomes, no matter Liberal Studies, CS or Chinese History. We have been short of teaching materials and teaching staff in Hong Kong; if Chinese History is made a compulsory subject at the senior secondary level, the shortage will become even more acute.

Lastly, we need to address the decreasing number of senior secondary students taking Chinese History in recent years. I believe the reasons behind are complex, including the social atmosphere of emphasizing business over history,

the general decline in students' Chinese language proficiency, the smearing and political campaigns of the Western powers over the past, and the recent trend of studying abroad, all of which play a part in weakening students' interest in taking Chinese History.

President, I am not an expert in this profession. I hope that the Education Bureau and the professionals in the education sector can find the right cure and turn the trend. In any case, we should not make Chinese History compulsory just because we cannot think of another way, forcing parents and students to swallow the decision.

With these remarks, I support Revd Canon Peter Douglas KOON's amendment, as well as the motion as amended by him.

I so submit.

MR CHU KWOK-KEUNG (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. I thank Prof LAU Chi-pang for moving the original motion and Revd Canon Peter Douglas KOON for proposing the amendment.

It is very important for all students to know the historical evolution and latest development of our country. The Citizenship and Social Development ("CS") subject was introduced only two years ago to replace the compulsory Liberal Studies at the senior secondary level. The CS subject covers the development of our country and Hong Kong after China's reform and opening up, and the essence of Chinese culture. Secondary schools have been working hard on the curriculum design and organizing Mainland study tours; teachers have yet to accumulate practical experience in classrooms; and the first Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education ("HKDSE") examination for the CS subject will be held next year. At this early harvest stage, practitioners from the education sector find the proposal of making Chinese History the fifth compulsory subject at the senior secondary level perplexing.

Most of the practitioners from the education sector whom I contacted acknowledge the good intent and objectives of the motion. However, it is not the right time to introduce a compulsory senior secondary subject in the near future, and we lack the conditions to do so. The reasons are as follows:

First, there are currently four core subjects at the senior secondary level, namely Chinese, English, Mathematics, and Liberal Studies or CS. With another compulsory subject added, hours of the lesson time being allocated to all core subjects will be more than half of the total at the senior secondary level. This implies that all the efforts put in the curriculum reform two years ago which aimed to alleviate the burden of students will be in vain.

Second, making Chinese History a compulsory subject will take up a considerable amount of lesson time, which in turn hinder the study of elective subjects, especially STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts and Mathematics) and Applied Learning subjects. It will go against the guiding principle of diversified development.

Third, Chinese History has been made an independent and compulsory subject in the revised junior secondary curriculum and implemented territory-wide from Secondary One to Secondary Three this year. As a result, students have already acquired holistic knowledge on Chinese history at the junior secondary level. If Chinese History is also made compulsory at the senior secondary level, it is afraid that the subject will greatly overlap with Chinese History at the junior secondary level or CS at the senior secondary level as the coverage and depth of its curriculum will be quite similar.

Fourth, if Chinese History is no longer offered as an elective subject at the senior secondary level, students who are eager to pursue their studies and consolidate their knowledge will not be catered for, and universities can hardly admit students on the strength of their academic excellence.

If Chinese History is retained as an elective, some students will be taking two subjects, both an elective and a compulsory one, in Chinese History. Some have suggested an arrangement like Chinese and Chinese Literature. Yet, the percentage of HKDSE candidates taking Chinese Literature was only about 2% this year; so how many students will still take an elective in Chinese History if they are already required to take a compulsory one? I am worried that this arrangement will turn out to be self-defeating.

President, we need to discuss Chinese History within the context of the existing subjects. Currently, Chinese History at the junior secondary level and CS at the senior secondary level are already sufficient for students to learn about the evolution of Chinese history and explore the interrelationship between

humanities, geography and history. If we need to enrich the content, it will be more appropriate to adjust the proportion of Chinese history content in CS, or add in elements of geography or culture.

As for non-formal curriculum, I suggest that we enrich the related learning experiences of senior secondary students by museum visits, source-based learning, study tours, VR (virtual reality), and even high technology activities; through experimental learning in diverse and attractive ways, students can know more about their country and cultivate a sense of national identity. As a result, students will surely have greater motivation and learn more effectively. Therefore, I do not support the original motion.

Although Revd Canon Peter Douglas KOON's amendment does not propose to make Chinese History a compulsory subject, "essential learning experiences" concerns the overall curriculum design, which I believe is better to be flexible than rigid. I agree that the Administration should re-examine the issue, take on board the views of frontline teachers and reach a consensus before implementation.

President, I so submit.

PROF WILLIAM WONG (in Cantonese): President, the title of my speech is "Senior secondary education should not be a window period of learning Chinese history".

Currently, senior secondary students who do not take Chinese History will have little access to the subject knowledge since then. Even though they are busy preparing for the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education examination, they should not be cut off from Chinese history. Chinese History became a compulsory junior secondary subject in 2000, but it was not an independent subject; some schools might combine it with Humanities or World History. Under this arrangement, limited hours of lesson time are allocated for students to learn about Chinese history and they can merely scratch the surface of it.

Even after Chinese History became an independent subject in 2018, there are only around 50 teaching periods per year. China has a long history; if students only learn about the political changes, like the rise and fall of dynasties due to the time constraint, they will never be able to understand national development in depth. Besides, history is not just about politics, but also religion, art, technology,

commerce and trade, etc. If we do not arrange for senior secondary students to learn Chinese history and they do not take the subject at university, they will stop learning Chinese history after the junior secondary level. If that is the case, how well can the young people of Hong Kong know about the country? How deep can they understand it?

Chinese History at the senior secondary level can be taught in different ways from the primary and junior secondary levels, but it cannot be omitted. The senior secondary curriculum should be set free from rote learning of historical facts and focus more on developing skills in thinking and making analysis, judgement and presentation. More thoughts should be given to the curriculum design to stimulate students' interest in learning. For example, with students who love gourmet, we can discuss the food culture of ancient China; with students who love painting, we can discuss the painting schools in Chinese art history; with students who love playing combat video games, we can discuss the evolution of ancient weapons. In this way, learning history is no longer a burden, but rather a pleasure.

Learning history is also important for cultivating a sense of national identity. Taking technology development as an example, many technologies applied by Western countries in modern times originate from China; the four great inventions of ancient China stand as significant contributions to human civilization. Another example is ZHENG He's voyages to the Western Seas; as ocean voyages require advanced shipbuilding skills and navigational techniques, it was an outstanding technological achievement and a demonstration of profound knowledge of that time. Unfortunately, the "closed-door" policy adopted in the Ming dynasty since the 14th century has hindered the spread of Chinese technologies and culture, and eventually impeded the technological advancement of our country for centuries.

All in all, China have made glorious achievements in culture and arts, architecture and craftsmanship, military equipment, and science and technology. As long as young people have more exposure and knowledge of Chinese history, they will naturally gain a sense of cultural identity and national pride.

President, with these remarks, I support giving senior secondary students the chance to learn Chinese history. Senior secondary education should not be a window period without any exposure to Chinese history. Thank you, President.

MR ROBERT LEE (in Cantonese): President, first of all, I would like to thank Prof LAU Chi-pang for moving the original motion and Revd Canon Peter Douglas KOON for proposing the amendment. In the past, many citizens criticized schools for combining Chinese History with other subjects at the junior secondary level, resulting in the contents on Chinese History in the junior secondary curriculum failing to cover modern history. Consequently, the new generation of young people “have forgotten about their history”, have insufficient knowledge of the history of the nation and lack a sense of belonging towards the Chinese people and the nation. Therefore, it is necessary to enhance young people’s knowledge of the country’s history. Students can then understand the fact that the interactive relationship between Hong Kong and the country since ancient times is inseparable. It is also necessary to develop their sense of identity towards the nation, the Chinese race and our society, and help them respect, appreciate and inherit the Chinese culture.

However, it will take time to observe and require careful consideration if Chinese History is thus made a compulsory subject at the senior secondary level. At the same time, if only a grading system of “attained” or “unattained” is established, students and parents may not pay enough attention to it. Moreover, the relevant proposal will affect the overall structure of the senior secondary curriculum, limit the choice of subjects for students, and impose more restrictions on subject selection, which will have a certain impact on the long-term development of education. Therefore, I support the inclusion of Chinese history as “essential learning experiences” throughout the entire secondary education, or propose to increase students’ sense of belonging to the country or sense of national identity through other school-based learning methods.

In terms of concrete implementation, the Government may consider strengthening education on Chinese Language by splitting the Chinese Language subject at the senior secondary level into two sections, respectively on language as well as history and culture, and including in the latter chapters on the in-depth study of Chinese culture and history knowledge and related topics. This will allow teachers to guide students in their study or discuss with them in class to delve deeper into the spirit of Chinese culture, thereby enhancing young people’s national awareness and sense of belonging to the country, cultivating their respect for Chinese culture, and deepening their understanding of and appreciation for the national development.

In addition to classroom learning, students’ first-hand experience can also help cultivate their affection for the country more effectively. Therefore, a

performance evaluation for extra-curricular activities may be included in the Chinese Language curriculum. Under this arrangement, each student can complete a thematic study on the development of contemporary China through exchange opportunities in the Mainland, thus enhancing their understanding of the development of such aspects as the country's history, culture, economy, education, science and technology, and strengthening their sense of national identity. In my opinion, the Education Bureau can enhance students' understanding of the country by increasing the study hours for the Chinese Language subject to incorporate knowledge on Chinese culture and history into it. This approach will also retain the existing framework of elective and compulsory subjects at the senior secondary level without imposing any restrictions on students' subject selection.

President, I so submit.

SUSPENSION OF MEETING

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now suspend the meeting until 9 am tomorrow.

Suspended accordingly at 6:00 pm.

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 7

(Written Reply)

Asked by: Hon Lillian KWOKDate of meeting: 15 February 2023Replied by: Secretary for Labour
and WelfareReply

President,

My reply to the question raised by the Member is as follows:

- (1) The Government is committed to promoting employment of persons with disabilities so that they can take up productive and gainful employment in the open market on the basis of their abilities. The Social Welfare Department (SWD) subsidises Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) to implement the “Supported Employment”, “On the Job Training Programme for People with Disabilities” and “Sunnyway - On the Job Training Programme for Young People with Disabilities” to provide persons with disabilities with related vocational training, counselling service, and post-placement service and help them to secure jobs. Currently, there are 26, 14 and 15 NGOs providing “Supported Employment”, “On the Job Training Programme for People with Disabilities” and “Sunnyway - On the Job Training Programme for Young People with Disabilities” respectively. The number of persons with disabilities participating in related employment support services in the past 5 years was as follows:

Year	Supported Employment	On the Job Training Programme for People with Disabilities	Sunnyway - On the Job Training Programme for Young People with Disabilities
2017-18	2 001	408	325
2018-19	1 974	436	307
2019-20	2 036	393	301
2020-21	1 987	411	285
2021-22	2 033	427	304

In 2001, SWD also set up the “Enhancing Employment of People with Disabilities through Small Enterprise” Project (3E Project) to provide grants of seed money to subsidise NGOs in setting up social enterprises, in which at least half of their employees must be persons with disabilities, so as to create more work and on-the-job training opportunities for persons with disabilities. The cumulative figure of the businesses subsidised by the 3E Project and employment opportunities created for employees with disabilities in the past five years was as follows:

As of the end of the following year	Businesses subsidised under the 3E Project (Cumulative Figure*)	Employment opportunities created for employees with disabilities (Cumulative Figure)
2017-18	115	844
2018-19	118	863
2019-20	125	907
2020-21	131	935
2021-22	136	956

* Number of approved businesses since the implementation of the Project in 2001.

Moreover, the Labour Department (LD) implements the Work Orientation and Placement Scheme (WOPS) to encourage employers to hire persons with disabilities and provide them with on-the-job training and support. Under WOPS, employers will be granted an on-the-job allowance up to \$60,000 for engaging each eligible job seeker with disabilities. The numbers of registered job-seekers and placements recorded by LD as well as the relevant figures under WOPS during 2018 to 2022 were as follows:

Year	Total number of registered job-seekers	Total number of placements (Note 1 and Note 2)	WOPS	
			Number of placements	Number of employers involved in the placements
2018	2 766	2 219	796	379
2019	2 766	2 213	942	395
2020	2 478	1 741	809	294
2021	2 882	2 375	1 137	426
2022	2 570	2 412	1 228	514

Note 1: It includes the number of placements under WOPS.

Note 2: LD does not maintain the total number of employers involved.

- (2) Having regard to the employment needs of the participants of “Supported Employment”, “On the Job Training Programme for People with Disabilities” and “Sunnyway - On the Job Training Programme for Young People with Disabilities”, SWD provides them with relevant vocational training, counselling service and post-placement services, and helps those participants in need of support to seek suitable jobs. Starting from 2018-19, the post-placement services for the three services have been extended to 12 months to enhance continuous support for employment of persons with disabilities.

