

OFFICIAL RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS

Wednesday, 26 March 2025

The Council met at Eleven o'clock

MEMBERS PRESENT

THE PRESIDENT

THE HONOURABLE ANDREW LEUNG KWAN-YUEN, GBM, GBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE TOMMY CHEUNG YU-YAN, GBM, GBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE JEFFREY LAM KIN-FUNG, GBM, GBS, JP

DR THE HONOURABLE STARRY LEE WAI-KING, GBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE CHAN HAK-KAN, SBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE CHAN KIN-POR, GBS, JP

PROF THE HONOURABLE PRISCILLA LEUNG MEI-FUN, GBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE MRS REGINA IP LAU SUK-YEE, GBM, GBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE PAUL TSE WAI-CHUN, JP

THE HONOURABLE MICHAEL TIEN PUK-SUN, BBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE STEVEN HO CHUN-YIN, BBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE FRANKIE YICK CHI-MING, GBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE MA FUNG-KWOK, GBS, JP

DR THE HONOURABLE CHAN HAN-PAN, BBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE KWOK WAI-KEUNG, BBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE ELIZABETH QUAT, SBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE MARTIN LIAO CHEUNG-KONG, GBM, GBS, JP

IR DR THE HONOURABLE LO WAI-KWOK, GBS, MH, JP

THE HONOURABLE JIMMY NG WING-KA, BBS, JP

DR THE HONOURABLE JUNIUS HO KWAN-YIU, BBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE HOLDEN CHOW HO-DING, JP

THE HONOURABLE SHIU KA-FAI, BBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE YUNG HOI-YAN, JP

THE HONOURABLE CHAN CHUN-YING, BBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE LUK CHUNG-HUNG, JP

THE HONOURABLE LAU KWOK-FAN, MH, JP

THE HONOURABLE KENNETH LAU IP-KEUNG, SBS, MH, JP

THE HONOURABLE VINCENT CHENG WING-SHUN, MH, JP

THE HONOURABLE TONY TSE WAI-CHUEN, BBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE DOREEN KONG YUK-FOON

THE HONOURABLE CHU KWOK-KEUNG

THE HONOURABLE STANLEY LI SAI-WING, MH, JP

DR THE HONOURABLE HOEY SIMON LEE, MH, JP

THE HONOURABLE ROBERT LEE WAI-WANG

THE HONOURABLE DOMINIC LEE TSZ-KING

IR THE HONOURABLE LEE CHUN-KEUNG, JP

DR THE HONOURABLE TIK CHI-YUEN, SBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE STANLEY NG CHAU-PEI, SBS, JP

DR THE HONOURABLE JOHNNY NG KIT-CHONG, MH, JP

THE HONOURABLE CHAU SIU-CHUNG

PROF THE HONOURABLE CHOW MAN-KONG, JP

DR THE HONOURABLE DAVID LAM TZIT-YUEN

THE HONOURABLE LAM CHUN-SING

THE HONOURABLE LAM SO-WAI

DR THE HONOURABLE DENNIS LAM SHUN-CHIU, JP

THE HONOURABLE LAM SAN-KEUNG, JP

THE HONOURABLE ANDREW LAM SIU-LO, SBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE DUNCAN CHIU

THE HONOURABLE YIU PAK-LEUNG, MH, JP

DR THE HONOURABLE WENDY HONG WEN

THE HONOURABLE DENNIS LEUNG TSZ-WING, MH

THE HONOURABLE LEUNG MAN-KWONG, MH

THE HONOURABLE EDWARD LEUNG HEI

THE HONOURABLE KENNETH LEUNG YUK-WAI, JP

THE HONOURABLE CHAN YUET-MING, MH

THE HONOURABLE ROCK CHEN CHUNG-NIN, SBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE CHAN PUI-LEUNG

THE HONOURABLE CHAN YUNG, SBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE JUDY CHAN KAPUI, MH, JP

THE HONOURABLE MAGGIE CHAN MAN-KI, MH, JP

IR THE HONOURABLE CHAN SIU-HUNG, JP

THE HONOURABLE CHAN HOI-YAN

THE HONOURABLE JOEPHY CHAN WING-YAN

THE HONOURABLE CHAN HOK-FUNG, MH, JP

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, BBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE EDMUND WONG CHUN-SEK

THE HONOURABLE KINGSLEY WONG KWOK, BBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE YANG WING-KIT

REVD CANON THE HONOURABLE PETER DOUGLAS KOON HO-MING,
BBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE TANG FEI, MH

THE HONOURABLE TANG KA-PIU, BBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE LAI TUNG-KWOK, GBS, IDSM, JP

PROF THE HONOURABLE LAU CHI-PANG, BBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE KENNETH FOK KAI-KONG, JP

THE HONOURABLE LOUIS LOONG HON-BIU

DR THE HONOURABLE NGAN MAN-YU

THE HONOURABLE CARMEN KAN WAI-MUN, JP

DR THE HONOURABLE TAN YUEHENG, JP

DR THE HONOURABLE SO CHEUNG-WING, SBS, JP

THE HONOURABLE YIM KONG, JP

THE HONOURABLE ADRIAN PEDRO HO KING-HONG

PROF THE HONOURABLE CHAN WING-KWONG

PROF THE HONOURABLE WILLIAM WONG KAM-FAI, MH

MEMBERS ABSENT

THE HONOURABLE NIXIE LAM LAM

THE HONOURABLE SUNNY TAN

THE HONOURABLE SHANG HAILONG

PUBLIC OFFICERS ATTENDING

THE HONOURABLE CHAN KWOK-KI, GBS, IDSM, JP
CHIEF SECRETARY FOR ADMINISTRATION

THE HONOURABLE ERICK TSANG KWOK-WAI, GBS, IDSM, JP
SECRETARY FOR CONSTITUTIONAL AND MAINLAND AFFAIRS

THE HONOURABLE CHRISTOPHER HUI CHING-YU, GBS, JP
SECRETARY FOR FINANCIAL SERVICES AND THE TREASURY

THE HONOURABLE TSE CHIN-WAN, BBS, JP
SECRETARY FOR ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

DR BERNARD CHAN PAK-LI, JP
UNDER SECRETARY FOR COMMERCE AND ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT, AND
SECRETARY FOR COMMERCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

PROF THE HONOURABLE LO CHUNG-MAU, BBS, JP
SECRETARY FOR HEALTH

THE HONOURABLE BERNADETTE LINN HON-HO, JP
SECRETARY FOR DEVELOPMENT

THE HONOURABLE WINNIE HO, JP
SECRETARY FOR HOUSING

MS LILLIAN CHEONG MAN-LEI, JP
UNDER SECRETARY FOR INNOVATION, TECHNOLOGY AND
INDUSTRY, AND
SECRETARY FOR INNOVATION, TECHNOLOGY AND INDUSTRY

THE HONOURABLE CHRIS SUN YUK-HAN, JP
SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND WELFARE

THE HONOURABLE MABLE CHAN, JP
SECRETARY FOR TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS

CLERKS IN ATTENDANCE

MS DORA WAI, SECRETARY GENERAL

MS TAMUS HON, 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:

Subsidiary Legislation	<i>Legal Notice No.</i>
Pharmacy and Poisons (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulation 2025	38 of 2025
Frontier Closed Area (Permission to Enter) (Amendment) Notice 2025	39 of 2025
Bankruptcy and Companies Legislation (Miscellaneous Amendments) Ordinance 2023 (Commencement) Notice 2025	40 of 2025
Import and Export (Strategic Commodities) Regulations (Amendment of Schedule 1) Order 2025 (Commencement) Notice	41 of 2025

Other Papers

Quality Education Fund
Financial Statements for the year ended 31 August 2024 (including Report
of the Director of Audit)

HKSAR Government Scholarship Fund
Financial Statements for the year ended 31 August 2024 (including Report
of the Director of Audit)

Self-financing Post-secondary Education Fund
Financial Statements for the year ended 31 August 2024 (including Report
of the Director of Audit)

Employees' Compensation Insurance Levies Management Board
Annual Report 2023/2024 (including Financial Statements and Independent
Auditor's Report)

Employees Compensation Assistance Fund Board
Annual Report 2023-2024 (including Financial Statements and Independent Auditor's Report)

Occupational Deafness Compensation Board
Annual Report 2023/2024 (including Financial Statements and Independent Auditor's Report)

Pneumoconiosis Compensation Fund Board
Annual Report 2023 (including Financial Statements and Independent Auditor's Report)

Pneumoconiosis Ex Gratia Fund
Annual Report for the Year from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 (including Financial Statements and Report of the Director of Audit)

Report No. 7/2025 of the House Committee on Consideration of Subsidiary Legislation and Other Instruments

Report of the Bills Committee on Courts (Remote Hearing) Bill

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Questions. First question.

Elderly recipients of Disability Allowance retiring in the Mainland

1. **MR STANLEY LI** (in Cantonese): *President, under the existing policy, if elderly recipients of Disability Allowance ("DA") retire in the Mainland, they are required to reside in Hong Kong for not less than 60 days in a payment year, otherwise the amount of their DA will be deducted. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *of the number of elderly DA recipients who have received a notice in the past two years informing them that their period of absence from Hong Kong would soon exceed the permissible limit, and the number of those who have received such notices and had their DA deducted;*

whether the Government has gained an understanding of the reasons why these elderly people have been absent from Hong Kong for a period exceeding the permissible limit; if so, of the categories of such reasons;

- (2) in order to assist elderly DA recipients in retiring in the Mainland, whether the authorities will consider exempting them from the permissible limit of absence from Hong Kong, so that they are not required to reside in Hong Kong for not less than 60 days in a payment year, or consider enhancing the existing Guangdong Scheme and Fujian Scheme to include elderly DA recipients in these schemes; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and*
- (3) as the Chief Executive has indicated in the 2024 Policy Address that elderly recipients of Comprehensive Social Security Assistance who opt to retire in Guangdong will be subsidized to reside in designated residential care homes for the elderly in the Province with a monthly subsidy of \$5,000, whether the authorities will consider allowing elderly DA recipients who opt to retire in Guangdong to receive the same level of subsidy; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?*

SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND WELFARE (in Cantonese): President, at present, the Government operates a social security system that provides cash assistance to persons with disabilities and other needy persons, including the Disability Allowance (“DA”) under the Social Security Allowance (“SSA”) Scheme and the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (“CSSA”) Scheme. No contribution is required from the recipients, and the amount of assistance is determined based on their level of disability, financial situation and personal or family circumstances.

