

Opening Remarks of
Mr Paul T K Lam, SC, Secretary for Justice,
at the Special Meeting of the Finance Committee of the
Legislative Council to Examine
the Estimates of Expenditure for 2024-25
on 15 April 2024 (Monday)

Chairman and Members,

Under the National 14th Five-Year Plan, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region is positioned as a centre for international legal and dispute resolution services in the Asia-Pacific region. Not only does Hong Kong enjoy a fine tradition of the rule of law and an international landscape, it is also the only common law jurisdiction in our country. The Department of Justice (DoJ) will fully support and contribute to unleashing Hong Kong's unique strengths under "one country, two systems", and will unremittingly reinforce our rule of law regime to open up more development opportunities for the local legal sector.

2. The total estimated expenditure of the DoJ for 2024-25 is about \$2,454.42 million, representing an increase of about 30% over the revised estimate for the last financial year (i.e. 2023-24), but a slight increase of about 1.0% over the original estimate for the last financial year.

3. The main reason for the need to lower the original estimate for 2023-24 is that we have lowered the estimated expenditure on court costs and expenses payable for briefing out cases to barristers, solicitors and other professionals in private practice in response to the latest developments and results of relevant judicial proceedings.

4. From the questions raised on the estimates of expenditure for this year, we note that Members are particularly concerned about three areas of our work, namely, rule of law education, legal and dispute resolution services, and foreign-related legal talent training. I would like to speak briefly on the following salient points.

(1) Promoting the Constitution, the Basic Law, the Hong Kong National

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Security Law and rule of law education

5. The Steering Committee on Rule of Law Education (Steering Committee) under my chairmanship was established by the DoJ in February last year with the aim of strengthening the understanding of the Constitution, the Basic Law, the Hong Kong National Security Law and the rule of law among different sectors of the community. The Steering Committee has been taking forward the ROLE Stars Train-the-Leaders Programme (TTL Programme) to promote popularisation of basic knowledge of the rule of law among the general public on all fronts. The first phase of the TTL Programme was concluded successfully in early December last year with a daily attendance of over 200 participants from 20 organisations undertaking youth-related and community work. In view of the warm response, we will launch the second phase of the TTL Programme within this year.

6. Meanwhile, the DoJ will continue to support programmes related to the Constitution, the Basic Law and the Hong Kong National Security Law for the general public and the youth, and disseminate information related to the rule of law from time to time, such as uploading a sourcebook on the Basic Law to the DoJ's webpage for public access late last year, so as to reinforce the core value of the rule of law.

(2) Promoting Hong Kong as a centre for international legal and dispute resolution services

7. The DoJ will lead the legal profession to visit the Belt and Road countries to promote Hong Kong's robust legal system and solid foundation of the rule of law. For instance, the Deputy Secretary for Justice visited the Middle East last month (in March this year) and I will also visit Middle East countries next month (in May this year) to enhance exchanges and deepen co-operation between Hong Kong's legal profession and people in the Middle East, so as to jointly tell good stories of Hong Kong.

8. On optimising legal framework, the Mainland Judgments in Civil and Commercial Matters (Reciprocal Enforcement) Ordinance came into effect on 29 January this year to reduce the risks, legal costs and time usually involved in cross-boundary enforcement of such judgments.

9. Besides, with the staunch support from the Central Government, the

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International Organization for Mediation (IOMed), upon establishment, will have its headquarters hosted in Hong Kong. The IOMed, specialising in resolving international disputes by means of mediation, will be the first international inter-governmental organisation to set up headquarters in Hong Kong. This will attract disputing parties and professionals, such as mediators and lawyers, to choose Hong Kong for conducting mediation, further enhancing the strength and status of Hong Kong as a “capital” for mediation in the world and in turn boosting other related economic activities.

(3) Training foreign-related legal talents

10. Taking forward the establishment of the Hong Kong International Legal Talents Training Academy (the Academy) is one of DoJ’s new initiatives as stated in the 2023 Policy Address. The Academy will place a focus on legal practice and regularly organise different practical legal courses, seminars, international exchange activities, etc., to raise Hong Kong’s profile as a regional hub for capacity building, add value to the Hong Kong legal profession and contribute to the construction of foreign-related rule of law in our country. To this end, the DoJ will establish the Hong Kong International Legal Talents Training Office and set up the Hong Kong International Legal Talents Training Expert Committee in 2024, so as to prepare for the establishment of the Academy.

11. Meanwhile, the DoJ continues to take forward smoothly the secondment programmes for local legal talents with a number of international organisations in order to provide training and exchange opportunities for legal talents.

Conclusion

12. Looking ahead, we will continue to promote on all fronts work of the DoJ in various policy areas, with a view to fostering development of the legal sector and strengthening the rule of law in our community.

13. Chairman, I conclude my opening remarks at this point. Members are welcome to put forward their questions.