For businesses funded by the 3E Projects, SWD will monitor each against the stated milestones, including the ratio of employees with disabilities employed as pledged in the application. SWD would conduct scheduled visits and interviews with employees with disabilities, and receive regular progress reports submitted by the businesses, to understand the employment situation of the employees with disabilities.

The Selective Placement Division of LD provides personalised employment services, including employment counselling, job matching and referral, for job seekers with disabilities who are fit for open employment. Upon placing job seekers with disabilities into employment, the employment consultants of the Selective Placement Division will provide follow-up service for at least six months to help them settle in their new jobs. LD also implements the “Counselling Scheme for Persons with Disabilities” under which registered social workers of the engaged NGOs will provide psychological and emotional counselling service to job seekers with disabilities when needed.

- (3) SWD has launched the Support Programme for Employees with Disabilities (SPED) since June 2013 to provide employers of persons with disabilities with a one-off subsidy in respect of each employee with disabilities for procurement of assistive devices and/or workplace modifications to facilitate employees with disabilities in discharging their duties at the workplace and enhance their work efficiency.

During the initial implementation stage of the SPED, each employer could apply for a subsidy up to \$20,000 in respect of each employee with disabilities. In April 2014, SWD enhanced SPED by raising the maximum support level to \$40,000 for procurement of a single assistive device and its essential accessories. In 2019, SWD conducted a comprehensive review on SPED, with a view to strengthening support to employees with disabilities and their employers and announced in March 2020 that the maximum level of support for SPED was raised to \$40,000 for each employee with disabilities for procurement of assistive devices and/or

workplace modifications to better meet the needs of employees with disabilities in discharging their duties at the workplace and enhance their work efficiency. SWD would timely review the SPED, including the vetting procedures, level of subsidies, etc., in order to provide applicants with appropriate assistance.

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 8

(Written Reply)

Asked by: Hon Jimmy NG

Date of meeting: 15 February 2023

Replied by: Secretary for Labour
and Welfare

Reply

President,

In consultation with the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau, the Health Bureau, the Education Bureau, the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau, the Innovation, Technology and Industry Bureau and the Transport and Logistics Bureau, on behalf of the Government, I provide the following consolidated reply to the question raised by the Member is as follows:

- (1) The Central People's Government first implemented the Hong Kong National Security Law to restore peace and stability to our society in Hong Kong, followed by the improved electoral system which enabled people with different political views, coming from different social classes and professions to run for election and to be elected as members of the Legislative Council (LegCo), in order to jointly govern Hong Kong, to achieving a major transition from chaos to order, and advancing from stability to prosperity. LegCo is restored to be a place for rational deliberation of policies, for fulfilment and implementation of the constitutional functions entrusted to the legislature by the Basic Law, which could help promote governance efficiency as the Government can exchange views with LegCo members in a more efficient and practical way, with a view to jointly serving our society, to safeguarding national sovereignty, security and development interest. Government policies can then become more people-oriented in achieving good governance. During President Xi Jinping's visit to Hong Kong, he put forward "four musts" and "four proposals" and said that "Hong Kong will prosper only when its young people thrive", which reinforced the confidence of all

sectors of the community in Hong Kong's future development and had become the blueprint of governance of this term of Government. The Chief Executive will continue to lead the team to unite and motivate all sectors of the community, to actively resolve conflicts in the economy and people's livelihood, to develop a sense of national identity as well as a law-abiding and respectful society, to strengthen communication with Hong Kong citizens and attach importance to youth development, to give full play to our fine traditions of inclusiveness, unity and respect for different viewpoints and to make the best endeavour all for serving our people and better developing Hong Kong.

- (2) The Hospital Authority (HA) has launched the Enhanced Home Loan Interest Subsidy Scheme (HLISS) for staff at the end of December 2022. As of 31 January 2023, more than 400 applications and nearly 800 enquiries have been received with positive response from staff. On the other hand, to retain experienced staff to cope with the increasing service demand in future, the HA Board has approved the policy of Extending Employment Beyond Retirement in September 2021. As of December 2022, there were 103 doctors, 263 nurses, 57 allied health professionals and 2 868 supporting/other grades staff working at the HA on contract full-time terms after retirement. Among staff retiring in 2022/23 to 2026/27, at least over 1 500 doctors, nurses and allied health professionals have indicated interest / agreed to take up further employment after retirement. The HA will regularly review the effectiveness of various staff retention measures and will continue to collect feedback from staff so as to review and further enhance such measures as appropriate. The Health Bureau may share with other policy bureau for reference after the HA has collated relevant experience and evaluated the effectiveness, so that different industries can benefit from it.
- (3) The Government has no plan to set terms to ensure that beneficiaries of public funding will stay in Hong Kong for development. Talents trail opportunities, as long as Hong Kong maintains our competitiveness, and provide local talents in particular the young ones with promising prospects and potential, they will choose to stay. Under the "One Country, Two Systems", Hong Kong has the distinctive advantages of enjoying strong support of the Motherland and being closely connected

to the world. Having direct access to the huge Mainland market and strong international connectivity at the same time, Hong Kong serves as a bridge linking the Mainland and the rest of the world. Key national strategies including the 14th Five-Year Plan, the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, and the Belt and Road Initiative provide Hong Kong with unlimited opportunities. Meanwhile, the Government is committed to nurturing local talents, by supporting Hong Kong citizens to equip themselves and in skills-upgrading with public funding, including to subsidise education, encourage start-ups and continuing education etc., for embracing the world of opportunities in the near future.

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 9
(Written Reply)

Asked by Hon CHAN Hak-kan

Date of meeting: 15/02/2023

Replied by: Secretary for Environment and Ecology

Reply

President,

Different government departments have been making efforts to introduce measures to enhance mountaineering safety, and disseminate relevant messages to the public through various channels to prevent accidents. Having consulted the relevant bureau and departments, our consolidated reply to the question raised by the Hon Chan Hak-kan is as follows:

- (1) According to the records of the Fire Services Department (FSD), the number of requests for mountain search and rescue received, as well as the number of casualties within country park areas in the past three years are at **Table 1 of the Annex**. The FSD does not maintain statistics on the cases of lone hikers going missing or seeking assistance.
- (2) In the past three years, the number of mountain search and rescue call-outs of the FSD, as well as the average mobilisation hours per incident (not limited to country parks) are at **Table 2 of the Annex**.

The search and rescue operations above were mainly carried out by the FSD, while the Hong Kong Police Force (the Police), the Government Flying Service and the Civil Aid Service (CAS) would provide appropriate support when necessary. The relevant departments do not maintain statistics on the search and rescue personnel deployed during the operations.

- (3) Since the launch of the “Enjoy Hiking” mobile application in 2010, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) has been proactively promoting its usage through various publicity and education activities related to mountaineering safety. As at end-2022, the “Enjoy Hiking” mobile application had been downloaded for over 450 000 times. The said mobile application is equipped with a “Hiker Tracking Service” which, if activated by hikers, would automatically store hikers’ location records at the service centre of the

Communications Association of Hong Kong. In case of accidents, search and rescue personnel could trace the location of the missing persons making use of their relevant mobile phone numbers, thereby enhancing the efficiency of mountain search and rescue operations. In the past three years, there were 33 search and rescue cases in which location information of the missing persons was obtained through the “Hiker Tracking Service” of the “Enjoy Hiking” mobile application, with the breakdown of the number of relevant cases by year at **Table 3 of the Annex**.

- (4) The AFCD provides members of the public with integrated information and maps of different types of hiking trails, including Long Distance Trails, Country Trails, Family Walks and Nature Trails, etc., through its “Enjoy Hiking” website (<http://www.hiking.gov.hk>) which is also compatible with mobile devices, thereby encouraging them to choose suitable routes and plan the itinerary ahead of the trip. If necessary, members of the public can save the relevant information and maps in advance for use during hiking. In addition, if members of the public have spotted any suspected cases of irregularities in the countryside, they may notify relevant government departments through different channels including email or calling 1823, etc. Currently, some hiking mobile applications in the market are equipped with functions of route deviation alerts, offline maps, and immediate reporting and uploading of incidents of damaging countryside. Apart from commencing cooperation with certain hiking mobile application providers to expand the channels for receiving reports of environmental problems in county parks for taking necessary follow up actions, the AFCD will also review the “Enjoy Hiking” mobile application with a view to continuously enhancing its functions.
- 5) Various government departments have been promoting mountaineering safety through different channels. Details are as follows:
 - (i) the AFCD organises education activities from time to time, including school visits, roving exhibitions, guided tours, etc.; disseminates information on hiking safety through promotional videos on television, online short videos and social media; distributes promotional materials at popular hiking spots during peak hiking seasons jointly with relevant government departments; and puts up warning signs at locations with potential danger in country parks to alert hikers to avoid access. The AFCD will continuously review and update its promotion strategy and content of information. Apart from regularly updating its webpage, brochures etc., the AFCD will

also launch new online videos and promotional materials in due course, and continue making use of diverse channels for conducting publicity, with a view to promulgating hiking safety information to the wider public;

- (ii) the FSD has been promoting hiking safety information to the public, including preparation before hiking, safety cautions during hiking which warrant attention, and ways to seek assistance in case of accidents, etc., through different social media platforms;
- (iii) the CAS organises the Mountain Safety Promotion Day from time to time to enhance public awareness of mountaineering safety, and allow the public to learn about the mountain search and rescue operations; and
- (iv) the Police conducts regularly inter-departmental mountain search and rescue drills, aiming to strengthen the command, coordination, response and support capabilities of various departments in carrying out mountain search and rescue operations, as well as to enhance the overall operational efficiency and cooperation.

Table 1: Figures relating to mountain search and rescue incidents in country park areas received in the past three years

Year	Country Park	Number of Requests for Mountain Search and Rescue	Number of Injury	Number of Death
2020	Pat Sin Leng Country Park	17	7	1
	Tai Po Kau Nature Reserve	8	2	0
	Tai Mo Shan Country Park	8	3	0
	Tai Tam Country Park	11	5	0
	Tai Lam Country Park	21	6	0
	Lantau North Country Park	19	11	0
	Shek O Country Park	14	8	0
	Sai Kung West Country Park	9	2	0
	Sai Kung East Country Park	47	12	0
	Lam Tsuen Country Park	7	3	0
	Kam Shan Country Park	2	1	0
	Lantau South Country Park	43	19	0
	Shing Mun Country Park	5	2	0
	Aberdeen Country Park	2	2	0
	Ma On Shan Country Park	66	16	0
	Clear Water Bay Country Park	2	2	0
	Plover Cove Country Park	17	6	0
	Lion Rock Country Park	24	16	1
	Kiu Tsui Country Park	1	1	0
	Lung Fu Shan Country Park	1	0	0
	Pok Fu Lam Country Park	4	1	0
	Total	328	125	2
2021	Pat Sin Leng Country Park	28	11	1
	Tai Po Kau Nature Reserve	8	4	0
	Tai Mo Shan Country Park	15	8	0
	Tai Tam Country Park	10	4	0
	Tai Tam Country Park (Quarry Bay Extension)	4	3	0
	Tai Lam Country Park	22	13	0
	Lantau North Country Park	16	4	0
	Shek O Country Park	21	13	1
	Sai Kung West Country Park	39	14	1
	Sai Kung West Country Park (Wan Tsai Extension)	2	0	0

	Sai Kung East Country Park	106	39	2
	Lam Tsuen Country Park	10	4	0
	Kam Shan Country Park	2	1	0
	Lantau South Country Park	54	27	0
	Shing Mun Country Park	10	7	0
	Aberdeen Country Park	3	0	0
	Ma On Shan Country Park	113	61	1
	Clear Water Bay Country Park	14	9	0
	Plover Cove (Extension) Country Park	2	2	0
	Plover Cove Country Park	56	31	0
	Lion Rock Country Park	45	23	0
	Kiu Tsui Country Park	3	0	0
	Lung Fu Shan Country Park	2	2	0
	Pok Fu Lam Country Park	3	2	0
	Total	588	282	6
2022	Pat Sin Leng Country Park	17	8	1
	Tai Po Kau Nature Reserve	5	4	0
	Tai Mo Shan Country Park	21	13	0
	Tai Tam Country Park	18	9	1
	Tai Tam Country Park (Quarry Bay Extension)	8	4	0
	Tai Lam Country Park	56	32	0
	Lantau North Country Park	26	11	0
	Shek O Country Park	14	11	0
	Sai Kung West Country Park	30	15	1
	Sai Kung East Country Park	110	55	3
	Lam Tsuen Country Park	21	11	0
	Kam Shan Country Park	4	3	0
	Lantau South Country Park	99	61	4
	Shing Mun Country Park	4	2	0
	Aberdeen Country Park	4	2	0
	Ma Shi Chau Special Area	1	1	0
	Ma On Shan Country Park	86	33	0
	Clear Water Bay Country Park	10	17	1
	Plover Cove Country Park	25	16	0
	Lion Rock Country Park	31	16	1
	Kiu Tsui Country Park	2	2	0
	Lung Fu Shan Country Park	2	2	0
	Pok Fu Lam Country Park	6	1	0
	Total	600	329	12

Table 2: The number of mountain search and rescue call-outs of the FSD and the average mobilisation hours per incident in the past three years

Years	Number of mountain search and rescue call-outs (case)	Average mobilisation hours per incident (hour)
2020	602	50.7
2021	951	53.5
2022	1014	49.6

Table 3: The number of rescues cases where the location information of missing persons in mountains was obtained through “Hiker Tracking Service” in the past three years

Years	Number of rescue cases where location information of missing persons in mountains obtained through “Hiker Tracking Service”
2020	4
2021	17
2022	12

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 10
(Written Reply)

Asked by: Prof Hon William WONG

Date of meeting: 15 February 2023

Replied by: Secretary for the
Environment and Ecology

Reply

President,

To help Hong Kong achieve the target of carbon neutrality before 2050, the Government has allocated \$400 million to the Green Tech Fund (GTF) which was established in 2020 to promote decarbonisation in Hong Kong and provide better and more focused funding support for research and development (R&D) projects that can enhance environmental protection. The GTF supports R&D projects in the priority areas including net-zero electricity generation, energy saving and green buildings, green transport and waste reduction. All applications are vetted and considered by the GTF Assessment Committee which comprises members from the academia, the industry and green groups.