DA is non-means-tested with no age restriction. It assists persons assessed to be severely disabled in meeting their special needs arising from disability. Eligibility for DA mainly depends on the results of the medical assessments conducted by medical practitioners of the Department of Health (“DH”) or the Hospital Authority (“HA”). In general, Normal DA is payable to persons assessed by medical practitioners of DH or HA as being severely disabled to the extent that he/she needs substantial help from others to cope with daily life whose disablement will last for not less than six months. In addition to being severely disabled, applicants for Higher DA must also be assessed by medical practitioners

of DH or HA as being in need of constant attendance from others in daily life who are not receiving government-subsidized residential care services, care services in public hospitals and institutions under HA, or boarding in special schools under the Education Bureau.

I reply to the three parts of the question raised by the Member as follows:

(1) and (2)

To ensure reasonable allocation of limited public resources and the long-term sustainability of the social security system, DA applicants and recipients must comply with the relevant residence requirements and permissible limits of absence from Hong Kong before application and during receipt of payment. This is to ensure that they maintain a close connection with Hong Kong, preventing people who have been living in other places for an extended period of time from receiving the allowance immediately upon return to Hong Kong, or continuing to receive the allowance despite prolonged absence from Hong Kong. In addition, the medical assessments required for DA recipients must be conducted by the medical practitioners of DH or HA to ensure the quality and consistency of assessments. The majority of DA recipients receive social welfare and medical services in Hong Kong on a long-term basis.

During receipt of payment, DA recipients are entitled to a permissible limit of 305 days absence from Hong Kong in each payment year. In other words, a recipient is eligible for a full-year allowance if he/she has resided in Hong Kong for not less than 60 days in a payment year. If a recipient has resided in Hong Kong for less than 60 days in a payment year, he/she will only receive the allowance for the period of residence in Hong Kong. This arrangement provides considerable flexibility for recipients who need to travel frequently between Hong Kong and places outside Hong Kong (including the Mainland).

Based on the records provided by the Immigration Department, the Social Welfare Department (“SWD”) will issue a Notification of About to Exceed the Permissible Limit of Absence from Hong Kong (“Notice”) to SSA recipients who are about to exceed the permissible limit of absence from Hong Kong. The Notice serves to remind recipients of the relevant permissible limit of absence from

Hong Kong and to avoid being overpaid arising from exceeding the permissible limit. SWD does not have information on the number of Notices issued to elderly DA recipients, the number of recipients whose allowance has been deducted, nor the reasons for their exceeding the permissible limit.

The Government has no plan to make DA a portable cash assistance or to abolish its permissible limit of absence from Hong Kong.

- (3) The Government plans to launch the three-year Pilot Scheme for Elderly Recipients of Comprehensive Social Security Assistance to Reside in Residential Care Homes in Guangdong (“Pilot Scheme”) in the third or fourth quarter of 2025. The Pilot Scheme provides a subsidy to elderly CSSA recipients who choose to retire in Guangdong to stay in residential care homes for the elderly (“RCHEs”) under the Residential Care Services Scheme in Guangdong (“GDRCS Scheme”), with a view to providing an additional retirement option to improve their living environment and enhance their quality of life. The Government will provide a monthly subsidy of HK\$5,000 to each elderly recipient to help them meet the expenses of staying in a designated RCHE in Guangdong. The Pilot Scheme mainly targets relatively healthy elderly CSSA recipients who are capable of taking care of themselves. At present, the Government has no plan to provide the same level of subsidy to elderly DA recipients who choose to retire in Guangdong. Thank you, President.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Members, I issued a circular earlier this week reminding you that mobile phones and audible devices must be set to silent mode in the Chamber. Last week, there were two incidents of this kind which disrupted the proceedings. I hereby remind Members once again that if they do not set their mobile phones to silent mode, I shall regard it as disorderly conduct.

MR STANLEY LI (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. President, I raise this question precisely because some elderly DA recipients in Hong Kong have told me about the situation. We must understand that DA recipients who are mobility impaired may need more room to move around and attendance from other people, and if they are elderly, they need special care too.*

Nowadays, we often strive to promote cross-boundary elderly care, and the Secretary has also mentioned in his main reply that a medical assessment is required to ascertain whether an applicant is eligible for DA. However, since Elderly Health Care Vouchers (“EHCVs”) can be used in Grade 3A hospitals and Hong Kong-style hospitals in the Mainland, can we also allow elderly people, and I stress, “elderly people” receiving DA to seek assessment from medical practitioners in Mainland hospitals about their continued DA eligibility? Of course, the SAR Government can provide the assessment mechanism to the relevant Mainland hospitals, so that elderly DA recipients can be assessed according to the same criteria for their continued eligibility. This can help the elderly recipients concerned by obviating their need to make a special trip back to Hong Kong to meet the key performance indicator (KPI), or so to speak, of “having resided in Hong Kong for 60 days” so as to continue to receive DA, which is a very important benefit to them. Thank you, President.

SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND WELFARE (in Cantonese): President, I would like to thank Mr LEE for the supplementary question. While I can understand this idea held by members of the public, we must still manage and assess DA eligibility with caution. We believe it is of paramount importance that the assessment should ultimately be carried out by medical practitioners in Hong Kong, that is, medical practitioners of DH or hospitals under HA.

Firstly, this arrangement can ensure the quality of assessment; and secondly, it can ensure consistency. If any problem arises in the process and the assessments are conducted by medical practitioners of DH or HA in Hong Kong, we will have the means to follow up and liaise with them. However, we do not consider it appropriate if the medical practitioners concerned are neither present nor regulated in Hong Kong. Thank you, President.

IR GARY ZHANG (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. I would like to raise a supplementary question on the general direction. As far as the Government’s policy is concerned, is it the intention to facilitate the retirement of elderly in the Greater Bay Area or to encourage them to do so? Thank you, President.*

SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND WELFARE (in Cantonese): President, my understanding is that Ir ZHANG wishes to know whether we are encouraging Hong Kong elderly persons to retire in the Greater Bay Area, or we are just facilitating them to do so. While the two are different in concepts, I think both are correct.

In terms of encouragement, we certainly encourage them to retire in the Greater Bay Area if they so wish. In the first level, for elderly persons who do not receive any government allowances, retiring in the Mainland is certainly an option for them. Regarding the second level, for elderly persons receiving the Government's cash allowances such as CSSA or Old Age Living Allowance ("OALA"), these allowances are already portable, which will facilitate their retirement in the Mainland. In addition, if they join GDRCS Scheme, they can also choose to retire in RCHes in Guangdong. Of course, they have to pass a standardized assessment.

In terms of facilitation, EHCVs can now be used at designated institutions in the Greater Bay Area, and GDRCS Scheme has also been expanded from covering 2 RCHes initially to 15 now. These are the facilitation measures that we are referring to. Thank you, President.

MR LUK CHUNG-HUNG (in Cantonese): *President, the Secretary's response is disappointing. He has given us no figures, not even the number of Notices, and his mindset is rather narrow. Of course, President, I understand that the allocation and effective use of public financial resources is on everyone's mind, but has the Government actually calculated the expenditure required in case the 60-day residence requirement is lifted to facilitate the application for DA by people in need? The expenditure will not necessarily increase. The people concerned may take out medical insurance and receive medical treatment in the Mainland, thus reducing their need to return to Hong Kong for follow-up consultations and hospitalization, which may even save money for the Government. Is the Government's approach just a restrictive elderly policy, without taking into account potential savings for the Government? Has the Government done any meaningful calculations for this purpose?*

SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND WELFARE (in Cantonese): President, DA has its special features. Firstly, it is not means-tested, and it simply relies on assessment made by medical practitioners on the degree of the applicant's

disability. As DA recipients are usually in very poor health, they often have long-term medical needs. In addition, as their assessments are made by medical practitioners of DH or HA and their medical needs are mostly followed up in Hong Kong, it is not appropriate for them to leave Hong Kong for a long period. Thus, as far as we know, not many of them have gone to retire in the Mainland.

As for recipients of OALA or SSA, their physical conditions are generally satisfactory. As they can move around freely and their medical needs are not too great, they can retire in the Guangdong Province. Their conditions are slightly different. I think these two groups should be handled separately. Thank you, President.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr LUK Chung-hung, which part of your supplementary question has not been answered?

MR LUK CHUNG-HUNG (in Cantonese): *He has not answered whether the Government has assessed the financial implications. Can any savings in expenditure be achieved?*

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr LUK, please sit down.

Secretary, do you have anything to add?

SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND WELFARE (in Cantonese): President, I thank the Member for the follow-up question. We have not made any specific assessment. As far as the Government is concerned, whether savings can be achieved or otherwise is not the only consideration.

I would like to point out that many DA recipients are not elderly people, with two-thirds of them being under the age of 65. As for elderly DA recipients, i.e. those aged 65 or above, while their number is small, we can imagine that people aged 65 or above receiving DA should be in a relatively poor health condition. Since they have a lot of medical needs and rely on Hong Kong's medical institutions and doctors for treatment, their need to retire in the Mainland will not be too great. Therefore, we need to carefully consider whether we should put

more of our limited public resources and policy space on areas with a great demand and a bigger scope for development, such as those in relation to elderly OALA and CSSA recipients. Thank you, President.

MR CHAN PUI-LEUNG (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. The Government has been encouraging the elderly to retire in the Mainland, but we need to pay special attention to persons with disability and the mobility-impaired elderly. While they are required to return to Hong Kong and reside here for 60 days a year, we must understand that some of them may have sold their properties in Hong Kong, with the sole intention to retire in the Greater Bay Area for the sake of living in a better environment and receiving better care.*

If the Administration still insists on requiring these people to return to Hong Kong and reside here for 60 days a year, or to undergo medical assessments in Hong Kong, is such an approach not contradictory to the Government's policy of encouraging them to retire in the Mainland as an additional choice?

SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND WELFARE (in Cantonese): President, I would like to thank Mr CHAN for the supplementary question. I do not think there is any contradiction because DA is non-means-tested. As Members may know, many elderly persons aged 65 or above are already eligible for OALA, the monthly rate of which is similar to that of Higher DA.

In other words, elderly persons can receive allowances through different ways, but some of them may choose not to apply for any allowances other than Higher DA. However, Higher DA recipients are often in very poor health and require long-term medical services, most of which are provided in Hong Kong. Therefore, as far as we can see, the vast majority of these elderly persons will stay in Hong Kong to receive regular medical follow-up and treatment. Thank you, President.

MR STANLEY NG (in Cantonese): *President, after undergoing the vetting and approval procedures and the assessment, some elderly persons may eventually chose to retire in the Mainland. Although the Secretary said that he could not provide us with the relevant figures, it can be imagined that these elderly persons with mobility problems can hardly stand the hassles.*

Since these elderly persons' eligibility has already been approved, and they have gone to retire in the Mainland, why should we not waive the requirement for them to return to Hong Kong and reside for 60 days a year after their applications have been approved? Only in this way can the original policy intent be better realized. Why does the Secretary refuse to consider such a waiver?

SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND WELFARE (in Cantonese): I thank Mr Stanley NG for the supplementary question. As I mentioned earlier, if an elderly person aged 65 or above wishes to opt for portable cash assistance to retire in the Mainland, he does have a choice. He can apply for OALA, but OALA is means-tested, and the applicant must pass the relevant tests before the allowance is granted.

However, if an applicant fails the means test but is a recipient of Higher DA due to his poor health, he is probably relatively well-off. Therefore, we need to consider how to make the best use of our limited public resources.

When it comes to deciding which cash assistance should be made portable and setting the permissible limit of absence from Hong Kong, we must also consider how government resources can be better utilized. Thank you, President.

MR HOLDEN CHOW (in Cantonese): *President, as far as OALA is concerned, even if elderly persons meet the asset limit, many of them have already moved to the Mainland, as Members have just said. In that case, even if they wish to join the Guangdong Scheme or Fujian Scheme, they still need to have continuously resided in Hong Kong for at least one year immediately before the date of application to be eligible for the scheme, and there is also a permissible limit of absence from Hong Kong.*

My question is that apart from the permissible limit of absence from Hong Kong, is it possible to give these people one more option? If these elderly persons can prove that they have lived in Hong Kong for many years and contributed a lot to Hong Kong, can other conditions be set so that they would be granted the allowance as long as they can prove their residence in Hong Kong? Then, it will not be necessary for those who have long moved to live in the Mainland to return to Hong Kong and live here for one year before the date of application for the allowance, which is a great hassle for them as Members have just said. Thank you, President.

SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND WELFARE (in Cantonese): President, I thank Mr Holden CHOW for the supplementary question. I believe what Mr CHOW refers to is the requirement of one year's continuous residence in Hong Kong before making an application for allowance under SSA Scheme. In this connection, we have in fact recently relaxed the requirement and raised the maximum number of days of absence from Hong Kong from 56 in the past to 90 days now. In order to strike a balance, we must set the requirement of one year's continuous residence in Hong Kong before application in the hope that public resources can be put to good use. At this point in time, we believe that given the relaxation of requirement as aforesaid, a balance has been struck. Thank you, President.

REVD CANON PETER DOUGLAS KOON (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. President, I understand that the original rationale of the policy may be to prevent people residing in places outside Hong Kong from obtaining this benefit. However, with the integration between Hong Kong and the Greater Bay Area, may I ask the Bureau whether, in construing the definition of "places outside Hong Kong", the Greater Bay Area or the Mainland will be dealt with separately? Thank you, President.*

SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND WELFARE (in Cantonese): Thank you, President and thanks also to Revd Canon KOON. At present, our portable cash assistance can be used in Guangdong Province and Fujian Province in the Mainland, but of course, we have to make a trade-off. Our main consideration is that about 80% of Hong Kong elderly persons living in the Mainland are living in either Guangdong Province or Fujian Province. In considering how to make a trade-off or the extent of relaxation of the restrictions, we still need to strike a balance between facilitating the elderly to retire in the Mainland on the one hand, and ensuring that public resources are properly utilized on the other. Thank you, President.

PROF CHOW MAN-KONG (in Cantonese): *President, according to the Administration's requirements, if DA recipients need to attend full-time programmes outside Hong Kong and can provide proof thereof, consideration can be given to granting them an exemption for the days of absence from Hong Kong. Elderly persons, on the other hand, are in poor health or suffering from illnesses, as the Secretary said just now. In particular, elderly persons with disabilities may*

suddenly need to leave Hong Kong for medical treatment or be stranded outside Hong Kong due to serious illnesses, can these circumstances be included as additional grounds for granting exemption for the days of absence from Hong Kong? At present, the Administration has made various arrangements, such as those for the elderly to live in RCHes outside Hong Kong, but on the other hand, it insists that welfare benefits are not portable, which is self-contradictory policy-wise. Can further improvements be made in this regard as suggested by different Members just now? Thank you, President.

SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND WELFARE (in Cantonese): President, I do not think there is any contradiction in policy. Increasing the portability of allowances under SSA Scheme is a gradual process. Looking back at the development in the past, we can see that the Government has gradually expanded the extent of portability. However, in considering whether there should be any further expansion, a trade-off has to be made, taking into account whether it is a good use of public resources on the whole and whether there are strong supporting reasons for it.

Regarding DA, why can special arrangements be made for full-time DA recipients who are not studying in Hong Kong and have exceeded the permissible limit of absence from Hong Kong? This is because we notice that many DA recipients are not elderly persons, and according to my crude observation, nearly 10% of them are under 12 years of age. DA does not only cover elderly persons but also people of all ages. Therefore, the relevant arrangements should not only cater for elderly persons, and we must carefully consider the details before taking any action. Thank you, President.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Second question.

Hong Kong Investment Corporation Limited

2. **DR JOHNNY NG** (in Cantonese): *The Government established the Hong Kong Investment Corporation Limited (“HKIC”) in 2022 to manage the investment activities of designated government funds through identifying investment opportunities and strategically promoting development of target industries, while generating investment return. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *of an overview of HKIC's investments since its establishment, including the main industries supported by HKIC's current portfolios, and how far HKIC can identify the investment targets which can contribute to the economic development of Hong Kong; whether the effectiveness of HKIC's work has been assessed;*
- (2) *given that the Temasek Holdings, founded in 1974, had an asset size reaching S\$389 billion (HK\$2.3 trillion) in March 2024, making it the eleventh largest sovereign wealth fund in the world, whether HKIC will draw on the successful experiences of, among others, the Temasek Holdings and the Singapore's Economic Development Board Investment, and strengthen HKIC's investment efforts while adjusting its investment directions at appropriate times; and*
- (3) *as far as Hong Kong's long-term economic development is concerned, whether it has considered adding a wider variety of sectors in HKIC's investments, including high-growth industries such as Web 3.0, thereby building up future economic pillars for Hong Kong and attracting talents as well as innovative enterprises to set up their presence in Hong Kong?*

SECRETARY FOR FINANCIAL SERVICES AND THE TREASURY (in Cantonese): President, in consultation with the Hong Kong Investment Corporation Limited ("HKIC"), my consolidated reply to the three parts of the question is as follows.

In the 2022 Policy Address, the Chief Executive announced the establishment of HKIC to manage the investment for a total of HK\$62 billion under the Hong Kong Growth Portfolio, Greater Bay Area Investment Fund, Strategic Tech Fund, and Co-Investment Fund. The positioning of HKIC is to capitalize the power of "Patient Capital" to channel market capital and leverage market resources, with a view to attracting technology enterprises to set up their operations in Hong Kong, thereby accelerating the construction of a vibrant strategic industry ecosystem, while seeking reasonable financial return over the medium to long term.

HKIC actively leverages the guiding force of capital to promote collaboration among the investment, industry, academic and research sectors, facilitates the construction of international, regional and cross-border collaboration

platform for Hong Kong, and supports the accelerated nurturing of new quality productive forces, thus enhancing Hong Kong's long-term competitiveness and economic vitality.

Since its establishment, HKIC has invested in over 90 projects, including enterprises with cutting-edge technologies or in key industries. These projects are medium-to-long-term investments. Key themes include Hard and Core Technology, Biotechnology and New Energy and Green Technology, with the proportions being 56%, 16% and 11% respectively based on the invested amount. In summary, these investments contribute to the development of Hong Kong's innovation and technology industry, and help local start-ups explore diversified markets and application scenarios. On the other hand, they attract high quality projects and companies from the Mainland and overseas to set up and develop their business in Hong Kong through the channelling force of capital.

HKIC has clear requirements for investee companies to contribute to Hong Kong's development in a sustainable manner, such as requiring the companies to establish offices in Hong Kong, nurture and attract talents, establish corporate venture capital (corporate VC) departments in Hong Kong and prioritize Hong Kong for their listing. Quite some investee companies have made good progress in attracting capital and talents and in exploring new markets, which has accelerated their planning for using Hong Kong as their business development platform. Certain investee companies have submitted their listing applications to the Hong Kong Exchanges and Clearing Limited.

HKIC also actively collaborates with various investment institutions and joins hands in investing with them, promoting the continuous development and application of cutting-edge technologies in Hong Kong. As of March 2025, every Hong Kong dollar invested by HKIC has attracted over four Hong Kong dollars from long-term capital in the market for investment.

The investments and relevant work of HKIC are guided by the vision and needs of Hong Kong's development. In the future, HKIC will continue to fully support government policies and the needs of Hong Kong's economic development, and actively work with different sectors of society to pool resources and implement its work. The Government has always been fully supportive of HKIC's work and will consider the timing and arrangements for capital injection in a timely manner as appropriate.

One of HKIC's key strategies for 2025 is to continue to focus on three core themes, namely Hard and Core Technology, Biotechnology, New Energy and Green Technology, and also capture the adjacent opportunities arising from these themes, including "cross-sector" applications. HKIC also focuses on expediting the deployment and application of cutting-edge technologies, bringing innovative and disruptive research outcomes into the market and to serve society.

HKIC has been paying attention to accelerating the exploration of the cutting-edge impetus for growth and to strategizing the relevant investment implementation. For example, the first batch of capital allocated to the Investment Portfolio under the New Capital Investment Entrant Scheme (commonly known as New CIES), which management is supervised by HKIC, will be invested in industries and innovative applications in areas such as low-altitude economy, gerontechnology and smart living technologies, as well as intelligent entertainment experiences. Thank you, President.

DR JOHNNY NG (in Cantonese): *President, at present, the Government is faced with a fiscal deficit while the public is strained by various fee hikes. We all hope very much that the Government can come up with a solution to resolve the fiscal deficit without digging into people's pockets. The \$62 billion managed by HKIC, which includes \$32 billion transferred from the aforesaid three funds, has been put under its investment for some time. May I ask whether the Government has any plan or target which specifies when and how much funds can be credited to the Treasury to help solve the fiscal deficit problem? Thank you, President.*

SECRETARY FOR FINANCIAL SERVICES AND THE TREASURY (in Cantonese): President, as I mentioned in the main reply just now, the positioning or key performance indicator ("KPI") of HKIC is clear. It serves the dual mission of seeking reasonable financial return over the medium to long term while at the same time boosting Hong Kong's competitiveness and vitality. Hopefully, these two approaches can help promote Hong Kong's long-term development. Of course, we would be happy to see that HKIC not only secures reasonable medium-to-long-term financial return in line with the above KPI, but also helps drive the economy (including economic restructuring) and brings in new cutting-edge technologies to promote economic restructuring and transformation.