The first and second rounds of applications for the GTF ended in February 2021 and February 2022 respectively. A total of 288 applications were received. About 70% of the applications were submitted by designated local public research institutes, while some 30% were submitted by local companies. 22 projects involving a total grant of around \$100 million were approved following careful deliberation by the GTF Assessment Committee. 16 of the approved applications were submitted by designated local public research institutes, and the remaining 6 came from local companies. As the number of applications submitted by local companies was less than that from designated local public research institutes, the number of approved projects from local companies was correspondingly smaller.

GTF's "Guide to Applicants" provides guidance on application, and sets out the assessment criteria, including potential contributions to decarbonisation and environmental protection (a weighting of 40%), technical and management capability (a weighting of 30%), plan for further development of project deliverables (a weighting of 20%) and financial considerations (a weighting of 10%). The Guide has been uploaded to the GTF webpage (www.gtf.hk), and the

aforesaid assessment criteria are applicable to both public institutes and private companies.

The GTF webpage also provides other information relevant to the submission of applications, including “frequently asked questions”. It seeks to explain in detail the points to note when making an application, such as the assessment criteria and how the applicants may demonstrate their applications’ compliance with such criteria, with a view to enhancing applicants’ understanding of the application procedures.

Applications may not receive funding support for different reasons. According to our experience in handling the first and second rounds of applications, the main reason was that the project’s potential contribution to decarbonisation and environmental protection was not significant. Other reasons include applicants’ failure to submit sufficient information to support their technical and management capability, and the failure to provide any plan for further developing the project deliverables. All unsuccessful applicants were informed of the reasons for not being granted funding support.

To encourage and help eligible institutes and companies to apply for the GTF and to understand the assessment criteria, the GTF Secretariat will organise a briefing when the GTF is open for application. In the first and second rounds of applications, the GTF Secretariat issued over 1 600 and 1 700 invitation emails to the webinars respectively. The webinars covered introduction to the GTF, application procedures, priority themes, assessment criteria, as well as briefings by members of the GTF Assessment Committee on the major assessment considerations. Video recordings of the webinars have been uploaded to the GTF webpage for reference by members of the public and prospective applicants.

The GTF is now open for the third round of applications until 14 March 2023. To encourage eligible institutes and companies to apply for the GTF and to provide them with assistance, the GTF Secretariat organised a webinar in January this year, and issued close to 2 000 invitation emails to local companies, R&D centres, corporate tenants of the Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation and the Hong Kong Cyberport Management Company Limited, as well as designated local public research institutes. The GTF Secretariat also provides an email address and an enquiry hotline for handling enquiries on application for the GTF, and will continue to explore different means to enhanced communication with potential applicants, with a view to promoting R&D projects that can help Hong Kong decarbonise and enhance environmental protection.

- End -

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 11

(Written Reply)

Asked by: Hon SHIU Ka-fai

Date of meeting: 15 February 2023

Replied by: Secretary for Labour
and Welfare

Reply

President,

My reply to the question raised by the Member is as follows:

- (1) The Chief Executive mentioned in the 2022 Policy Address that many sectors in Hong Kong are facing manpower shortages. Relevant policy bureaux would listen to the views of the industries and formulate solutions with regard to their situation.

Insofar as the Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB) is concerned, we have formulated a Special Scheme to import care workers for residential care homes to address the acute shortage of care workers in the RCH sector by providing greater flexibility and more streamlined procedures to import care workers. We have consulted industry stakeholders on the implementation aspects of the Special Scheme, with a view to launching it in the second quarter of 2023.

Regarding construction industry, the Construction Industry Council released the latest “Construction Manpower Forecast” last week. The Development Bureau (DEVB) has indicated that it would make reference to the forecast data and assess how to enhance manpower supply through a multi-pronged strategy including leveraging local manpower resources, enhancing training and bringing in non-local resources as necessary, as well as to reduce manpower needs through productivity uplifting measures. DEVB’s target is to present the assessment and a holistic strategy for addressing manpower needs of the construction sector by mid-2023.

- (2) The Government launched a series of measures trawling for talents on 28 December 2022, including streamlining the General Employment Policy and the Admission Scheme for Mainland Talents and Professionals, such that for vacancies falling under the 13 professions with shortage of local supply as listed in the Talent List, employers are not required to provide proof to substantiate their difficulties in local recruitment in making applications for talent admission. The 13 professions currently under the Talent List are tabulated below:

1. Professionals in Compliance in Asset Management
2. Financial Professionals in Environmental, Social and Governance
3. Waste Treatment Specialists
4. Asset Management Professionals
5. Marine Insurance Professionals
6. Actuaries
7. Fintech Professionals
8. Data Scientists and Cyber Security Specialists
9. Innovation and Technology Experts
10. Naval Architects
11. Marine Engineers and Superintendents of Ships
12. Creative Industries and Performing Arts Professionals
13. Dispute Resolution Professionals and Transactional Lawyers

To reflect the latest shortage situation in various professions, the Government has commenced a new round of review of the Talent List of Hong Kong following the promulgation of the 2022 Policy Address. All relevant bureaux and departments have been invited to conduct research, and consult industry bodies and stakeholders of their responsible sectors. LWB coordinates the review of the Talent List, and is now consolidating the updates suggested by relevant sectors, with a view to completing the review by end-March 2023.

- (3) The Government draws reference from the experience of other countries and places from time to time. Having regard to the different circumstances of demography, economy and industry structure, etc. of various places, the Government reviews and

formulates the policy of labour importation that suits the needs of Hong Kong. On the premise of safeguarding the employment priority for local workers, the Government allows increasing the number of imported workers on an appropriate and regulated basis, with a view to alleviating the shortage of manpower in individual sectors/job categories. Employers may apply to the Labour Department on account of their actual operational circumstances for importation of labour at technician level or below under the Supplementary Labour Scheme so as to supplement skills not readily available in the local labour market.

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 12

(Written Reply)

Asked by Hon Dominic LEE

Date of meeting : 15 February 2023

Replied by : Secretary for Transport
and Logistics

Reply

President,

In consultation with relevant bureaux and departments, our reply to the Hon Dominic Lee's question is as follows:

- (1) & (2) The land lease conditions of the property development project above MTR Tai Wai Station were drawn up in accordance with established procedures and in consultation with relevant departments. Executed in 2015, the land lease contains provisions requiring the grantee to modify the footbridge at the junction of Che Kung Miu Road and Mei Tin Road in accordance with the scheme as approved by the Government (i.e. proposed road works gazetted and authorised under the statutory procedures in 2010) within the stipulated timeframe (subsequently extended to 30 September 2023), with a view to facilitating its connection to the buildings in the land lot.

According to the results of pedestrian flow survey submitted by the traffic consultant of the developer of the new shopping mall and the recent observation made by the Transport Department (TD), the escalators and lifts concerned have the capacity to cope with the pedestrian flow. Upon the commissioning of the shopping mall's exits to MTR Tai Wai Station and the public transport interchange, it will help divert the existing pedestrian flow travelling along the concerned escalators and lifts.

- (3) The Highways Department (HyD) is responsible for the maintenance of the footbridge concerned. As regards the graffiti

issue of the footbridge, HyD conducted a total of 15 graffiti cleaning operations between August 2022 and January 2023, and has informed the Police of unauthorized graffiti for follow-up actions. The Police have been stepping up patrols at graffiti black spots to prevent related illegal acts. Upon receipt of such reports, the Police will send officers to the scene to investigate and follow up. Depending on the circumstances, the Police may initiate prosecution under section 4(19) (nuisances committed in public places) and section 8(b) (other offences against good order) of the Summary Offences Ordinance (Cap. 228), and refer the case to relevant government departments for graffiti removal.

- (4) HyD regularly inspects the footbridge concerned, and will carry out necessary repair works in a timely manner in case damages of footbridge facilities (including gully gratings) are found. HyD has also arranged its contractors to perform regular cleansing of the bridge deck to remove stains that may lead to slippery floor, and conduct cleansing of the drainage system of the footbridge regularly to avoid blockage. HyD's staff has been recently deployed to inspect the site, and confirmed that the existing bridge deck and drainage system are in normal condition. The condition of the relevant gully gratings is generally satisfactory with no displacement issue found.

In respect of the placement of litter container, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) has currently placed a total of 7 litter containers at different entrances and exits of the concerned footbridge. Upon review, FEHD will place an additional litter container at a suitable location on the footbridge for public use. FEHD will continue to closely monitor the use of the litter containers thereat and take follow-up actions as necessary.

- (5) TD has invited the bus companies to explore the feasibility of providing additional signages at the footbridge. If such addition is confirmed to be feasible, TD will examine whether the proposals of the bus companies could facilitate the public to access the bus stops near to the footbridge without obstructing pedestrian sightline and flow.

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 13

(Written Reply)

Asked by: Hon Elizabeth QUAT

Date of meeting: 15 February 2023

Replied by: Secretary for Environment
and Ecology

Reply

President,

Our consolidated reply to the question raised by the Hon Elizabeth QUAT is set out below.

EcoPark, which came into operation in 2007, has a site area of about 20 hectares (ha) and it is one of the major initiatives of the Government for fostering the development of the local recycling industry. EcoPark is designated for use by the environmental and recycling industry and it offers the trade with long-term land lease at an affordable rental cost. Meanwhile, EcoPark offers together with a whole package of basic utilities including sea and land transport access, water and electricity supply, sewerage system and telecommunication system, etc. Common facilities such as internal road network, standard berthing spaces at the marine frontage, weighbridge, as well as the meeting room, seminar room and conference room inside the administration building, are available for use by the tenants, so as to help reducing their capital expenditure and encourage them to invest in more advanced technology and treatment processes. The total quantity of recyclables processed in EcoPark exceeded 1 million tonnes (over 200,000 tonnes / year on average) in the last 5 years.

The Environmental Protection Department (EPD) has been maintaining communication with the recycling industry to understand the actual needs of the industry in order to cope with its development. In response to the accumulation of experience and market changes, the EPD continues to adjust and optimize the operation strategy of the EcoPark, e.g. extending the lease terms from 10 to 20 years to provide a more stable and long-term investment environment for enterprises, and increasing the technical / rental weighting of the tender from 40 / 60 to 70 / 30 to encourage recyclers to develop advanced and value-added recycling technologies.

- (1) EcoPark tenants are operating on commercial principles and their business situations are subject to market competition and other market factors.

EcoPark tenants may move out due to various factors such as expiry of the lease, operational considerations or changes in business plans, etc. Meanwhile, a tenant manages to continue his operation in EcoPark through another open tender. As such, the occupancy rate of the EcoPark may vary from time-to-time. Currently, 90% of the EcoPark area (i.e. about 12.2 ha) has been utilised for waste recycling purposes. The remaining two sites with a total area of about 1.3 ha are available for development. The EPD conducted open tender on 31 October 2022 for one of the sites with an area of about 0.4 ha and the tender was closed on 20 January 2023. The response was positive and the relevant tenders are now being evaluated. It can show that EcoPark remains appealing to the recycling industry. The EPD will conduct tendering exercise for the remaining site of about 0.9 ha in due course.

- (2) The average rent of EcoPark is about HK\$2 per square foot. With the current occupancy rate at 90%, the total monthly rental income of EcoPark is about HK\$1.9 million. Meanwhile, the EPD employs a contractor for managing EcoPark. The contractor is responsible for daily operation and maintaining common facilities (including 8 berthing spaces at the marine frontage, weighbridge, road network, visitor centre, administration building, etc.); providing 24-hours surveillance camera monitoring and security services; managing the traffic within EcoPark to avoid obstruction; providing guided tour services and the related promotion and education services; managing EcoPark website and an on-line booking system to provide the latest EcoPark information to the public; assisting the EPD to conduct tendering exercise of EcoPark lots and conduct market sounding exercise; providing various support and advice to tenants and assisting them to communicate with government departments and to liaise with public utilities companies for applying the services; facilitating the collaboration between the tenants and promoting their businesses (e.g. participating in EcoExpo Asia to promote the tenants' businesses, organising the "Friends of EcoPark" scheme to promote collaborative partnership among the public / private sectors and the recycling industry, providing the recyclables to EcoPark tenants or adopt their products, encouraging waste reduction, reuse and recycling). Over 200 companies and organisations (including restaurants, hotels, shopping malls and property management of residential buildings, etc.) have become "2022 Friends of EcoPark". In addition, the contractor is responsible for implementing the environmental management system to monitor and audit environmental performance of the tenants according to the environmental measures stipulated in the Environmental Permit issued under the Environmental Impact Assessment Ordinance (Cap. 499). The management fee of the contractor is about HK\$1.7 million each month.