Looking ahead, HKIC will focus on three major strategic priority areas, i.e. hard and core technology, new energy and biotechnology. These areas need to be vigorously developed as they are where Hong Kong's key economic strengths lie as identified by us and the wider community. For the question of whether return can be generated in the short term to improve the public coffers, we would certainly be happy to see such a result. But as far as the KPI target is concerned, I believe that many of HKIC's plans are looking beyond the short-term horizon, and such far-reaching plans are made in line with the above dual mission to prepare the ground for Hong Kong's medium-to-long-term development. Thank you, President.

MR KENNETH LEUNG (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. Quite a number of foreign sovereign funds (e.g. Temasek) would provide support to local enterprises for the steady development of industries. My supplementary question is whether HKIC, apart from inviting outside enterprises to establish their presence in Hong Kong, has a team or staff to explore investment opportunities in the local market, especially those related to youth entrepreneurship, and whether it will provide support for local young entrepreneurial teams by making relevant investments in the future? Thank you, President.*

SECRETARY FOR FINANCIAL SERVICES AND THE TREASURY (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. Given the above two major KPIs, i.e. securing financial return over the medium to long term and promoting Hong Kong's economic reform or transformation in the long run, the issue of "how to implement" as mentioned by the Honourable Member just now is of vital importance. Can we really allow local start-ups or local entrepreneurs (especially young entrepreneurs) to take part in the process?

Taking into account the overarching "how to implement" issue, this year HKIC will strive for progress on three fronts in pursuit of the above two major KPIs. First, as mentioned by the Honourable Member just now, HKIC will actively make horizontal ties with various sectors to pool the strengths and resources of industries and the community. At the same time, HKIC will look beyond the local boundary to establish more platforms for international, regional and cross-border collaboration, with a view to promoting the domestic development of local enterprises and facilitating their engagement in more cross-border collaboration.

In this regard, HKIC will organize relevant forums in May including the inaugural International Young Scientist Forum on Artificial Intelligence under preparation. This is part of the horizontal initiatives intended to draw on the resources and knowledge of existing local young industrialists or entrepreneurs and help them explore cross-border, regional and even international collaboration. This is the first aspect.

By the way, I would like to add that the horizontal focus is supplemented by a vertical focus which also revolves around the above three key themes, namely hard and core technology, biotechnology, as well as new energy and green technology. HKIC will focus on these three key themes and explore what technological applications and scenarios can come into fruition in Hong Kong.

In addition to the above horizontal and vertical focuses, the third aspect is speed. We strive to ensure that cutting-edge technologies developed on these themes can be launched expeditiously to facilitate greater application and innovation, so as to deliver more scientific research outcomes that can be introduced into the market and serve the community. Both the local start-up ecosystem and start-up entrepreneurs have an important role to play in this aspect. I will definitely not leave them out of this process. Thank you, President.

MR JEFFREY LAM (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. It has been almost two and a half years since the establishment of HKIC. I would like to know whether HKIC adopts a proactive approach for its investment strategy (i.e. actively identifying projects with potential), or just sits around waiting for others to approach it? As far as I know, HKIC's investments in areas such as AI, healthcare and green technology have yielded certain results, with many members of the public interested to participate. Therefore, may I ask the Secretary whether HKIC will consider issuing retail bonds to enable the public's direct participation in relevant investments, thereby sharing the fruits of industrial development in Hong Kong? Thank you, President.*

SECRETARY FOR FINANCIAL SERVICES AND THE TREASURY (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. Regarding the supplementary question raised by the Honourable Member just now, I believe that the first part of it concerns whether HKIC takes the initiative to proactively identify investment targets having

regard to its established dual KPI as well as the horizontal focus, vertical focus and expeditious progress mentioned above. Looking back at the history of HKIC, Members may know quite well that HKIC was established at the end of 2023, with its overall work fully laid out in the second half of 2024. In 2025, HKIC will continue to deepen its efforts in promoting application on the aforesaid three major themes and identify specific investment projects based on its targets and established directions.

Along this general line, HKIC has adopted a different approach as compared with our previous practice for, say, the investment growth portfolio. In the past, we often relied on general partners (GP) or fund companies to help identify projects for the investment growth portfolio. Now, with its own team and having accumulated experience over the past one or two years, HKIC engages more in direct investment or co-investment. Under this approach, HKIC must act proactively, not only in considering the benefits of investment projects to Hong Kong at the time of investment, but also in conducting reviews during and after the investment process to see whether results have been achieved as originally pledged and whether the investments can bring real economic benefits to Hong Kong. It is therefore necessary for HKIC to carry out research and due diligence at the outset, keep tabs on the investments during the investment period and conduct reviews afterwards. These are exactly what HKIC needs to do.

In another part of the supplementary question raised just now, the Honourable Member asked how different sectors of the Hong Kong community can benefit from this process. Regarding the most tangible benefits, we may refer back to the two major KPI targets of HKIC, i.e. ensuring reasonable financial return over the medium to long term while bringing about positive changes to promote economic restructuring and create new growth areas. For the latter target, I believe the Hong Kong society and the overall economy will enjoy tangible benefits if new industries can be introduced into Hong Kong and create new quality jobs during the process.

In discussing this topic today, I know that many Honourable Members are very concerned about the overall development of HKIC. Therefore, by the end of the year, HKIC will submit a report to give a more comprehensive account of what it has done over the past year since the full commencement of its work. Follow-up information in this aspect will be provided in the year-end work report of HKIC. Thank you, President.

MRS REGINA IP (in Cantonese): *President, I of course know that, as mentioned by the Secretary, the investments made by HKIC are different from those made by ordinary sovereign funds as they are “patient capital” not intended to seek immediate return. It has been just a year or so since HKIC came into actual operation, but it has already invested in 90 companies. I would like to ask whether HKIC has carried out proper due diligence on these companies; how many people have been employed to support its CEO; whether a chief investment officer (“CIO”) has been employed; how much manpower has been increased, and whether there are data showing the average time taken to complete due diligence on these 90 companies?*

SECRETARY FOR FINANCIAL SERVICES AND THE TREASURY (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. As mentioned by the Honourable Member just now, HKIC’s work has been fully laid out over the past year or so. Insofar as its structure is concerned, I believe that reference has been made to the practices of similar organizations such that HKIC has a CIO, investment teams, etc. HKIC could invest in as many as 90 projects partly because its investment teams have been joined by relevant investment analysts since their establishment. These people come from diverse backgrounds, with some being industry experts and some specialize in asset management. They could precisely provide complementary support for HKIC to carry out more comprehensive investment research or due diligence. This is the first point.

Second, mechanism-wise, an Investment Committee has been set up under the Board of Directors of HKIC to examine whether the amounts of HKIC investments meet the requirements in respect of its overall governance or structure. Moreover, approval at different levels (including the Investment Committee or the Board of Directors) is required for all HKIC investments.

On the whole, there are corresponding mechanisms for the selection of investment targets, front-end due diligence and back-end institutional gatekeeping to ensure that the entire process can achieve the above two KPI targets and, hopefully, bring about positive changes to our economic and social development in the long run. Thank you, President.

MR ADRIAN PEDRO HO (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. The Secretary mentioned in his main reply that HKIC has invested in more than 90 projects, but there appears to be a lack of transparency since no relevant information such as the names of the investee companies, the proportion of shareholding and the amount of individual investment has been made public at all. By contrast, Temasek in Singapore discloses its full investment portfolio and financial indicators each year. May I ask whether such data will be included in the work report to be submitted at the year-end as mentioned by the Secretary? Thank you, President.*

SECRETARY FOR FINANCIAL SERVICES AND THE TREASURY (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. With reference drawn from overseas sovereign funds, we observe that while individual investment projects are sometimes made known in the course of publicity or promotion, not all investment projects are disclosed. After all, we all know that business sensitive information may be involved. If the investment is related to cutting-edge technology, the matter itself is already sensitive information. Is it appropriate to make full disclosure? I believe the matter should be handled on a case-by-case basis, depending on different circumstances. This is the first point.

Second, regarding the work report to be submitted by the year-end, we hope that through the report, HKIC can give a more comprehensive account of its work over the past year or so. From this question and our daily communication with relevant industries, we understand that many industry representatives and relevant groups are very eager to know more about HKIC's investment targets and strategies.

Therefore, despite the consideration on business information sensitivity as mentioned above, HKIC has all along made some arrangements (e.g. in terms of publicity or engagement) for the general public, Honourable Members and the market to better understand the contents of its investments as far as practicable. As Members can see, the Financial Secretary has often participated in the signings or launches of investment projects. In the future, we will continue to make similar arrangements and disclose highlights where practicable, so that everyone can understand HKIC's work priorities. Hopefully, in doing so, we can also promote the development of the relevant industries and trades. Thank you, President.

MR LAI TUNG-KWOK (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. With HK\$62 billion of funds under its management, HKIC has great responsibility and far-reaching influence. I am very pleased to hear the Secretary say that the long-awaited or even long overdue report will be published by the end of this year. But what information will be included in the report? The Secretary seemed a little hesitant to say more just now, leaving us uncertain about how much of the information we truly want to know will be disclosed then.*

The Secretary also said that some promotional activities would be held to enhance the community's understanding of HKIC, but the information provided in these publicity activities is often very incomprehensive and limited. Can the Secretary undertake here that upon publication of the long-awaited report, HKIC's representatives will come and join the discussion of the relevant Panel of the Legislative Council ("LegCo")? Thank you, President.

SECRETARY FOR FINANCIAL SERVICES AND THE TREASURY (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. As Honourable Members may recall, HKIC's representatives did come to LegCo to explain and introduce HKIC's work priorities shortly after its establishment. I think it is incumbent on HKIC to come to LegCo to communicate with Members, listen to their views and receive questions. This is the first point.

The second point is that HKIC's first work report, to be published by the end of 2025 (i.e. this year) as mentioned by Members just now, will set out the progress of HKIC's operation and investments to provide a clearer picture of its operation and business results. Members will surely know the specific contents of the report upon its publication. As for the next step, we are more than happy to let HKIC give explanations and listen to the valuable views of Members itself. Thank you, President.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Third question.

Dissemination of information on the Northern Metropolis project

3. **MS CHAN YUET-MING** (in Cantonese): *Some residents in the North District have reflected that some unidentified persons have recently patrolled on the hills in the vicinity of the North District and put up flags labelled “Hong Kong Northern Metropolis New District Earthworks Project” on the hills, causing doubts and anxiety among local residents. In addition, it is reported that a large number of advertisements relating to the recruitment of Mainland construction workers for the Northern Metropolis project have appeared on Mainland’s social media platforms, which involve illegal practices by “unlawful intermediaries” obtaining intermediary fees by deception from workers applying for the recruitment. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) whether it has put up flags on the hills in the New Territories for the Northern Metropolis project; if so, of the details; if not, whether it will conduct an investigation into the incident, and of the details of the investigation;*
- (2) whether it has recruited workers from the Mainland for the Northern Metropolis development project; if so, of the details; if not, whether it will conduct an investigation into the recruitment situation on Mainland’s social media platforms and the problem of unlawful intermediaries; if it will, of the details of the investigation; and*
- (3) of the projects commenced by government departments in the Northern Metropolis and their addresses; whether it has disseminated information on the planning and development of the Northern Metropolis to the Mainland through official channels; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?*

SECRETARY FOR DEVELOPMENT (in Cantonese): President, the Northern Metropolis (“NM”) is a major land development project of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (“HKSAR”), and is the new engine for Hong Kong’s future economic growth. As we are taking forward the works in a number of new development areas (“NDAs”) in full steam and are expediting the construction of NM, we would not tolerate any act of individuals to use the name of NM to mislead the public or even commit illegal activities. Should these

situations occur, we will act decisively, disseminate the correct information publicly and take appropriate follow-up actions, including law enforcement with other departments including the Police.

My reply to different parts of the question raised by Ms CHAN Yuet-ming is as follows:

- (1) Earlier, flags with words meaning “Site works project of new area in the Hong Kong Northern Metropolis” were erected on a hillside in the area around Muk Wu Nga Yiu Village in Ta Kwu Ling, North District. After inspection by relevant departments, the Development Bureau (“DEVB”) has clarified publicly that the flags and bamboo poles concerned were not placed by the works departments of the Government or their contractors. These flags and bamboo poles illegally erected on government land have already been removed so as to prevent the outlaws from using such signage to continue to disseminate false information. In fact, when carrying out works projects, government departments would display project signboards at prominent locations providing project details, such as the responsible department, project title, contact phone numbers, commencement and completion dates of the project. We appeal to the public to report any suspicious situation by calling 1823 at once or by notifying the Police and DEVB. The government departments will carry out investigation immediately and take appropriate actions. At the same time, the offices concerned under the Lands Department, the Planning Department and the Civil Engineering and Development Department (“CEDD”) will watch out for any such suspicious cases during their routine inspections.
- (2) To address the manpower shortage of the construction sector in Hong Kong, the Government has launched the Labour Importation Scheme for the Construction Sector (“the Scheme”). On the premise of safeguarding the employment priority for local workers, it allows qualified employers to apply for importing labour at an appropriate scale. Currently, approved applications include public works projects in NM, some of which involve labour from the Mainland. The Scheme sets out stringent requirements for the principal contractors, subcontractors and their agents. If the employers are

preparing to import labour from the Mainland, they must recruit such labour through Mainland labour service enterprises. Labour service enterprises refer to enterprises approved by the Ministry of Commerce and granted with the permission to operate business on labour service cooperation with HKSAR. Labour from the Mainland who wish to work in Hong Kong have to pay attention that the recruitment organization should be among the aforementioned approved labour service enterprises. These labour service enterprises will ensure that the employers conducting the recruitment exercise are the principal contractors or subcontractors who are granted with quotas under the Scheme. The list of such labour service enterprises has been published on the websites of the Ministry of Commerce and the Labour Department (“LD”) of the HKSAR Government. Details of the Scheme are available on DEVB’s website. Relevant information is also disseminated via different platforms such as the Representative Office of the Construction Industry Council (“CIC”) on the Mainland. Meanwhile, CIC will, together with LD, the Independent Commission Against Corruption and labour unions, arrange monthly briefings for newly imported workers on their employment rights. It is believed that these briefings will also enable the Mainland workers to share the correct information among their circle of friends on the Mainland.

- (3) NDAs in NM are under different construction and planning stages. For example, Kwu Tung North/Fanling North, Hung Shui Kiu/Ha Tsuen, Yuen Long South and San Tin Technopole have site formation and engineering infrastructure works being carried out. Other NDAs such as the Lau Fau Shan area, Ngau Tam Mei, New Territories North New Town and Ma Tso Lung are in the process of conducting public engagement activities and other preparatory work according to the development proposals.

The tender notices and information on contracts awarded in the past six months for public works in the territory have been uploaded onto the websites of DEVB and the relevant works departments. Among them, works related to NM are mainly those site formation and engineering infrastructure works being carried out by CEDD. As of 10 March this year, ongoing works projects concerned are listed at Annex.

The Task Force for Collaboration on the Northern Metropolis Development Strategy jointly established by senior officials of the HKSAR and Shenzhen governments has operated since 2023 for exchanging views on the NM development regularly and strengthening collaboration. We have all along been providing up-to-date information of the NM development to the Mainland authorities through the task force and other collaboration platforms extended therefrom. Furthermore, for NDAs currently under the planning stage, we would not only arrange roving exhibitions in Hong Kong during public engagement, but also in Guangzhou and Shenzhen. Also, we will share information about the NM development via the social media platforms on the Mainland of the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in Guangdong (“GDETO”) of the HKSAR Government and the official Weibo account of DEVB. We will continue to enhance promotional efforts in all aspects in the future. Thank you, President.

Annex

List of Ongoing Contracts of Site Formation and Infrastructure Works
in New Development Areas of the Northern Metropolis
Being Undertaken by CEDD

New Development Area Concerned	Contract Title	Date of Invitation of Tender	Commencement Date
Kwu Tung North/Fanling North NDA	Kwu Tung North New Development Area, Phase 1: Site Formation and Infrastructure Works (Contract No. ND/2019/01)	21 June 2019	6 December 2019
Kwu Tung North/Fanling North NDA	Kwu Tung North New Development Area, Phase 1: Roads and Drains between Kwu Tung North New Development Area and Shek Wu Hui (Contract No. ND/2019/02)	27 September 2019	17 February 2020

New Development Area Concerned	Contract Title	Date of Invitation of Tender	Commencement Date
Kwu Tung North/Fanling North NDA	Fanling North New Development Area, Phase 1: Fanling Bypass Eastern Section (Shek Wu San Tsuen North to Lung Yeuk Tau) (Contract No. ND/2019/04)	29 November 2019	14 August 2020
Kwu Tung North/Fanling North NDA	Fanling North New Development Area, Phase 1: Fanling Bypass Eastern Section (Shung Him Tong to Kau Lung Hang) (Contract No. ND/2019/05)	14 June 2019	2 March 2020
Kwu Tung North/Fanling North NDA	Fanling North New Development Area, Phase 1: Site Formation and Infrastructure Works (Contract No. ND/2019/07)	17 April 2020	31 August 2020
Kwu Tung North/Fanling North NDA	Kwu Tung North New Development Area, Remaining Phase: Site Formation and Infrastructure Works (South) (Contract No. ND/2024/01)	12 January 2024	23 August 2024
Kwu Tung North/Fanling North NDA	Kwu Tung North New Development Area, Remaining Phase: Improvement Works of Fanling Highway (Kwu Tung Portion) and Associated Works (Contract No. ND/2024/03)	12 January 2024	14 August 2024
Kwu Tung North/Fanling North NDA	Kwu Tung North New Development Area, Remaining Phase: Improvement Works of Tai Tau Leng Roundabout and Po Shek Wu Road and Associated Works (Contract No. ND/2024/04)	26 April 2024	31 December 2024

New Development Area Concerned	Contract Title	Date of Invitation of Tender	Commencement Date
Kwu Tung North/Fanling North NDA	Fanling North New Development Area, Remaining Phase: Fresh Water and Flushing Water Service Reservoirs and Associated Works (Contract No. ND/2024/06)	5 January 2024	30 July 2024
Kwu Tung North/Fanling North NDA	Fanling North New Development Area, Remaining Phase: Site Formation and Infrastructure Works (East) (Contract No. ND/2024/07)	5 January 2024	14 August 2024
Hung Shui Kiu/Ha Tsuen NDA	Hung Shui Kiu/Ha Tsuen New Development Area Advance Works Phase 2—Site Formation and Engineering Infrastructure (Contract No. YL/2019/02)	29 April 2020	17 August 2020
Hung Shui Kiu/Ha Tsuen NDA	Hung Shui Kiu/Ha Tsuen New Development Area Stage 1 Works—Site Formation and Engineering Infrastructure (Contract No. YL/2020/03)	9 October 2020	28 April 2021
Hung Shui Kiu/Ha Tsuen NDA	Hung Shui Kiu/Ha Tsuen New Development Area Second Phase Development—Contract 1—Site Formation and Engineering Infrastructure Works (Contract No. YL/2023/01)	23 June 2023	6 June 2024
Hung Shui Kiu/Ha Tsuen NDA	Hung Shui Kiu/Ha Tsuen New Development Area Second Phase Development—Contract 2—Fresh Water Service Reservoir and Associated Mainlaying Works (Contract No. YL/2023/02)	29 September 2023	7 June 2024

New Development Area Concerned	Contract Title	Date of Invitation of Tender	Commencement Date
Hung Shui Kiu/Ha Tsuen NDA	Hung Shui Kiu/Ha Tsuen New Development Area Second Phase Development—Contract 3—Site Formation and Engineering Infrastructure Works (Contract No. YL/2023/03)	12 April 2024	18 October 2024
Hung Shui Kiu/Ha Tsuen NDA	Hung Shui Kiu/Ha Tsuen New Development Area Second Phase Development—Contract 4—Site Formation and Engineering Infrastructure Works (Contract No. YL/2023/04)	8 March 2024	27 September 2024
Yuen Long South NDA	Site Formation and Infrastructure Works for Yuen Long South First Phase Development—Contract 1 (Contract No. YL/2021/03)	22 April 2022	29 August 2022
Yuen Long South NDA	Site Formation and Infrastructure Works for Yuen Long South First Phase Development—Contract 2 (Contract No. YL/2021/04)	10 June 2022	8 December 2022
Yuen Long South NDA	Site Formation and Infrastructure Works for Yuen Long South First Phase Development—Contract 3 (Contract No. YL/2022/01)	19 August 2022	28 December 2022
The Loop	Development of the Loop: Main Works Package 1—Contract 1 Site Formation and Infrastructure Works inside the Loop and Western Connection Road Phase 1 (Contract No. YL/2020/01)	24 December 2020	15 July 2021

New Development Area Concerned	Contract Title	Date of Invitation of Tender	Commencement Date
The Loop	Development of the Loop: Main Works Package 1—Contract 2 Western Connection Road Phase 2, Connection Roads to Fanling/San Tin Highway and Direct Road Link Phase 1 (Contract No. YL/2020/02)	30 April 2021	15 September 2021
The Loop	Development of the Loop: Main Works Package 1—Contract 3—Direct Road Link Phase 2 (Contract No. YL/2021/01)	17 September 2021	28 February 2022
The Loop	Development of the Loop: Main Works Package 1—Contract 4—Fresh Water Service Reservoir (Contract No. YL/2024/01)	16 August 2024	10 March 2025
San Tin Technopole (except the Loop)	San Tin Technopole Phase 1 Stage 1 (West)—Contract 1—Site Formation and Associated Works (Contract No. ND/2024/09)	20 September 2024	31 December 2024
San Tin Technopole (except the Loop)	San Tin Technopole Phase 1 Stage 1 (East)—Contract 1—Site Formation and Engineering Infrastructure Works (Contract No. ND/2024/10)	20 September 2024	31 December 2024

MS CHAN YUET-MING (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. I thank the Secretary for the main reply. The Secretary mentioned that when carrying out works projects, the Government would display project details at prominent locations. However, the problem is that many fraudulent cases relating to NM occur outside Hong Kong. For example, on a Chinese search platform in the Mainland, none of the search results for the term “北部都會區” (i.e. the Chinese term of NM) leads to the Government’s website for NM, and there is even false*

information. As only by improving the situation can the dissemination of information on NM be enhanced, my supplementary question is whether the Government will liaise with the search platforms concerned to request the removal of fraudulent information about NM or pay such platforms to ensure that the official website for NM and the correct information always appear at the top of search results? Thank you.