- (3) The promotion of local waste recycling forms an integral part of the waste management strategies of Hong Kong. Certain recyclables such as ferrous and non-ferrous metals are always in great demand with high market prices, thus their recycling outlets and operations in Hong Kong are primarily run by private recyclers on commercial principles. Led by the market, recycling of waste metals in Hong Kong has been in effective operation with a stable recovery rate of 90% or above.

As for major recyclables that are of low market values but of high proportions in the daily disposal of municipal solid waste in Hong Kong, or waste materials containing hazardous substances that may cause harm to the environment and human health if not properly treated or disposed of, the Government takes the initiative to play a proactive role by introducing a number of measures to enhance the performance of their recycling. Such measures include providing central collection services and expanding the community recycling network for different kinds of major recyclables, as well as implementing producer responsibility schemes for suitable types of waste. These measures help support the operation of the local recycling sector, including EcoPark tenants and other recyclers. Government policies should have due regard for a fair competitive business environment by supporting the industry as a whole instead of favouring individual companies (including EcoPark tenants), or else the efficiency of waste management will be reduced while the overall social costs will increase.

Waste lead-acid batteries (WLABs) are hazardous wastes subject to regulation under the Chemical Waste Control Scheme. The Scheme imposes comprehensive and strict “cradle to grave” control on the generation, storage, collection, transport and disposal of WLABs, aiming to ensure the proper management and disposal of WLABs in an environmentally friendly manner, thereby facilitating the development of a local circular economy for WLABs. In Hong Kong, there are several licensed private recycling facilities, one of which is a lead-acid battery recycling centre set up in EcoPark, providing services such as the collection, preliminary treatment and recycling of WLABs. To further support the relevant industries on the recycling of waste battery, the Government has banned the disposal of WLABs at landfills since 2020.

Currently, some of the waste vehicle tyres generated in Hong Kong are delivered to local recyclers for production of retreaded tyres or extraction of metals and rubber materials for recycling. The Highways Department is exploring and assessing the feasibility of the application of rubberised

bitumin in Hong Kong, in an effort to open up other local recycling options for waste tyres. A tenant in EcoPark also plans to increase its recycling capacity for waste tyres. We are considering the formulation of producer responsibility schemes for products like vehicle tyres and lead-acid batteries, and are planning to implement these schemes based on market-based model. This will allow stakeholders such as suppliers, retailers, collectors and recyclers to play a more active role in the schemes, with a view to achieving more efficient and cost-effective recycling arrangements.

As regards the collection of food waste, the Government has been transforming food waste collected to renewable energy at the Organic Resources Recovery Centre Phase 1 (O • PARK1) in Siu Ho Wan of North Lantau and the Food Waste / Sewage Sludge Anaerobic Co-digestion Trial Scheme at the Tai Po Sewage Treatment Works. At the same time, to promote the recycling of food waste, the EPD extended the scale of the Pilot Scheme on Food Waste Collection in 2021 by rolling out four collection service contracts in phases to provide point-to-point food waste collection services at relatively clustered public and private premises generating larger quantities of food waste, with a view to reducing the transportation cost. The first two contracts which mainly cover the Hong Kong Island, Kowloon and Islands District have been commenced to provide the collection service; while the remaining two contracts serving the New Territories are expected to commence in March 2023.

- (4) The EPD has been flexibly determining the area of the site for leasing according to market demand, which facilitates the entry and operation of different types of recyclers. In addition, when evaluating tenders, the EPD will also consider recyclers' recruitment plans, including the number of jobs created and the measures taken to recruit technical personnel, etc., as one of the considerations in calculating the technical scores of tenders. The overall technical score of the tender documents accounts for 70% to encourage recycling companies to develop advanced and value-added recycling technologies, rather than aiming at the highest price.

- (5) EcoPark offers the trade with long-term and stable land lease at an affordable rental cost, together with a whole package of basic utilities, to help reduce the expenditure of tenants and thereby encouraging them to invest in and adopt more advanced technologies and treatment processes. With these supports, EcoPark tenants can design and build recycling facilities and workshops suitable for their development needs in response to their specific business requirements.

Regarding the proposal on constructing a multi-storey building in EcoPark to facilitate the operation of smaller recyclers with fewer specific requirements for their factories, the EPD will proactively explore the availability of suitable location in EcoPark and, if so, the feasibility of the proposal. We will also invite development proposals from the local recycling sector to further enhance the support rendered by EcoPark to the industry.

- (6) The recycling industry in Hong Kong involves various stakeholders engaging in different businesses, ranging from collecting and exporting recyclables to offering downstream treatment facilities and services. Premising on maintaining a fair competitive business environment, the Government's overall policy is to develop the local recycling industry with the aim of relieving the burden on landfills and fostering a circular economy for recyclables. EcoPark tenants are all engaged in local recycling businesses and hence enjoy competitive edges in the rental payable, the term of use of land and the infrastructure available, as compared with recyclers engaging in the business of exporting recyclables. Furthermore, all regulated wastes to be exported from Hong Kong have to obtain permission from the authorities of the exporting / importing places in accordance with the requirements of the Basel Convention, and have to be transported to facilities recognised by the Government for proper handling. When the Government implements various producer responsibility schemes, priorities will be given to local stakeholders (such as suppliers, retailers, collectors and recyclers) to play a more active role so long as it is more cost-effective to do so.

- End -

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 14
(Written Reply)

Asked by Hon YIM Kong

Date of meeting : 15 February 2023

Replied by : Secretary for
Innovation, Technology and
Industry

Reply

President,

The Government has been dedicated to supporting enterprises to undergo digital transformation through different channels. The three years of epidemic have brought about great opportunities for enterprises to create new operation models and sources of income with the use of digital technologies. With the gradual commencement of regional cooperation projects, such as the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and the Belt and Road Initiative, the Government will continue to help enterprises increase their productivity proactively through digital transformation, and expand mutual access with other trade and industrial enterprises around the world to expand into overseas and Mainland markets.

Having consulted the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau (CEDB), our reply to both parts of the question is as follows:

The Digital Economy Development Committee chaired by the Financial Secretary set up four sub-groups in end-September 2022. These sub-groups invited relevant industry representatives and stakeholders to jointly make suggestions on accelerating the development of Hong Kong's digital economy. Among them, the sub-group on digital transformation is understanding through different channels the challenges encountered by small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the process of digital transformation and

the support required, so as to formulate corresponding recommendations that meet the digital transformation needs of SMEs for the Government's consideration.

As for the Distance Business (D-Biz) Programme, a time-limited programme launched by the Innovation and Technology Commission (ITC) under the Anti-Epidemic Fund in May 2020, it aimed to support enterprises to adopt information technology solutions to continue their business and services during the pandemic. The application period for the D-Biz programme ended on 31 October 2020. A total of 23 560 approved applications have completed the projects, involving total funding of around \$1.55 billion.

In order to assist enterprises/organisations in using technologies to improve productivity, or upgrade/ transform their business processes, ITC launched the Technology Voucher Programme (TVP) under the Innovation and Technology Fund in November 2016 to subsidise local enterprises/organisations in using technological services and solutions. TVP is now a regular funding scheme, providing funding for projects on a 3 (Government):1 (enterprise/organisation) matching basis. For each enterprise/organisation, the cumulative funding ceiling is \$600,000 and the maximum number of projects to be approved is six. As at end-2022, 19 462 applications were approved under TVP, among which 96% were from SMEs, with around 98% success rate, involving total funding of around \$3.27 billion.

On the other hand, the Hong Kong Productivity Council (HKPC) will continue to provide consultancy services, online forums and training etc., to expedite efforts in supporting digitalisation of SMEs. A series of services include:

- (a) introducing a free one-stop digital transformation solutions platform “Digital DIY Portal” that brings together digital transformation solutions, digital and innovation information and successful cases of digital transformation in industries, in order to assist local SMEs to embark on digital transformation;
- (b) assisting SMEs to streamline work processes, minimise labour-intensive processes and enhance operational efficiency through the adoption of big data consultancy, service robots, Internet of Things, smart operation and system integration, etc.;

- (c) organising online forums to help enterprises adapt to new modes of business operation through digital technologies and online business, and explore new clientele despite geographic constraints; and
- (d) holding physical and online HKPC Academy training activities to assist around 30 000 trainees in mastering new technologies and knowledge management. The courses cover digital and management skills under the framework of “future skills”.

Furthermore, the Government provides various funding schemes to assist enterprises in enhancing their competitiveness, including the use of electronic channels for product promotion to develop cross-border e-commerce. Among the various schemes, the funding scope of the Dedicated Fund on Branding, Upgrading and Domestic Sales covers the support to enterprises in developing e-commerce and integrating online-offline modes of sales and marketing, such as establishing online sales platforms, setting up online shops on third-party online sales platforms, incorporating electronic payment functions into their websites and developing mobile applications, etc. In addition, the SME Export Marketing Fund provides funding support for local enterprises to participate in and conduct export promotion activities through electronic platforms or media.

The aforementioned measures are conducive to improving distance business environments and promoting the informatisation of Hong Kong’s enterprises, enhancing mutual access with enterprises in other places.

-End-

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 15

(Written Reply)

Asked by : Hon YUNG Hoi-yan

Date of meeting : 15 February 2023

Replied by : Secretary for Commerce and
Economic Development

Reply

President,

The reply to the three parts of the question is as follows:

- (1) The Dedicated Fund on Branding, Upgrading and Domestic Sales (BUD Fund) was established in 2012. As at end 2022, a total of 5 476 applications had been approved, with a funding amount of over \$3.232 billion, the details of which are shown in **Annex 1**. In addition, the distribution of major target markets, major industries and project scopes of the approved applications are shown in **Annex 2**.
- (2) The Trade and Industry Department (TID), which is responsible for administering the BUD Fund, and Hong Kong Productivity Council (HKPC), which serves as the Programme Secretariat, have not received any complaints or requests for assistance from enterprises regarding consultant agencies overcharging for assisting in applications. According to the Guide to Application, enterprises are required to submit applications by themselves and appoint their staff members to act as the project coordinator and deputy project coordinator for overseeing the implementation of the project.

In recent years, the Government introduced a series of measures to facilitate enterprises in submitting applications, such as simplifying the application form and redesigning the webpage of the BUD Fund to provide graphic illustration of the application process, application tips and success stories, etc., so that enterprises can obtain simple and clear information on application. The Government also provides free one-on-one consultation service to enterprises, through HKPC and the SME ReachOut established in 2020, to answer enterprises' enquiries relating to application, so that they can plan projects and submit

applications by themselves, without having to resort to consultant agencies for assistance.

In addition, the Government continues to provide “four-in-one” integrated services through the four consolidated small and medium enterprises (SMEs) centres (i.e. the Support and Consultation Centre for SMEs under the TID, the SME Centre under Hong Kong Trade Development Council, the SME One under HKPC, and the TecONE under Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation), so that enterprises can obtain information on the BUD Fund from any of the centres. Enterprises can also access to such information on the “SME Link” webpage of the TID and the “Biz Expands Easy” online platform of HKPC.

- (3) The Government has been reviewing the operation and implementation of the BUD Fund on an on-going basis. HKPC will examine the supporting documents provided by applicants to confirm that they fulfil the eligibility criteria, and will follow up and verify the contents of the applications with the enterprises via phone, email or meeting based on actual circumstances and needs. If it is found that an applicant does not meet the eligibility, the application will be rejected. HKPC will also conduct on-site inspections on selected approved projects to prevent misuse of funds. As regards the approved projects, if the enterprises fail to complete the relevant projects or violate other terms of the funding agreement, the projects will be terminated. Subject to the actual circumstances of individual cases, applicants will be required to return to the Government all or part of the project funding disbursed.

BUD Fund Annual Statistics on the Applications Received, Applications Approved and Relevant Funding Amounts
(as at end 2022)

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
Number of applications received ^{Note}	519	430	254	404	625	578	1 082	1 721	3 521	2 580	2 637	14 351
Number of applications approved	92	103	85	129	390	343	479	719	881	899	1 356	5 476
Amount of funding approved (\$ million)	36.42	47.96	41.07	54.28	103.73	123.12	217.88	419.27	584.63	634.48	969.65	3,232.48
Average amount of funding approved (\$ million)	0.396	0.466	0.483	0.421	0.266	0.359	0.455	0.583	0.664	0.706	0.715	0.590

Note: The applications received may not be processed in the same year. The figures also include applications that could not be processed owing to the lack of necessary information and applications withdrawn voluntarily by enterprises.

Distribution of Major Target Markets of the Applications Approved
(as at end 2022)

	Major target markets (in descending order according to the number of applications approved)	Number of applications approved ^{Note} (percentage out of the total number of the applications approved (i.e. 5 476))
1.	The Mainland	4 357 (79.6%)
2.	Singapore	410 (7.5%)
3.	Malaysia	339 (6.2%)
4.	Thailand	236 (4.3%)
5.	Vietnam	219 (4.0%)
6.	Macao SAR	157 (2.9%)
7.	Indonesia	152 (2.8%)
8.	Australia	149 (2.7%)
9.	The Philippines	116 (2.1%)
10.	Cambodia	72 (1.3%)

Note: Some applications involve more than one target market, resulting in the difference between the sum of applications approved for individual target markets and the total number of applications approved.

Distribution of Major Industries of the Applications Approved
(as at end 2022)

	Major industries (in descending order according to the number of applications approved)	Number of applications approved (percentage out of the total number of the applications approved (i.e. 5 476))
1.	Wholesale and Retail	1 270 (23.2%)
2.	Import and Export Trade	722 (13.2%)
3.	Textiles and Clothing	336 (6.1%)
4.	Information Technology	302 (5.5%)
5.	Electronics	301 (5.5%)
6.	Metal Products	179 (3.3%)
7.	Plastics	156 (2.8%)
8.	Electrical Appliances	114 (2.1%)
9.	Creative Industries	114 (2.1%)
10.	Toys	109 (2.0%)
11.	Advertisement, Sales and Marketing	107 (2.0%)

Distribution of Project Scopes of the Applications Approved
(as at end 2022)

	Project scopes	Number of applications approved (percentage out of the total number of the applications approved (i.e. 5 476)) ^{Note}
1.	Branding	55 (1.0%)
2.	Upgrading and restructuring	337 (6.2%)
3.	Promoting sales	1 554 (28.4%)
4.	Covering branding as well as upgrading and restructuring	85 (1.6%)
5.	Covering branding as well as promoting sales	1 082 (19.8%)
6.	Covering upgrading and restructuring as well as promoting sales	1 592 (29.1%)
7.	Covering branding, upgrading and restructuring as well as promoting sales	771 (14.1%)

Note: The sum of the percentages is not 100% owing to rounding.

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 16

(Written Reply)

Asked by Hon Holden CHOW

Date of meeting : 15 February 2023

Replied by : Secretary for Transport
and Logistics

Reply

President,

Having consulted the Transport Department (TD), our reply to the various parts of the question raised by the Hon Holden Chow is as follows:

- (1) In the fourth quarter of 2022, the average daily patronage at the Tai Lam Tunnel Bus-Bus Interchange (TLTBBI) was about 19 800, of which about 8 150 and 11 650 travelled to the urban areas and Yuen Long respectively. TD does not keep the statistics of the daily patronage at TLTBBI during peak hours.
- (2) The proposal involves retrofitting an additional lift connecting TLTBBI and the nearby Tai Lam bus turnaround area at Pat Heung Road to facilitate passengers, including the elderly and persons with disabilities, to access the BBI. Noting the proposal involves construction of pedestrian facilities to enhance the accessibility of the hillside areas, the Government will consider the proposal concerned under the ambit of hillside escalator links and elevator systems (HELs). At present, we are pressing ahead with the proposals selected for priority implementation under the revised assessment mechanism for HELs. Subject to the implementation progress of these proposals and factors such as the allocation of available resources, we will review the proposal concerned under the assessment mechanism in a timely manner.

- Ends -

LEGCO QUESTION 17

(Written Reply)

Asked by: Prof Hon CHAN Wing-kwong Date of meeting: 15 February 2023

Replied by: Secretary for Health

Reply:

President:

According to information from the World Health Organization (WHO), some COVID-19 patients may experience mid- and long-term effects from the virus, collectively known as “Post COVID-19 condition”, or “Long COVID”. The Government strives to provide suitable care and support services for patients recovered from COVID-19, and also supports a number of studies on “Long COVID” in order to support the formulation of better policies for assisting recovered patients to receive appropriate care.

In consultation with the Hospital Authority (HA), my reply to the various parts of the question raised by the Prof Hon CHAN Wing-kwong is as follows:

(1)

Since April 2020, the Health Bureau (HHB) and the Health and Medical Research Fund (HMRF) have approved a total of \$556 million to support 70 COVID-19 related research studies from bench to bedside and at the community level through application of new technologies. These studies address important research areas including transmissibility and infectivity of the virus, effective detection and surveillance, prevention strategies of the disease and development of treatments and therapies.

To better understand the impact of “Long COVID” in Hong Kong, a total of seven studies conducted by The University of Hong Kong, The Chinese University of Hong Kong and The Hong Kong Polytechnic University have been supported. These studies cover a wide variety of topics, ranging from understanding the prevalence of clinical manifestations of “Long COVID” and investigating the prognostic values of various biomarkers, to the effects on physiological functions such as the lungs and the cardiopulmonary system, as

well as neuropsychiatric sequelae. In addition, different interventions targeting prevention, treatment and rehabilitation have also been tested, including the oral microbiome formula, centre-based and novel digital-based cardiopulmonary rehabilitation programmes, cognitive behavioural therapy and mindfulness-based psychological programmes.

These studies last two to five years and all of them are expected to be completed in the second half of 2026. Some initial findings have been disseminated in press conference or published in scientific journals in 2022. For example, one study reported the beneficial effects of a cardiopulmonary rehabilitation programme in COVID-19 survivors; another study discovered that post-COVID gut microbiome dysbiosis could persist for more than one year and was closely associated with the symptoms of “Long COVID”; and a study reported the occurrence of neuropsychiatric morbidities one year after COVID-19 infection.

(2)

The HA has carried out the collation and analysis of medical related data of “Long COVID” in accordance with the definition of “Long COVID” by the WHO. Taking reference from the HA’s provisional figures, about 2 800 general outpatients were diagnosed with “Long COVID” from August 15, 2022 to February 6, 2023. The main symptoms include persistent cough, shortness of breath generalized weakness. As the relevant work on data collection and analysis is still in progress, no further figures are available at this stage.

The Government has not compiled statistics on medical consultations made to private healthcare institutions in connection with “Long COVID” symptoms. Currently, most private healthcare institutions have not uploaded patients’ medical records to the Electronic Health Record Sharing System (eHealth), making it practically difficult to collect the relevant data.

(3) to (5)

The HA launched in 2020 the “Special Chinese Medicine (CM) Out-patient Programme for COVID-19 Infected Persons” to provide eligible Hong Kong residents who have been infected with COVID-19 in Hong Kong and have completed isolation but still have COVID-19 sequelae with free CM general consultations based on Chinese medicine practitioners’ clinical assessment at the

Chinese Medicine Clinics cum Training and Research Centres (CMCTRs) in the 18 districts. In response to the sharp rise in the demand for CM rehabilitation services amid the fifth wave of the epidemic, the HA has, in collaboration with the CMCTRs, taken various measures swiftly to enhance the service capacity to meet the increased demand. As at end-January 2023, nearly 440 000 consultations for more than 100 000 recovered patients were provided by the CMCTRs.

In addition to providing government-subsidised CM out-patient services for eligible Hong Kong residents, the 18 CMCTRs also provide other non-government-subsidised CM services to cope with the healthcare needs of persons seeking consultations. Upon the Government's official cancellation of the arrangement of issuing isolation orders on 30 January 2023, members of the public with healthcare needs can still seek medical consultations at the 18 CMCTRs. The HA will closely monitor the service demand and co-ordinate with the CMCTRs to mobilise resources to enhance their services when necessary.

The HA has all along been in support of the Government to step up the involvement of CM in the whole process of COVID-19 epidemic prevention, treatment and rehabilitation. Apart from providing CM services through the HA to COVID-19 patients, the Government has enhanced the use of CM on all fronts at different levels via various modes (including the tele-advice hotline, outreach or telemedicine services, dispensing and delivery of CM drugs, etc.) and has provided CM support to confirmed patients, persons under isolation/quarantine and recovered patients in need of follow-up rehabilitation amid the fifth wave of the epidemic, thereby giving full play to the strengths and functions of CM. The "Together We Unite - Chinese Medicine COVID-19 Rehabilitation Scheme", funded by the Chinese Medicine Development Fund (CMDf) under the HHB and implemented by the Federation of the Hong Kong Chinese Medicine Practitioners and Chinese Medicines Traders Association, has been launched earlier to meet the needs of recovered patient for rehabilitation. Considering that the resources of Hong Kong's CM sector are mainly concentrated in the private market, the Government will continue to work closely with stakeholders in the sector to provide the public with appropriate CM support.

(6)

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) raises public awareness about “Long COVID” through various channels and encourages COVID-19 vaccination as a preventive measure. Apart from dissemination of relevant information through the “COVID-19 Thematic Website” (<https://www.coronavirus.gov.hk>), the CHP also explains to the general public about the health impact of “Long COVID” and the preventive measures through various channels such as social media, Announcements in the Public Interest, short video clips, and interviews and seminars with medical experts, etc..

On the other hand, the HA clinical teams will continue to identify for any complications or persistent symptoms of “Long COVID” based on patients’ signs and symptoms, provide necessary treatment, rehabilitation support and health recommendations accordingly, and refer them to other rehabilitation services from different specialties, allied health and psychological support services, according to clinical needs.

As regards CM, the CMDf has also been funding applications for training, promotion and research projects related to the COVID-19 epidemic initiated by the sector. Some of the funded projects have provided health information and advice on the management and rehabilitation of COVID-19 to the public through publications and short video clips.

- End -

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 18

(Written Reply)

Asked by Hon Rock Chen

Date of meeting : 15 February 2023

Replied by : Secretary for
Commerce and Economic
Development

Reply

President,

In consultation with the Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau (CSTB) and the Civil Service Bureau (CSB), the reply to various part of the question raised by the Hon Rock Chen is as follows:

(1) To further promote Chinese culture and Hong Kong's arts and cultural achievements to the overseas community, the CSTB sets aside dedicated funding each year for the Economic and Trade Offices (ETOs) in the Mainland and overseas to support arts groups / artists from Hong Kong in staging arts and cultural activities outside Hong Kong.

The overseas ETOs have been proactively telling the good stories of Hong Kong to overseas interlocutors from various sectors through multiple channels. Hong Kong is back on the international stage and the ETOs would enhance promotion of Hong Kong's unique advantages where we enjoy the motherland's strong support and our close connections to the world under "one country, two systems", and also the limitless opportunities brought about by Hong Kong's proactive participation in the Belt and Road Initiative and Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area Development. Specific key performance indicators for telling the good stories of Hong Kong are set out in the 2022 Policy Address, among which the ETOs will increase the promotional events by 20% in 2024 as compared to 2022.

(2) The National 14th Five-Year Plan and the Development Plan for the Tourism Sector during the 14th Five-Year Plan Period categorically stated its support for Hong Kong in developing into an East-meets-West Centre for international cultural exchange and an international aviation hub. Moreover, the Outline Development Plan for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area and the Culture and Tourism Development Plan for Guangdong-Hong

Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area support Hong Kong in developing into an international tourism hub and a core demonstration zone for multi-destination tourism while setting out the guiding direction for the development of Hong Kong's tourism industry. Riding on Hong Kong's advantages as an international tourist destination and a bridge between the Mainland and cities around the world, the Hong Kong Tourism Board leverages its 15 worldwide offices covering the Mainland, Asia, Australia, Europe and the Americas to tell good stories of Hong Kong and promote Hong Kong's East-meets-West unique experience to visitors in source markets, including fascinating arts and cultural activities and attractions, as well as diverse dining, traditional and cultural experiences.

The Hong Kong Trade Development Council (HKTDC) will also continue to promote Hong Kong's unique advantages under the "one country, two systems" through its 50 offices worldwide, and the collaboration with 47 Hong Kong Business Associations in 36 countries and regions under the network of the Federation of Hong Kong Business Associations Worldwide, publicising Hong Kong's business and investment opportunities in the "dual circulation" development pattern, promoting Hong Kong as a two-way global investment, trade and business hub. As the global pandemic situation eases, the HKTDC has prepared to take forward a series of promotion events in the Mainland and around the world, including organising the "Guangdong-Hong Kong Co-operation Week" in Guangdong in May and the flagship event "Think Business, Think Hong Kong" in Thailand in July.

(3) The CSB has all along, through different kinds of training and exchange activities, broadened civil servants' international horizons and fostered the sharing of experiences with officers in other places, with a view to telling the world the good stories of Hong Kong and our country.