SECRETARY FOR DEVELOPMENT (in Cantonese): President, regarding the situation mentioned by Ms CHAN, as I just said, the Government currently disseminates information on Mainland social media through the Weibo pages of GDETO and DEVB. We will make further efforts to ensure that the information disseminated on the pages appears at the top of search results. Some specific arrangements may require payments, and we will also work on that.

As for inaccurate information appearing on Mainland social media, such as the incident in Ta Kwu Ling mentioned by Ms CHAN Yuet-ming in today's question, the false information was removed by the Mainland social media concerned upon request from the Police, and the social media involved at that time was Douyin. Of course, the above incident is just an example. We will report any similar situations identified to the Mainland social media concerned and public security authorities through the Police, and the relevant mechanism is already in place.

MR TONY TSE (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. NM covers vast areas of land and has a long development timeline, and we all recognize the need for accurate information. In this connection, the Secretary previously proposed the construction of a gallery to showcase major development projects, which may not be implemented in the near future for various reasons. Nonetheless, one of the functions of the said gallery is to showcase the development of NM.*

I have visited the official website for information on NM mentioned just now, and I have two points to make. First, President, I am not sure how often the website is updated, as its content is obsolete and it seems much of the information has not been updated. As Members, we are more knowledgeable about the development and the latest situation. I would like to ask how often is the information on the website updated? Can the website make use of current innovative technology to provide more engaging content, and refrain from text-only content, which may not capture the public's interest? Thank you.

SECRETARY FOR DEVELOPMENT (in Cantonese): President, regarding the gallery mentioned by the Member, we have been contemplating a gallery to showcase major development and infrastructure projects in Hong Kong. Currently, we are considering the location of the gallery, and how it can synergize with the City Gallery. Nevertheless, at this stage, we will endeavour to set up small exhibition halls separately at our offices in various development areas of NM to introduce the development of NM, which is similar to the current approach for the Loop. We will also seek to set up these exhibition halls in other development areas in the future.

Meanwhile, as mentioned just now, we will disseminate information about NM on our official website. In principle, we immediately upload any newly announced information to the website. However, I believe the situation mentioned by the Member relates to the better consolidation and update of past information available on the website to facilitate public searches. I will review this matter with my colleagues shortly.

Besides the official website, we make frequent use of social media, which is indeed more engaging. Currently, apart from DEVB's use of social media, the Northern Metropolis Co-ordination Office ("NMCO") has also created a social media account about NM to upload clips and interviews. In the future, we will strive for excellence and continue to do a good job, especially in publicity and information dissemination. I believe that there is always room for improvement, and we will take heed of the views expressed by Members.

PROF CHOW MAN-KONG (in Cantonese): *President, with regard to the situation raised in the main question just now, there are two straightforward ways to make improvements. The first is to enhance transparency. The irresponsible acts of "flag-planting" or even unlawful occupation of land in the area concerned are indeed intimidating to local residents. Can the Government take the initiative to swiftly clarify any false information on its website, so as to maintain smooth communication between the Government and the public? The other way is to step up enforcement. As the efforts of the Police alone may not suffice for enforcement, will DEVB and the Security Bureau ("SB") jointly establish a dedicated team to step up enforcement and fight against outlaws? Thank you, President.*

SECRETARY FOR DEVELOPMENT (in Cantonese): President, I have already mentioned in the main reply our efforts to enhance transparency. In fact, following the establishment of NMCO, good communication has been established between NMCO and the district offices of government departments across the North and Yuen Long Districts, thus expediting the referral of complaint cases once received.

Meanwhile, we have not set up a dedicated team for the purpose of stepping up enforcement, as doing so may affect the division of work and involve manpower deployment. However, joint enforcement operations will be conducted through enhanced communication among various departments including not only the Police, but also the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (“FEHD”), Drainage Services Department, Environmental Protection Department, Lands Department, Planning Department, and so on. The example raised by Ms CHAN Yuet-ming involves unlawful occupation of government land, as well as illegal dumping which falls under the purview of FEHD. The Police may also take action due to the fraudulent nature of the case. Now, we have added coordinated operations to our arsenal. This is not because individual operations are unfeasible, but because joint operations offer the advantage of a stronger deterrent effect. With the strengthened liaison between DEVB and SB, we will immediately communicate with SB about any reports received, particularly those related to the situation mentioned by Ms CHAN.

MR CHAN YUNG (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President, and also thanks to the Secretary. We can see that various parties attach great importance to NM. Apart from online information, we suggest the authorities draw on the past experience of the construction of the Legislative Council (“LegCo”) Complex or the airport to provide clear illustrations and descriptions on-site, thereby promoting a better understanding of the progress of development works.*

Meanwhile, in order to stop intermediaries from charging high fees and the related fraud, will the authorities make reference to the Top Talent Pass Scheme of the Labour and Welfare Bureau and the Immigration Department? Under this scheme, direct applications can be submitted by the applicants without going through an intermediary, which is a fast process that can minimize unexpected circumstances. This is my question. Thank you, President.

SECRETARY FOR DEVELOPMENT (in Cantonese): President, as I mentioned earlier, we do indeed plan to set up on-site exhibition venues at the construction sites in NM in the future. Currently, there are already some good exhibition halls at individual construction sites, which provide comprehensive information despite their small size. Going forward, as we commence work at different places, we will make greater efforts in this regard.

Mr CHAN also mentioned the import of workers without going through an intermediary, which is theoretically possible. For instance, in the construction sector, if an application is made by a principal contractor, it can complete all formalities itself. However, in reality, principal contractors may not be well-versed in labour affairs, and they often delegate the duties to intermediaries in the Mainland or other places, who are closer to the market and more familiar with recruitment. Nevertheless, the key point is that the approval of the government authorities in the labour-exporting place is always required, regardless of whether the workers come from the Mainland or elsewhere. In the case of the Mainland, we have made it very clear that by the so-called “government authorities”, we mean our designated labour service enterprises. I think this is a vital piece of information that prospective workers must be informed of. They should always ask about the responsible labour service enterprises handling their cases, regardless of the agent contacting them. This is the first point.

Secondly, we have recently strengthened the regulation on agents. We have imposed additional regulation on contractors who employ agents to recruit workers to Hong Kong, and manage matters such as meals and transportation for the workers. To begin with, we stipulate the responsibilities of contractors. As contractors are the employers of agents, they must undertake to us that they are responsible for ensuring that the agents are aware of their responsibilities. If an incident happens and a contractor fails to act with due diligence, it will also be held accountable. Moreover, we specify that an agent shall not assume the responsibilities of importing workers and providing meals to the workers at the same time. If an agent takes care of everything, it may have an overwhelming influence over the workers, who might feel intimidated. Therefore, we have recently introduced different measures, which have shown promising initial results, and we will continue to monitor the situation.

MS CARMEN KAN (in Cantonese): *President, I have noticed that as the main reply mentioned, the relevant works in NM are carried out by CEDD under DEVB. I have noticed from the Annex that CEDD has recently signed “Development of the Loop: Main Works Package 1—Contract 4” on 10 March in respect of the construction of a fresh water service reservoir under Main Works Package 1, which is expected to be completed in 2027. With regard to this piece of information, I would like to ask about the impact of the works project on those enterprises and users who would have already moved in the Hong Kong Park? If there is no fresh water service reservoir yet, why has such planning been made by the Government? Thank you.*

SECRETARY FOR DEVELOPMENT (in Cantonese): President, in this regard, Members may rest assured as CEDD is responsible for the land formation and engineering infrastructure works throughout the Hong Kong Park in the Loop, and of course, the Hong Kong-Shenzhen Innovation and Technology Park Limited is responsible for the construction of buildings. Members may notice that individual contracts (such as the water supply contract) have only been awarded recently. This is solely because the infrastructure works on the 80 ha of land in the Loop are implemented in phases, despite having obtained funding approval from LegCo earlier. Recently, we and the Innovation, Technology and Industry Bureau have announced that the first three buildings in the Hong Kong Park in the Loop will be commissioned soon. The relevant infrastructure and necessary facilities, including fresh water supply, will be ready by the time tenants move in. The construction works are implemented in phases because there are still buildings to be constructed in the Loop in the remaining phase. Moreover, there are still some mobile cabin facilities in different locations in the area. We have just started the removal of the mobile cabin facilities to carry out site formation works at the relevant location. The works are proceeding on schedule. The contract noticed by the Member is intended to complement the remaining works. Thank you, President.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Fourth question.

Public healthcare services and their fees and charges

4. **DR DAVID LAM** (in Cantonese): *President, the Government has just announced a comprehensive reform on the fees and charges for public healthcare services. It is learnt that while the principle of Hong Kong's public healthcare policy is that no citizen is denied appropriate healthcare service due to financial difficulty, concerns about the sustainability of healthcare expenditure have been raised in previous reviews of the fees and charges for healthcare services. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) whether it will promote the extensive use of the reference frameworks or clinical pathways developed by the Health Bureau, which serve as a guide for medical procedures such as laboratory tests, imaging, medication, radiotherapy and surgeries, so as to ensure the safety and enhance the effectiveness of diagnoses and treatments; and*
- (2) whether it has considered setting up individual or family healthcare accounts for members of the public to settle the co-payment fees, and introducing in public healthcare institutions preferential inpatient and outpatient paid services which are pegged to the amounts of compensation under the Voluntary Health Insurance Scheme as an additional option for members of the public and, in parallel, capping the fees and charges for expensive treatments, so as to prevent members of the public from falling into poverty because of illness; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?*

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH (in Cantonese): President, Hong Kong has an efficient healthcare system with high quality, and the public healthcare system is the cornerstone of our healthcare system and the safety net for all. Nevertheless, in view of challenges such as an ageing population, rising service demand and healthcare costs, Hong Kong's healthcare system needs to be reformed in order to achieve sustainable development. Healthcare reform efforts are closely intertwined, and fees and charges reform for public healthcare is an indispensable part thereof. The fees and charges reform for public healthcare just announced is premised on five principles:

- (1) Commitment will not be lessened: All the gains from the reform will be wholly utilized for public healthcare services;

- (2) “Co-payment by those who can afford and co-payment by those with mild conditions”: We need to expand and enhance the co-payment mechanism;
- (3) Enhancement and reduction: To enhance the protection for “poor, acute, serious, critical” patients and to reduce in wastage;
- (4) High subsidization: To maintain 90% overall public subsidization rate; and
- (5) Gradual and orderly manner: Aim to achieve the objective in five years.