Starting from 2019, the Civil Service College (CSC) under CSB has collaborated with the Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (OCMFA) in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) to provide training on the country's foreign affairs. A series of monthly talks delivered by relevant officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, covering various topics such as "In-depth Study of Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy for a Brighter Future of Hong Kong", "China's Relations with ASEAN, Japan, India and Other Neighbouring Countries", "China-United States Relations", "Strengthening International Communication and Telling Good Stories of China" have been held. The talks aim to deepen civil servant's understanding of the international scene and our country's foreign policy, enabling them to act in better concert with the country's foreign affairs policy in handling the relevant areas of work. Twelve talks have been successfully held so far with a total attendance of 3 200 civil servants in the directorate and senior ranks. In 2023, CSC also plans to continue its collaboration with OCMFA to organise seminars on the country's foreign affairs, so as to deepen civil servants' understanding of the relevant topics.

The HKSAR Government attaches great importance to youth development and training of public officers and is committed to facilitating young public officers to widen their horizons outside Hong Kong. With the support of the Central People's Government (CPG) and the assistance of the OCMFA, the HKSAR took part in the United Nations (UN) Junior Professional Officer (JPO) Programme for the first time in 2019, with five young public officers recommended by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) participating in the JPO Programme. They are gradually completing their tenure since last year with outstanding performance, which was highly commended by the UN side. Starting from late 2021, the HKSAR Government has started working with the OCMFA to make arrangements for the second batch of young public officers to join the programme, and with the recommendation of MFA, 12 young public officers have been successfully selected. They will assume different posts in the UN offices in New York, the United States; Geneva, Switzerland; Vienna, Austria; and Nairobi, Kenya, as Chinese personnel, and are expected to report duty to the UN in early 2023. We look forward to these 12 young people giving their best in the international arena, serving as the bridge of the country and the world, as well as shouldering the role as a representative of the HKSAR to tell good stories of Hong Kong and promote Hong Kong's abilities, strengths, charisma and competitiveness to the world.

CSB also arranges attachments to regional and international organisations, such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation Secretariat and the Financial Action Task Force, for civil servants and sponsors middle and senior-level civil servants with potential to attend executive development courses at renowned institutions to broaden their perspectives. However, owing to the epidemic, we have suspended training outside Hong Kong for civil servants since 2020. We will continuously assess the training needs of civil servants and provide them with timely training opportunities as appropriate.

Apart from training outside Hong Kong arranged for civil servants at different levels by CSB and CSC, individual departments/grades also arrange for their staff to attend training and exchange activities outside Hong Kong to cater for the departments/grades' development needs.

LEGCO QUESTION NO.19

(Written Reply)

Asked by: Hon CHAN Pui-leung

Date of meeting: 15 February 2023

Replied by: Secretary for Health

Reply

President,

In relation to Hon Chan's question, my reply in consultation with the Hospital Authority (HA) is as follows -

In order to strengthen support for COVID-19 infected persons in the community, the HA activated Designated Clinics for COVID-19 Confirmed Cases (Designated Clinics) since mid-February 2022 and started providing tele-consultation services to infected persons at the end of July 2022. In response to the Government's cessation of issuing isolation orders from 30 January 2023, COVID-19 infected persons are no longer isolated and are free to go out for medical consultations, the Designated Clinics and tele-consultation services provided by the HA for isolated COVID-19 infected persons were also terminated on the same day.

(1) and (2)

During the activation period of the Designated Clinics, infected persons could make an appointment at Designated Clinics through the "Book Tele/DC" function on the HA's one-stop mobile app "HA Go" or calling the relevant Designated Clinics. High risk infected persons (including elderly aged 70 or above, children aged 5 or below, women at 28 or more weeks of pregnancy, and immunocompromised patients) could also call the "Care Booking Line" of the relevant Designated Clinics to make an appointment for medical consultation services. For those infected persons who intended to receive tele-consultation services, they could make an appointment through the "Book Tele/DC" function on "HA Go". In general, infected persons would be provided with the earliest consultation timeslot on the same day or the next day when making an appointment through the mobile app or by phone. From the mid of February 2022 to the end of January 2023, the HA's Designated Clinics and tele-

consultation services have provided a total of over 511,600 attendances, of which around 130,100 attendances were provided to high risk infected persons aged 5 or below or 70 or above. The Designated Clinics have provided over 296,600 attendances, of which around 88,000 attendances were provided to infected persons aged 5 or below or 70 or above. As for tele-consultation services, over 214,900 attendances were provided, of which around 42,100 attendances were provided to infected persons aged 5 or below or 70 or above. Among the overall attendances, more than 67,500 attendances were provided to high risk infected persons making appointments via the “Care Booking Line”.

(3)

To meet the overall needs of COVID-19 infected persons and other patients, the HA needs to flexibly deploy manpower to adjust various services in response to the development of the epidemic. Therefore, the operating expenditure of Designated Clinics and tele-consultation services for 2022/23 is not readily available. Taking reference of the attendance cost of GOPCs of the HA, the basic operating expenditure of Designated Clinics and tele-consultations services is estimated at about 300 million, excluding the costs of other additional resources required such as the implementation of strengthened infection control measures, the accessories required for Designated Clinics and tele-consultation services, additional manpower and support in the consultation workflow for COVID-19 infected persons, prescription of COVID-19 oral drugs for appropriate infected persons and related drug delivery services, etc.

(4)

Designated Clinics and tele-consultation services can effectively support the infected persons in the community, especially the medical needs of persons with mild symptoms, and are an important part of the multi-tiered triage and treatment strategy. This enables the public hospitals of the HA to concentrate on caring for infected persons who required to stay in the hospitals, thus strengthening the ability and capacity of the healthcare system.

In accordance with the latest development of the epidemic situation, the HA has strengthened its services to sustain support for COVID-19 infected persons in the community. At present, all General Outpatient Clinics (GOPCs) provide treatments for COVID-19 infected persons. The HA has also reserved consultation quotas for infected persons with higher risks to make appointments. They may also call the HA support hotline 1836115. In addition, the HA has

enhanced the support of outreach medical teams for infected persons in residential care homes.

The HA will continue to closely monitor different service needs, and adjust services according to the situation and demand with a view to providing appropriate treatment for patients.

(5) The HA has been striving to introduce modern technology to provide patient-centered healthcare services, in order to provide a better experience for patients and to improve service quality. As technology evolves, the HA is actively implementing telehealth so that suitable patients can receive the healthcare services of the HA without visiting hospitals or clinics personally. This also helps alleviate the over-crowded situations in hospitals or clinics.

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic, the HA has been striving to re-engineer various service models, where practicable, and explore the use of information and telecommunication technology in different types of workflow to continuously provide medical services.

With reference to the experience during the epidemic, the HA is currently providing tele-consultation services through "HA Go" and other platforms for suitable patients. Relevant services are being implemented in some Specialist Out-patient Clinics, nurse clinics, allied health services and outreach services. However, telehealth has its limitations and may not be suitable for all patients or circumstances. For example, patients who need to undergo physical examinations by the doctors are required to visit hospitals personally to complete the whole examination procedure. Generally speaking, the HA will provide tele-consultations services to follow-up patients who are stable, do not need clinical examinations, and are physically located in Hong Kong. The HA will continue to actively promote the application of telehealth to appropriate healthcare services progressively, with a view to benefiting more patients in need. The Government will also continue to explore with the HA more opportunities to make use of telehealth. On the other hand, when developing primary healthcare care and the associated eHealth supporting system, the Government will further study the feasibility of providing telehealth services and how to provide more convenience for it.

-Ends-

LEGCO QUESTION NO.20
(Written Reply)

Asked by Hon Kenneth LAU

Date of meeting : 15 February, 2023

Replied by : Secretary for Environment
and Ecology

Reply

President,

The Government has been working closely with the Heung Yee Kuk to take continuous actions and allocate resources, including the implementation of the village sewerage programme (hereinafter referred to as “the Programme”), which progressively provides public sewerage facilities in village areas to improve rural environmental hygiene conditions, while enhancing the water quality of rivers and coastal waters at the same time. The Government will take into account the level of improvement to the environment by the Programme, density of village population, preference of residents, technical feasibility, cost effectiveness and resources availability, etc. in taking forward the progressive extension of relevant sewerage works to unsewered village areas.

The Government’s consolidated response to the questions raised by Hon Kenneth LAU is as follows:

- (1) As at end of 2022, the Programme has covered 581 villages, of which the sewerage systems for 263 villages with relatively large de jure population and in close proximity to public sewerage works have been completed. Separately, public sewerage works for another 62 villages are currently under construction. Relevant details are set out in Annex 1. We are actively planning relevant projects for the remaining villages according to the aforementioned considerations.
- (2) Currently, the Drainage Services Department is carrying out village sewerage projects in various districts. Relevant details are set out in Annex 2.

- (3) For villages with public sewers in place, all relevant government departments would collaborate in assisting the village households to carry out the connection works. So far, about 95% of the village households have completed the connection works to public sewers. The main reasons for not being able to complete the relevant connection works include limited land available due to the original house design or unauthorized building works, or encroachment on other people's land, obstruction from underground utilities or sewers, and inadequate hydraulic gradient at the village house site, etc. Nevertheless, those village households may continue to use septic tanks or other original sewerage facilities; and ensure their normal operation through regular maintenance, so as to alleviate any potential environmental hygiene problems that may be caused by sewage discharge. We will continue to provide appropriate assistance to the village households and help them to complete the connection works to public sewers.
- (4) To facilitate the connection of private sewers to public ones by village households, we have made every effort to cover all village houses in the village area and extend the branch sewers up to the boundaries of private land at the same time to shorten the connection distance and reduce the cost of connection works during project planning and design of the village sewerage system. Since the sewerage connecting pipes and the terminal manholes of each of the village houses are all located in private lots, they are private properties and facilities that belonged to and dedicated to be used solely by the concerned village houses. Village households should be responsible for the cost of the relevant connection works. Such arrangement is also in line with the Government's principles of fairness and proper use of resources.

The Building Maintenance Grant Scheme for Needy Owners (hereinafter referred to as "BMGSNO") aims to subsidise owners with financial difficulties (including elderly owners aged 60 or above who pass the means test) to repair their self-occupied properties. The scope of works eligible under BMGSNO includes improvement works for building services and sanitary facilities, covering works to connect village house sewers to public sewers. BMGSNO's income and asset limits for elderly applicants have been relaxed since its launch in 2020. Currently, the monthly income limit for elderly applicants is \$10,430 (for singletons) / \$15,810 (for couples); whilst the asset limit is \$1,122,000 (for singletons) / \$1,704,000 (for couples). For fiscal prudence and efficient use of public funds, we consider it appropriate to set income and asset limits under BMGSNO.

-End-

**Details of villages where public sewerage works installed /
under construction**

(i) Villages with works of installation of public sewerage systems completed

District (Number of villages)	Village name	Number of houses (About)	Planned population (About)
North District (44)	Fan Leng Lau, Ha Heung Yuen, Heung Yuen Wai, Hung Leng (Part), Kai Leng, Kan Lung Tsuen, Kan Tau Wai, Kaw Liu, Leng Tsai, Lo Wai, Ma Mei Ha, Ma Mei Ha Leng Tsui, Ma Wat Wai, Ng Uk Tsuen, Pak Hok Shan, Ping Che, Ping Yeung, San Uk Tsuen, San Wai, Ta Kwu Ling, Tai Po Tin (Part), Tai Tau Leng, Tai Tong Wu, Tong Fong, Tsung Pak Long, Tsung Yuen Ha, Tsz Tong Tsuen, Tung Kok Wai, Wing Ning Tsuen (Part), Wing Ning Wai, Yin Kong, Chuk Yuen (North), Chuk Yuen (South), Ping Kong, Ha Tam Shui Hang, Muk Min Tau, Nga Yiu Tau (North), San Tsuen (North), Shan Tsui, Sheung Tam Shui Hang, Tsiu Hang (North), Wu Shek Kok, Yim Tso Ha, Tong To	4 360	32 800
Yuen Long (16)	Chun Hing San Tsuen, Kwan Lok San Tsuen, Tsoi Uk Tsuen, Ying Lung Wai, Sha Chau Lei Tsuen (1), Chung Sam Wai, Sai Tau Wai, Lam Uk Tsuen, Tung Tau Wai San Tsuen, Yeung Uk Tsuen (North of Yuen Long), Tung Tau Wai, Sai Pin Wai, Fuk Hing Tsuen, Nam Pin Wai, Tong Yan San Tsuen, Tai Tong Tsuen (Part)	2 030	15 300
Tsuen Wan	Pai Min Kok Village, Sham Tseng	260	1 600