Through the fees and charges reform, we can guide the public to make optimal use of healthcare resources, reduce wastage and abuse, and enhance the healthcare protection for “poor, acute, serious, critical” patients on all fronts, with a view to ensuring the public healthcare system can provide subsidies in a more precise and targeted manner, and better serving as a safety net for all.

There are three areas in enhancing healthcare protection:

- (1) Enhancing the medical fee waiver mechanism by raising the income and asset eligibility limits to largely enhance the support for low-income families and the underprivileged group;
- (2) Introducing an annual cap of \$10,000 on public healthcare service items (except self-financed drugs and medical devices) to take better care of patients with serious illnesses and providing protection to all seven million people in Hong Kong; and
- (3) Expediting the introduction of more effective and innovative drugs and medical devices, and relaxing the eligibility criteria for the safety net of self-financed drugs and medical devices, so that more patients with critical conditions, in particular middle-income persons, can receive subsidies for self-financed drugs and medical devices.

In consultation with the Hospital Authority (“HA”), the reply to the question raised by Dr David LAM is as follows:

- (1) Hong Kong's dual-track healthcare system comprises both public and private sectors. The private healthcare sector provides a wide range of services, including but not limited to general, specialist and inpatient services, that complement the public healthcare system. To achieve meaningful reform on the healthcare system in Hong Kong, it is imperative to enhance private healthcare price transparency alongside with the reforms on the public healthcare sector, whilst promoting the adoption of quality and outcome indicators across healthcare services. We plan to launch the consultation exercise on legislating for enhancing private healthcare price transparency later this year.

In promoting the continuous improvement of Hong Kong's healthcare standards including its quality and efficiency, the Chief Executive's 2024 Policy Address announced that the Government would establish a professional platform to develop evidence-based clinical protocols and explore the feasibility of devising service quality and efficiency standards for public and private healthcare services. To this end, the Health Bureau has taken forward the establishment of the Institute for Medical Advancement and Clinical Excellence ("IMACE") by seven major institutions in the Hong Kong healthcare sector, including the Hong Kong Academy of Medicine, the Department of Health, HA, the Primary Healthcare Commission, the Faculty of Medicine of The Chinese University of Hong Kong, the Li Ka Shing Faculty of Medicine of the University of Hong Kong, and the Hong Kong Private Hospitals Association.

IMACE is a professional-led, evidence-based platform with members from both the public and private healthcare sectors in Hong Kong. It enables the sectors to collect data and cases in an effective manner for detailed deliberations on clinical practices in screening, diagnosis, treatment and management of different diseases. IMACE will also evaluate the effectiveness of various medical options, including drugs, medical devices, diagnostic techniques, surgical procedures, non-pharmacological interventions and new medical innovations to formulate clinical guidelines in light of the evaluation results, and explore the feasibility of devising service quality and efficiency standards for both the public and private healthcare sectors. It is expected that IMACE will formally commence its work within the first half of this year.

Through the work of IMACE, we hope to help the sectors to identify cost-effective medical options that may benefit patients. This will also foster professional exchange among healthcare professionals to learn about and apply the latest technologies, thereby further promoting the development of Hong Kong into an international health and medical innovation hub.

- (2) On the second point, under the existing design of the Voluntary Health Insurance Scheme (“VHIS”), its reimbursement policy has already covered all facilities which offer inpatient services, including those in the public healthcare system. As for the suggestions of setting up personal or family healthcare accounts to settle the co-payments for public healthcare, and establishing premium fee-charging services linked to VHIS compensation in the public healthcare system, the Government is willing to listen to comments from various sectors in the community and relevant stakeholders, consider the practical needs for the relevant arrangements and study the feasibility.

As for the suggestion on a cap for expensive treatment items, the Government’s fees and charges reform for public healthcare has already enhanced healthcare protection for “poor, acute, serious, critical” patients on all fronts, strengthening various safety net measures, including increasing the subsidy for patients who are in need of expensive drugs or medical devices, to prevent “patients with serious conditions falling into poverty”. In fact, there is currently already a mechanism of capping charges for drugs and medical devices covered by our safety net, with the maximum amount to be borne by patients at \$1 million per year. However, with medical technologies ever changing, new drugs and medical devices as well as therapeutic techniques are very costly. Given the current resource constraints of the public healthcare system, provision of a uniform cap for all relevant charging items may not be feasible.

To cope with the challenges faced by the healthcare system in a pragmatic manner, we have to keep taking steps of reform and continuously drive forward the healthcare reform on different fronts. As for the long-term healthcare financing arrangements, the Government will continue to listen to the views of various sectors, and

welcome more suggestions from stakeholders as well as more public participation in the discussion, so as to build consensus on the future healthcare financing reform that will best suit the situation in Hong Kong. Thank you.

DR DAVID LAM (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. I thank the Secretary for his comprehensive reply. Regarding the introduction of a fee cap of \$10,000, it may involve expensive drugs. With the technological development nowadays, diseases which were incurable in the past may have become chronic diseases, but the medications required are very expensive. If members of the public are ineligible for subsidies for self-financed drugs, they may fall into poverty because of illness. In the light of this, the introduction of a \$10,000 fee cap may not be helpful to these citizens.*

On the other hand, we would like to draw the Secretary's attention to the fact that the existing cap of \$10,000 could be said to be relatively low compared to the cost of purchasing a service place from a residential care home for the elderly, which costs \$20,000 or so a year. This may give a small number of people—and I stress, "a small number"—the wrong incentive to leave elderly patients in public hospitals and be reluctant to take them back home even when the elderly persons no longer have any medical needs.

In this connection, may I ask the Secretary whether there is any room for further optimizing the design of the capping mechanism in this regard? Thank you.

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH (in Cantonese): All 7.5 million Hong Kong residents can apply to have their medical fees capped at \$10,000. We emphasize that the main reason for continuing to require patients to apply is to prevent abuse. If some inpatients are already suitable for discharge, we will consider their clinical conditions during the application process. For patients who are already suitable for discharge, we will not accept their request for prolonged hospitalization in order to prevent some people from taking advantage of the capping mechanism for abusive use of services. Thank you, President.

DR DENNIS LAM (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. The Bureau has emphasized that all additional revenue from the current reform proposal will be fully ploughed back into public healthcare services. At the same time, it has introduced a series of support measures, including a new fee ceiling and subsidies for expensive self-financed drugs and medical devices. However, the prices of drugs and medical devices are likely to continue to rise year on year in the future. Has the Bureau considered whether the financial sustainability of the public healthcare sector will be affected if the additional revenue is not sufficient to offset the expenditure on the support measures in the future?*

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH (in Cantonese): One of the main focuses of the reform is to enhance healthcare protection for the public, one aspect of which is precisely the expensive drugs and medical devices that Dr LAM mentioned. Over a period of time in the past, there were many middle-class people who suffered from serious or critical illnesses, because no one can guarantee that they will not suffer from serious illnesses, especially cancer. As the population ages, we will review and consider various factors such as affordability, trial services and cost sharing when considering subsidizing expensive drugs and medical devices.

However, a very important point to note is that a mechanism will be put in place to assess the cost-effectiveness of expensive and innovative drugs and medical devices. Cost-effectiveness is a crucial factor because the cost-effectiveness of many innovative drugs, especially those for rare diseases, has been uncertain due to the paucity of clinical data. For this reason, we will conduct an assessment under HA's mechanism to determine when there is sufficient data to support the inclusion of the drugs concerned in the self-financed drug category of the Drug Formulary and when they will be covered by the safety net. After their inclusion in the safety net, we will gradually relax the eligibility criteria according to the existing mechanism, so as to ensure that the additional revenue generated by this reform can support these additional protections, including the relaxation of the fee waiver mechanism, the introduction of the \$10,000 fee cap and the provision of subsidies for self-financed drugs. Thank you.

MR KENNETH LAU (in Cantonese): *President, the authorities plan to require non-urgent patients (including outpatients) to pay for relatively complicated examination items such as computed tomography scans and magnetic resonance imaging examinations, while emergency patients and inpatients will continue to*

use the relevant services free of charge. At present, the fees for receiving these examinations in private hospitals or medical centres are quite high. May I ask the Secretary whether the ultimate goal of the authorities is to recover costs, and how the charging standards for outpatient services in public hospitals will be determined in the future?

In addition, it is the authorities' thinking that some patients seeking treatment in public hospitals are expected to switch to private hospitals. In this connection, how can we prevent the private sector from taking advantage of the opportunity to increase fees and charges? Thank you.

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH (in Cantonese): The current fees and charges reform is not intended to recover costs, because there is a long way to go before costs can be recovered. As I mentioned in the main reply just now, we will maintain a high level of subsidization (90% overall subsidization rate), which means that the overall co-payment rate is only 10%. Of course, a 90% overall subsidization rate does not mean that all items will be subsidized at 90%. We will determine the subsidy rate for individual items according to service priorities and public affordability. The subsidy rates currently proposed range from 70% to 95%, with individual items reaching 95%.

Regarding the Member's question about whether the fee adjustment will lead to price increases in the private sector, in terms of patient outflow from the accident and emergency ("A&E") departments, there are currently no accurate statistics on the expected number of patients who may switch to the private sector following the fee adjustment. Based on the experience of the last fee adjustment in 2017, there was an outflow of about 5% of patients. This 5% patient outflow has provided some relief to the A&E services. We expect that the number of outgoing patients will increase after this fee adjustment, but the number of A&E patients only constitutes a very small proportion of the total number of outpatient visits in the private sector. Moreover, the current subsidy rate for public healthcare services, such as outpatient services, is still over 70%, which is a far cry from the private sector fees and charges. Therefore, there should be no question of public sector fees pushing up private sector fees. After all, the gap between the two is really too big. It is difficult for small shops to push up the prices of large shops. Thank you, President.