Annex 1

District (Number of villages)	Village name	Number of houses (About)	Planned population (About)
(12)	Commercial New Village, Sham Tseng Kau Tsuen, Sham Tseng San Tsuen, Sham Tseng East Village, Sham Tseng Village, Sham Tseng West Village, Shu On Terrace, Ting Kau Village, Tsing Fai Tong New Village, Yuen Tun Village, Tsing Lung Tau Village (including Tsing Lung Tau New Village)		
Kwai Ching (5)	Lam Tin Resite Village, Tai Wong Ha Resite Village, Yim Tin Kok Resite Village, San Uk Resite Village, Tsing Yi Hui/Fung Shue Wo Resite Village	280	2 500
Tuen Mun (10)	Tuen Tsz Wai (Part), Tseng Tau Sheung Tsuen (Part), Tsing Chuen Wai (Part), Tsing Shan Tsuen, Tseng Tau Chung Tsuen, Fu Tei Ha Tsuen, Fuk Hang Tsuen (Upper), Lam Tei, Kei Lun Wai, Yeung Siu Hang	1 200	9 900
Tai Po (78)	Tai Wo, Kau Lung Hang Lo Wai, Kau Lung Hang San Wai, Tai Hang, Nam Wa Po, Wai Tau Tsuen, To Yuen Tung, Chuen Shui Tseng, Pak Tin Kong, Sha Pa, Shek Kwu Lung (Tai Po) (Part), A Shan Tseng Tau, Ko Tin Hom, Kau Shi Wai, Yin Tse Lane, Fong Ma Po, Lung A Pai, Ha Wun Yiu, Shan Tong New Village, Shuen Wan Chim Uk (Part 1), Wo Tong Pui, Shan Liu, Lai Pek Shan San Tsuen, Chai Kek, Wo Liu, Ma Po Mei, Sha Lan (Part 1), Tsiu Lam, Pak Ngau Shek Ha Tsuen, San Uk Pai, Kau Liu Ha,	12 610	75 800

District (Number of villages)	Village name	Number of houses (About)	Planned population (About)
	Shuen Wan Lei Uk, Shui Wo, Chung Uk Tsuen, Mak Uk, San Wai Tsai, San Tong, Ng Tung Chai, Cheung Uk Tei, Tai Mei Tuk, Tai Mong Che, Wai Ha, Pak Ngau Shek Sheung Tsuen, Tung Tse, Yim Tin Tsai (Luen Yick), She Shan Tsuen, Hang Ha Po, Wong Chuk Tsuen, San Uk Tsai, Tin Liu Ha, Lam Tsuen San Tsuen, Tai Om, Yung Shue O, Lai Chi Shan, Shuen Wan Wai Ha, Fung Yuen Lo Tsuen, Pan Chung (Part), Sam Mun Tsai New Village, Chuk Hang, Tong Min Tsuen, Po Sam Pai, San Tau Kok, Lo Tsz Tin, Ping Long, Lung Mei (including Ng Uk Tsuen), Ting Kok, Ha Hang, Kam Shan, Nam Hang (Part 1) and Pan Chung San Tsuen, San Uk Ka (Part), Sheung Wun Yiu, Shui Wai, Ying Pun Ha, Yue Kok, Lai Chi Hang, Tai Po Kau, Tin Sam (Tai Po) (Part)		
Sha Tin (44)	Pai Tau, Lok Lo Ha (including Ho Tung Lau), Fui Yiu Ha (Sha Tin), Hung Mui Kuk, Tsok Pok Hang, Pat Tsz Wo, To Fung Shan, Sha Tin Fisherman's New Village, Wong Chuk Yeung, Shek Kwu Lung (Sha Tin), Wo Liu Hang, Pai Tau Hang, Wong Nai Tau, Kwai Tei New Village, Sha Tin Heights, Ha Wo Che, Tai Lam Liu, Ngau Pei Sha (Part 2), Fo Tan, Tung Lo Wan, Tai Shui Hang, Tin Liu, Wu Kwai Sha New Village, Siu Lek Yuen, Wu Kai Sha Village, Sheung Wo Che, Chap Wai Kon, Chap Wai Kon New Village, Ha Keng Hau, Hin	3 900	32 400

District (Number of villages)	Village name	Number of houses (About)	Planned population (About)
	Tin, Kak Tin, Pak Tin, Sha Tin Tau, Sha Tin Wai, Sheung Keng Hau, Tai Wai, Tin Sam (Sha Tin), To Shek, Tsang Tai Uk, Heung Fan Liu (West), Kau To, ,Che Kung Miu, , Nam Shan, Tai Che		
Sai Kung (25)	Pak Kong Au (Part), Lung Wo Tsuen, O Mun Village, Yu Uk Village (Part), Silverstrand, Heng Mei Deng Tsuen, Fui Yiu Ha (Sai Kung), Chan Uk Tsuen, Sha Ha, O Pui Village (Part), Wo Tong Kong (Mang Kung Uk), Hung Uk, Wai Sum Village, Tai Ping Tsuen, Tui Min Hoi, Tan Cheung, Sha Kok Mei (Part), Fei Ngo Shan, Po Lo Che, Sai Kung Old Town, Tai Wan, Pak Kong, Kap Pin Long (Part), Mau Ping New Village (Part), Wong Chuk Shan San Tsuen (Part)	1 850	15 400
Islands (29)	Central Cheung Chau Old Town, Peng Chau (Part), Kam Shan Terrace, Ko Long (Part 1), Po Wah Yuen (Part 1), Tai Yuen New Village, Sha Po New Village (Part 1), Sha Po Old Village (Part 1), Yung Shue Wan Main Street, Chung Mei, Sok Kwu Wan, O Tsai, Tai Peng, Tai Shan Central, Tai Shan East, Tai Shan West, Tai Yuen Village (Part 1), Yung Shue Long New Village, Yung Shue Long Old Village, Yung Shue Wan Back Street, Tei Po New Village, Chek Lap Kok New Village, Ma Wan New Village, Tai O Town Centre, Ngong Ping Village, Tung Wan Tau, Chung Hau, Yue Kwong Chuen, Wang Tong	2 650	13 600

District (Number of villages)	Village name	Number of houses (About)	Planned population (About)
Total	263 villages	29 140	199 300

(ii) Villages with public sewerage works under construction

District (Number of villages)	Village name	Number of house (About)	Planned population (About)
North District (6)	Leng Pei Tsuen, So Kwun Po, Fan Leng Ching Wai, Fan Leng Nam Wai, Fan Leng Pak Wai, Muk Wu	1 100	11 000
Yuen Long (1)	Kam Tin Shi	40	300
Tsuen Wan (2)	Chuen Lung Village, Lo Wai	560	4 200
Kwai Ching (1)	Kau Wa Keng Old Village	500	3 700
Tuen Mun (4)	Fuk Hang Tsuen (Lower), Po Tong Ha, Siu Hang Tsuen, Tsz Tin Tsuen	1 260	7 600
Tai Po (6)	Sha Lan (Part 2), Ha Wong Yi Au, Yuen Tun Ha, Lo Lau Uk, Ta Tit Yan, CARE Village	420	3 500
Sha Tin (2)	Cheung Kang and Ma Niu	120	1 000
Sai Kung (7)	Po Toi O, Heung Chung, Wong Chuk Wan, Tai Po Tsai, Sam Long, Tseng Lan Shue, Wo Mei	2 340	13 400
Islands (18)	Central Peng Chau, Nam Wan San Tsuen, Nam Wan Shan Ting Tsuen, Tai Yat San Tsuen (Part), Tung Wan Village (Part), Hung Shing Ye, Wai Tsai Tseng San Tsuen, Ko Long (Part 3), Tai Wan Kau Tsuen, Tai Wan San Tsuen, Tai Wan To,	3 700	17 000

Annex 1

District (Number of villages)	Village name	Number of house (About)	Planned population (About)
	Tai Yuen Village (Part 2), Wang Long, Tai Tei Tong, Pak Ngan Heung, Pui O Lo Uk Tsuen, Luk Tei Tong, Ma Po Tsuen		
Kwun Tong (4)	Che Ting Tsuen, On Li Sai Tsuen, Ma Pui Tsuen, Ma Wan Tsuen	420	3 200
Tseung Kwan O (11)	Ming Oi New Village, Hang Hau Lower Old Village, Boon Kin Village, Tseung Kwan O Upper Old Village, Au Tau Village, Sun Tei Village, Wo Tong Kong (Part), Mau Wu Tsai Village, Shui Bin Village, Tseung Kwan O Village, Ma Yau Tong Village	650	5 500
Total	62 villages	11 110	70 400

**Details of sewerage projects under construction by the
Drainage Services Department in various districts**

Project code	Project title	Project commencement date	Target completion date	Village name
4214DS	Tseung Kwan O sewerage for villages	October 2020	Early 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shui Bin Village • Au Tau Village • Boon Kin Village • Wo Tong Kong (Part) • Hang Hau Lower Old Village • Ming Oi New Village • Mau Wu Tsai Village • Tseung Kwan O Village • Tseung Kwan O Upper Old Village • Sun Tei Village
4353DS	Outlying Islands sewerage, stage 2 – extension of sewerage system to other unsewered villages in Mui Wo	November 2021	Early 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Luk Tei Tong • Ma Po Tsuen

Annex 2

Project code	Project title	Project commencement date	Target completion date	Village name
4355DS	Outlying Islands sewerage, stage 2 – Lamma village sewerage phase 2, package 2	November 2021	Mid 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tai Yuen Village (Part 2) • Tai Wan To • Tai Wan San Tsuen • Tai Wan Kau Tsuen • Hung Shing Ye • Ko Long (Part 3) • Wang Long
4358DS	Sewerage to Lo Wai, Chuen Lung and Kau Wa Keng Old Village	August 2022	End 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kau Wa Keng Old Village • Chuen Lung Village • Lo Wai
4362DS	Sewerage for Ma Yau Tong Village, Tseung Kwan O	October 2020	End 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ma Yau Tong Village
4398DS	Sewerage to Lei Yue Mun Village	November 2018	Early 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On Li Sai Tsuen • Ma Pui Tusen • Ma Wan Tsuen • Che Ting Tsuen
4403DS	Upgrading of sewage pumping stations and sewerage along Ting Kok Road	February 2019	End 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sha Lan (Part 2)

Annex 2

Project code	Project title	Project commencement date	Target completion date	Village name
4422DS	Outlying Islands sewerage, stage 2 – Peng Chau village sewerage phase 2 package 1	November 2018	End 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central Peng Chau • Tung Wan Village (Part) • Nam Wan Shan Ting Tsuen • Nam Wan San Tsuen • Tai Yat San Tsuen (Part) • Wai Tsai Tseng San Tsuen
4430DS	Tolo Harbour sewerage of unsewered areas, stage 2 – phase 2	July 2020	Mid 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ha Wong Yi Au • Cheung Kang • CARE Village • Ma Niu
4431DS	Port Shelter sewerage, stage 2, package 3	July 2020	Mid 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wong Chuk Wan • Wo Mei • Heung Chung
4432DS	Port Shelter sewerage, stage 3, package 2	July 2020	Mid 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tai Po Tsai • Tseng Lan Shue • Sam Long • Po Toi O
4433DS	Construction of San Shek Wan Sewage Treatment Works and Pui O village sewerage	March 2021	End 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pui O Lo Uk Tsuen
4434DS	Village Sewerage in Fanling Wai, So Kwun Po and Leng Pei Tsuen, Fanling	January 2021	Early 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fan Leng Pak Wai • Fanling Ching Wai • Fanling Nam Wai • So Kwun Po • Leng Pei Tsuen

Annex 2

Project code	Project title	Project commencement date	Target completion date	Village name
4435DS	Village Sewerage in Northern Tuen Mun	January 2021	End 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Siu Hang Tsuen • Tsz Tin Tsuen • Fuk Hang Tsuen (Lower) • Po Tong Ha
4457DS	North District sewerage stage 2 part 2A – village sewerage in Muk Wu, New Territories	August 2022	End 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Muk Wu
Other minor works items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of trunk sewer to three villages in Tai Po including Ta Tit Yan, Yuen Tun Ha and Lo Lau Uk • Village sewerage at Kam Tin Shi, Kam Tin • Village sewerage at Tai Tei Tong, Pak Ngan Heung 	From 2020	From 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yuen Tun Ha • Ta Tit Yan • Lo Lau Uk • Kam Tin Shi • Tai Tei Tong • Pak Ngan Heung

(Translation)

LENGCO QUESTION No. 21

(Written Reply)

Asked by: Hon Mrs Regina IP

Date of Meeting: 15 February 2023

Replied by: Secretary for Justice

Reply:

President,

In relation to the estate of the late Mrs Nina Wang (“Estate”), the Department of Justice (“DoJ”) has been actively following up the blueprint of the scheme of administration for the Estate (“Scheme”) as laid down in the judgment of the Court of Final Appeal dated 18 May 2015 as well as the subsequent legal proceedings, orders and directions. The relevant legal proceedings are still ongoing.

In relation to the Hon Regina Ip’s questions, I now reply as follows:

The Court made procedural directions at the hearing on 26 May 2021 which primarily concerned the further timetable for the parties’ filing of evidence. The parties have been progressing with the legal proceedings according to the timetable. The Court conducted the first stage hearing on matters relating to the trustee of the Estate in July 2022 and handed down its judgment on 21 October 2022 (HCMP 853/2012: [2022] HKCFI 3255) ruling on the key issues concerning the Scheme, including the imposition of two conditions for Chinachem Charitable Foundation Ltd (“Foundation”) to be appointed as the trustee of the Estate:

- (1) The Solvency Condition; and
- (2) The Fit and Proper Condition.

The Court has also dismissed the Foundation’s application for issuance of formal requests to the Premier of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China and the Secretary General of the United Nations inviting them to join a supervisory managing organisation (“SMO”), for the reason that they are not subject to the Hong Kong Courts’ jurisdiction. It is thus inexpedient and inappropriate for them to be invited to join the SMO.

In addition, the Court held that before dealing with the detailed provisions of the Scheme (including the constitution and structure of the SMO), it is necessary to determine whether the Foundation is suitable to be appointed as the trustee. Subsequently, the Court held a directions hearing in November 2022 regarding the issue of Foundation’s suitability to be appointed as the trustee. The parties were directed to file documents and evidence on the said two Conditions in accordance

(Translation)

with the Court's directions. The Court has also scheduled separately the substantive hearings for determining (1) the Solvency Condition in July 2023 and (2) the Fit and Proper Condition in December 2023 and February 2024.

As the legal proceedings are still ongoing, it is inappropriate for us to publicly discuss any further details or make any comments. Upon the Court's determination of whether the Foundation satisfies the said two Conditions for appointment as the trustee, the DoJ will continue to pursue the matters in relation to the detailed provisions of the Scheme.

The Estate is currently administered by the interim administrators pursuant to the Court's orders so as to preserve its status quo. Pending a Scheme to be set up and sanctioned by the Court, no unauthorised person may misappropriate any assets of the Estate. According to information provided by the interim administrators, in each year between 2018 and 2022, the Chinachem Group made donations to different charitable organisations and other institutes for charitable purposes, totalling around HK\$55.51 million.

As the protector of charities, the Secretary for Justice will actively follow up on the ongoing legal proceedings in order to assist the Court in sanctioning the Scheme as early as possible, with a view to facilitating the trustee in proper use of the Estate for charitable purposes in accordance with the Scheme and Mrs Nina Wang's wishes.

-End-

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 22

(Written Reply)

Asked by Dr Hon Tan Yueheng

Date of meeting : 15 February 2023

Replied by : Secretary for
Constitutional and Mainland Affairs

Reply

President,

Hong Kong enjoys strong support of the Motherland while being closely connected to the world. Meanwhile, as Hong Kong is entering a new phase of advancing from stability to prosperity, and the epidemic has slowed down with everything returning to normal, Hong Kong is reconnecting to the world as well as resuming normal travel between Hong Kong and the Mainland fully. Under this circumstance, telling the good story of Hong Kong to the world with a view to reviving Hong Kong economy and the livelihood of people has become one of the top priorities of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government (SAR Government).

Regarding Dr Hon Tan's question, after consultation with the Financial Secretary's Office; Commerce and Economic Development Bureau; Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau; Transport and Logistics Bureau; and the Information Services Department, this Bureau's comprehensive reply is as follows:

- (1) With the resumption of convenient cross-boundary movement, the SAR Government is going all out to promote the new potentials and opportunities of Hong Kong at full steam, and has planned a

series of promotional activities, one after another, with a view to enhancing promotion of Hong Kong in the Mainland. The Task Force on Promoting and Branding Hong Kong (the Task Force), led by the Financial Secretary, has commenced the relevant work. With the focus on telling good stories of Hong Kong for the new situation, new potentials and new opportunities in Hong Kong under its new development stage, and through direct communication and public relations promotion, the Task Force will facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of Hong Kong's advantages and opportunities by friends and stakeholders in the Mainland and overseas regions. With members comprising prominent individuals in diverse sectors, representatives of Hong Kong Inc. partner organisations and Government officials, the Task Force will provide valuable advice on the Government's overall promotional strategy and a series of promotional plans and activities in the Mainland and overseas regions. We believe that with concerted efforts, our promotional work in the Mainland and overseas regions will be more targeted, more in line with the actual objectives and more impactful in terms of further enhancing the branding and image of Hong Kong.

The SAR Government has also launched a large-scale publicity campaign "Hello Hong Kong". Through a series of publicity and promotional activities, the campaign will showcase Hong Kong's new attractions, new developments and new opportunities to the world. To welcome tourists from the Mainland and overseas to come and experience the hospitality of Hong Kong in person, the SAR Government will distribute 500 000 free air tickets through the campaign. In addition, a number of major new attractions have opened locally over the past few years, such as the Hong Kong Palace Museum, the M+ museum at the West Kowloon Cultural District, and the newly renovated Hong Kong Museum of Art, providing visitors with newer experiences. There are also a series of consumption vouchers, including transport, food and beverages, tourist spots and shopping, redeemable under HK Goodies and various special offers provided by merchants available to welcome visitors and enrich their itinerary in Hong Kong. A variety of large-scale events that will take place in the

coming two to three months include Hong Kong Sevens, Trailwalker, Art Basel Hong Kong, Museum Summit, Hong Kong Arts Festival, Hong Kong Pop Culture Festival, Hong Kong International Jewellery Show, WOW Summit Hong Kong and Vis East Moot, etc. Also, large-scale MICE tourism related international conferences and exhibitions are also returning one after another, in order to bring in more high-spending tourists to Hong Kong.

- (2) Since the implementation of the gradual resumption of normal travel between Hong Kong and the Mainland on 8 January this year, the Chief Executive and the principal officials of the SAR Government have actively planned to visit various provinces and municipalities in the Mainland for high-level visits and exchanges, hosting and attending bilateral and multilateral co-operation meetings with provinces and municipalities in the Mainland, and participating in meetings and activities organised by the SAR Government Mainland Offices (Mainland Offices) and the relevant Mainland organisations in areas of business and trade, culture, art, tourism, sports, etc., so as to strengthened the co-operation with the provinces and municipalities in the Mainland comprehensively. The Mainland Offices will also take advantage of the opportunity when senior SAR Government officials visiting the Mainland to arrange for officials to attend promotional activities, give speeches and accept media interviews in order to enhance the effectiveness of publicity and tell good stories of Hong Kong in the Mainland. In addition, the Mainland Offices and relevant organisations will also promote Hong Kong's advantages through diversified activities, encourage and support representatives of different professions and sectors to visit the Mainland, and deepen exchanges with various places.

The Mainland Offices will continue to play the bridging role, to organise visits to Mainland authorities and bodies, to attend speaking occasions, to conduct media interviews and briefings, as well as to participate in business and trade meetings. They will also make good use of the online and offline platforms, including digital and multimedia platforms, and mass media platforms such as television, radio, newspapers, etc. These platforms will also

be used for disseminating information, short videos, interview programmes, etc., for promoting Hong Kong's advantages and opportunities in the Mainland.

At the same time, to complement the policy initiatives of “competing for enterprises” and “competing for talents”, the SAR Government has expanded the functions of the Mainland Offices. The five Mainland Offices had each set up a “Dedicated Team for Attracting Businesses and Talents” in December 2022 to support the relevant work of the Office for the Attracting Strategic Enterprises led by the Financial Secretary, and the Hong Kong Talent Engage under the Labour and Welfare Bureau, including reaching out to target enterprises and talents in the Mainland proactively, liaising with the world's top 100 universities, discussing with target enterprise, and providing appropriate information and assistance, etc., with a view to attracting investments and talents from the Mainland to come to Hong Kong to pursue development.

In addition, this year, Invest Hong Kong will continue to work closely with the relevant ministries and commissions of the Central Government, commerce bureaux of Mainland provinces and municipalities, Mainland commercial and industrial organisations in organising a variety of investment promotion events of different scale, so as to assist Mainland enterprises to understand the distinctive advantages of Hong Kong enjoying strong support of the Motherland and being closely connected to the world under “One Country, Two Systems”, and encourage more potential Mainland enterprises to set up in Hong Kong, or to make use of Hong Kong as a platform to go global and open up overseas markets.

Besides, bureaux and departments of the SAR Government are also reactivating various co-operation projects with the Mainland, including youth exchange, internship, activities promoting start-ups, etc., so as to further strengthen the co-operation between Hong Kong and the Mainland in different areas.

- (3) As for the plans to step up publicity targeting Mainland visitors, the SAR Government has already devised an overall plan to welcome Mainland visitors proactively, as demonstrated by the Task Force and the large-scale promotional campaign “Hello

Hong Kong” mentioned in Part (1) above. With the full resumption of normal travel between Hong Kong and the Mainland starting from 6 February, Hong Kong is increasing its capacity in receiving tourists gradually. The Mainland will also resume the arrangement for tourist groups visiting Hong Kong in a gradual and orderly manner. The Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau has already taken immediate action to get in touch with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism to discuss the relevant issues.

Interpretation and General Clauses Ordinance

Resolution

(Under section 34(4) of the Interpretation and
General Clauses Ordinance (Cap. 1))

Resolved that in relation to the —

- (a) Minimum Wage Ordinance (Amendment of Schedule 3) Notice 2023, published in the Gazette as Legal Notice No. 3 of 2023; and
- (b) Employment Ordinance (Amendment of Ninth Schedule) Notice 2023, published in the Gazette as Legal Notice No. 4 of 2023,

and laid on the table of the Legislative Council on 18 January 2023, the period for amending subsidiary legislation referred to in section 34(2) of the Interpretation and General Clauses Ordinance (Cap. 1) be extended under section 34(4) of that Ordinance to the meeting of 15 March 2023.

The marked-up version of the amendment moved by Ir LEE Chun-keung (Translation)

That *many families have employed foreign domestic helpers ('FDHs') to take care of their children or elderly family members*; with the ageing of the Hong Kong society, an increasing number of elderly people and persons with chronic illnesses are in need of long-term care, and with more and more women joining the workforce, the duties of taking care of the family and performing household chores in many families have fallen on ~~foreign domestic helpers~~ ('FDHs'), resulting in society's growing demand for FDHs; statistics show that the number of FDHs working in Hong Kong has increased to about 400 000 in recent years; given the wide concern in the community over the regulation of FDH agencies, the premature termination of contracts and job-hopping by FDHs as well as their quality, this Council urges the Government to *adopt the following measures to enhance the protection of the interests of both the employers and FDHs*:

- (1) ~~comprehensively review~~ *reviewing* and ~~improve~~ *improving* the policies on FDHs, including establishing an FDH Authority, reviewing and amending the standard employment contract for FDHs and the Code of Practice for Employment Agencies;
- (2) *ensuring that FDH agencies must comply with the relevant legislation such as the Employment Agency Regulations; following the practices of the real estate and insurance industries by establishing a mandatory licensing regime and a rating system for FDH agencies; and practitioners;*
- (3) setting up a dedicated information website for FDHs and employers, ~~and providing~~ *drawing up a 'blacklist' of FDHs engaged in premature termination of contracts and job-hopping, and making public the 'blacklist' as well as the various service fees charged by FDH agencies for public reference;*
- (4) *establishing a test centre of housework techniques and a skills assessment system for FDHs whereby FDHs are required to pass a skills test on performing household chores and taking care of the elderly and children before assuming duty, so as to ensure that the skills of FDHs reach a certain standard, and if FDHs do not meet the basic requirements, FDH agencies should be required to provide training courses for FDHs, thereby enhancing the protection of the interests of both the employers and FDHs; and*

- (5) *studying how to prevent the employers from suffering harassment when their FDHs who have borrowed from banks or finance companies are unable to repay their debts.*

Note: Ir LEE Chun-keung's amendment is marked in *bold and italic type* or with deletion line.

**The marked-up version of the further amendment moved by Ms Judy CHAN
(Translation)**

That many families have employed foreign domestic helpers ('FDHs') to take care of their children or elderly family members; with the ageing of the Hong Kong society, an increasing number of elderly people and persons with chronic illnesses are in need of long-term care, and with more and more women joining the workforce, the duties of taking care of the family and performing household chores in many families have fallen on FDHs, resulting in society's growing demand for FDHs; statistics show that the number of FDHs working in Hong Kong has increased to about 400 000 in recent years; given the wide concern in the community over the regulation of FDH agencies, the premature termination of contracts and job-hopping by FDHs as well as their quality, this Council urges the Government to adopt the following measures to enhance the protection of the interests of both the employers and FDHs:

- (1) comprehensively reviewing and improving the policies on FDHs, including establishing an FDH Authority, reviewing and amending the standard employment contract for FDHs and the Code of Practice for Employment Agencies;
- (2) ensuring that FDH agencies must comply with the relevant legislation such as the Employment Agency Regulations; following the practices of the real estate and insurance industries by establishing a mandatory licensing regime and a rating system for FDH agencies and practitioners;
- (3) setting up a dedicated information website for FDHs and employers, drawing up a 'blacklist' of FDHs engaged in premature termination of contracts and job-hopping, and making public the 'blacklist' as well as the various service fees charged by FDH agencies for public reference;
- (4) establishing a test centre of housework techniques and a skills assessment system for FDHs whereby FDHs are required to pass a skills test on performing household chores and taking care of the elderly and children before assuming duty, so as to ensure that the skills of FDHs reach a certain standard, and if FDHs do not meet the basic requirements, FDH agencies should be required to provide training courses for FDHs; and
- (5) studying how to prevent the employers from suffering harassment when their FDHs who have borrowed from banks or finance companies are unable to repay their debts; *and*
- (6) *setting up a hotline for FDHs and employers.*

Note: Ms Judy CHAN's amendment is marked in ***bold and italic type***.