MR CHAN KIN-POR (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. Due to the low transparency in the surgical fees of private doctors and the fees charged by private hospitals, the fees paid by patients at discharge are often much higher than expected, leading to a corresponding substantial increase in medical insurance premiums. Therefore, I hope that the legislative work on price transparency in the private healthcare sector will commence as soon as possible.*

On the other hand, the formulation of standardized medical procedures will help establish compensation standards and effectively prevent unreasonable charges. Therefore, I am glad that the Government will set up IMACE to explore the establishment of benchmarks for the quality and effectiveness of public and private healthcare services, and that the relevant work will officially commence in the first half of this year. May I ask when the report of this important study will be available so that the insurance sector can respond accordingly?

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH (in Cantonese): Regarding price transparency in the private healthcare sector, we have completed a study and the consultant's report is expected to be available for discussion with the industry shortly (i.e. this year). We hope that the relevant measures, including the enactment of legislation to improve price transparency in the private healthcare sector, can be introduced as early as possible.

With regard to IMACE, we have facilitated the seven healthcare institutions just mentioned to commence work. The first meeting is expected to take place in the next month or two. We hope that they will propose clinical guidelines and benchmark benefits one after the other as soon as possible. But this needs to be done in a gradual and orderly way. Thank you, President.

MR EDWARD LEUNG (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. After the introduction of the healthcare reform, we have heard many voices in society, one of which is that people do not intend to abuse the resources of A&E departments. However, when children fall ill or have a fever at night and need medical treatment, they have only two choices: private hospitals or A&E departments. The consultation, examination and medication fees at a private hospital can cost nearly \$1,000, while the fees at A&E departments are much cheaper, so people often go to A&E departments.*

May I ask the authorities whether they will take the opportunity of the current healthcare reform to consider increasing the number of evening clinics? This is because at the moment, many districts, such as the Eastern District, do not have evening clinics. This will help to relieve pressure on A&E departments and give patients another option if they feel unwell at night, rather than paying exorbitant consultation fees or rushing to A&E departments. Thank you.

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH (in Cantonese): I thank Mr Edward LEUNG for his supplementary question. Over the past two years, the Government has been promoting the primary healthcare development, including the Chronic Disease Co-Care Pilot Scheme. Our aim is to promote the concept of “family doctor for all” so that members of the public can visit their family doctors when they have minor illnesses or feel sick.

Regarding the healthcare service needs of members of the public during non-office hours, evening consultation period and holidays that the Member mentioned, Members may have noticed that in the past (especially during the influenza season or before and after long holidays), HA has introduced additional public holiday services and evening consultation services and will continue to take forward the work. At the same time, we encourage private practitioners to provide more services during consultation hours and holidays. At present, we have a mobile app that can be used to check the service availability of private clinics during holidays to facilitate members of the public to make a choice.

I would like to emphasize that the current fees and charges reform, including the A&E fees reform and the promotion of primary healthcare services, are closely intertwined, as we have stated in the healthcare reform. If we only expand evening consultation services without adjusting the fees and charges of A&E departments or other services, the public will still not choose private healthcare services or evening consultation services. Even if clinics are open into the night, patients may not go there. On the contrary, if we do not establish these clinics and only adjust the service fees and charges, the public may be left with no choice. That is why I emphasize the need for a “two-pronged approach”. In respect of the fee adjustment, we need a driving force to help the public and guide them in using the services. Meanwhile, we will provide the public with choices so that more private and public clinics will provide services outside normal hours. Thank you.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Fifth question.

Design of subsidized sale flats

5. **MR LEUNG MAN-KWONG** (in Cantonese): *President, it has been reported that some prospective owners of Home Ownership Scheme (“HOS”) flats were informed only after taking possession of their flats that the kitchens and toilets in their flats were “prefabricated components”, of which the partitioning could not be altered, and they decided to forfeit the deposit they had paid as their flats had become much less practical. There are views that the layout and design of HOS flats fail to meet the needs of the public, resulting in quite a number of owners abandoning their brand-new furniture such as pedestal toilets, lavatory basins and zinc basins. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) of the number of applications received by the Housing Department (“HD”) in the past three years for altering the partitioning of subsidized sale flats and, among them, the respective numbers of applications involving alterations to kitchens and toilets;*
- (2) given that the subsidized sale flats of the Hong Kong Housing Society provide open kitchen units for buyers to choose from, whether the Hong Kong Housing Authority has considered increasing the supply of such units; if not, of the reasons for that; and*
- (3) whether HD is aware of the wastage caused by tenants and owners of public housing units abandoning the original furniture of the units, such as, among others, counter-tops in kitchens, taps and zinc basins, after taking possession of their flats; if so, whether HD will conduct a review of the indoor installations of public housing units, so as to minimize such abandonment; if not, the reasons for that?*

SECRETARY FOR HOUSING (in Cantonese): President, I would like to thank Mr LEUNG for his concern about the construction methods, flat design and indoor provisions of the Home Ownership Scheme (“HOS”) flats categorized under Subsidized Sale Flats (“SSFs”) of the Hong Kong Housing Authority (“HA”). My reply to the question raised by Mr LEUNG is as follows:

Since its establishment in 1973, HA has all along been committed to enhancing the housing ladder, assisting low- to middle-income families to achieve home ownership through the sale of SSF, with a view to promoting upward mobility.

In terms of design, HA has been adopting a simple yet practical approach. The flats are designed according to basic design principles emphasizing simplicity, sustainability and safety with provisions that comply with the requirements of the Buildings Ordinance and other relevant regulations. With the constraint of flat size, we understand that residents have to design the layout and partitions in a more flexible manner, so as to meet the needs of different family members. For example, families with elderly members or children will have vastly different needs. Therefore, SSF are partition-free, providing maximum flexibility for users to opt for layouts which suit their own needs at best.

As for construction, as early as the 1980s, HA has adopted off-site prefabrication technology and has had most building components prefabricated in factories and then delivered to sites for installation. Not only does this technology minimize on-site construction processes, but it also enhances site safety and environmental protection. This further boost construction efficiency and sustains the sale of SSF at a low price.

Subject to actual conditions of the site, HA uses different prefabricated components, including precast facades, semi-precast slabs, or volumetric precast bathrooms and kitchens as building parts. For example, since 2002, i.e. more than two decades ago, HA has been applying volumetric precast bathrooms and kitchens in public rental housing projects, and the use of volumetric precast bathrooms and kitchens were subsequently applied to HOS. So far, 22 relevant projects have been completed with a total provision of as many as 80 000 units. We noticed that for projects adopting volumetric precast bathrooms and kitchens, the required remedial works related to bathrooms and kitchens, such as water seepage, amount to at least 50% less compared to traditional on-site construction projects, as reflected in the rectification list submitted by owners after flat in-take. The technology of these volumetric precast bathrooms and kitchens has been further developed and it laid the ground for Modular Integrated Construction (“MiC”), which is well-known to us these days. As this technology is satisfactory in terms of effectiveness and it can further enhance the overall construction quality, HA has further extended the use of MiC to the construction of entire flats in suitable projects, in addition to bathrooms and kitchens. In March last year, the Development Bureau and the Department of Housing and Urban-Rural

Development of Guangdong Province signed the Letter of Intent on Strengthening Guangdong-Hong Kong Cooperation in Construction and Related Engineering Sectors to deepen the collaboration of construction areas between Guangdong and Hong Kong, including the development of MiC as a new quality productive force to contribute to the high-quality national development, making MiC a strategic industry that expands to the international arena.

Regarding household decoration works, HOS flat owners or decoration workers engaged should consult building professionals on the alteration proposals before commencing works, in addition to heeding advice in the decoration guide and confirming compliance with the deed of mutual covenant of the building. Regarding the video clips recently circulated on the Internet about decoration works of new HOS flats, I would like to draw attention to the following situations. Generally speaking, decoration works which only involve the demolition or minor addition of non-structural walls in a flat, such as altering the position of the toilet door, are exempted from prior approval and consent. If the works involve alterations to non-structural walls inside a flat, depending on the nature and scale of the works, it may be necessary to notify the Independent Checking Unit (“ICU”) of the Housing Bureau prior to the commencement of the works and/or upon their completion according to the Minor Works Control System. If the works involve alteration to the structure of the building or fire safety, flat owners should seek advice from building professionals to ensure that the alteration works comply with the Buildings Ordinance and relevant regulations. For example, alterations to kitchen partitioning or decoration works for conversion into an open kitchen must first be approved by ICU. In short, regardless of construction methods, such as MiC, volumetric precast bathrooms and kitchens or planar precast components, the design and construction should be carried out in accordance with the established quality control requirements of HA, including fabrication testing, installation and inspection procedures. Any restrictions on future modification works have no relation to the construction method used in the project, but the structural design itself. This principle has always been upheld and applicable to different SSF projects.

Regarding the design of SSF, HA’s current kitchen designs aim to facilitate the habit of traditional families in cooking with open flames, and hence the kitchens are equipped with four fire-rated partition walls and fire-rated doors to comply with relevant provisions. We understand that as society constantly changes, people’s living and dietary habits also evolve, and hence residents may have new demands for the design layouts of kitchens. For example, small families of singletons or two tend to prefer simpler cooking styles. Looking ahead, in view of these

changes, we are actively exploring the feasibility of adopting an open kitchen design in smaller flats to keep abreast of the times. That said, the design of open kitchens requires addition of automatic sprinkler systems and other additional fire services installations. These fire services installations will also have to be inspected annually by registered fire services installations contractors. We will conduct a comprehensive study on the construction cost effectiveness and future maintenance as well as other issues.

Noting that most HOS owners carry out decoration works according to their own needs, we have decided to introduce design enhancements for HOS projects to be put up for sale starting from 2025, including removal of some provisions that many residents opined as unnecessary in resident surveys and have no relation to regulatory requirements, such as removal of kitchen cooking slab and drying rods in bathrooms to provide owners with greater flexibility in selecting preferable models.

Providing simple, decent and affordable HOS has all along been the vision of HA. In the future, we will continue to strive for excellence by introducing new materials and technologies to suit the changes in society, and ensure success in every project that we are driving. Thank you, President.

MR LEUNG MAN-KWONG (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President, and I would like to thank the Secretary for her response in the main reply. Regarding the main reply, I have three points of observation. Firstly, I agree with the Bureau that the design of HOS flats should keep abreast of the times, and I also agree that the adoption of an open kitchen design for future flats should be explored. Secondly, the Bureau also mentioned the development of prefabricated components and MiC, and that the construction quality is satisfactory. However, in past discussions, some people often questioned whether there might be water seepage and other problems. In fact, the advantages should be emphasized and publicity needs to be stepped up in this regard. The last point of observation is related to my question. The main reply mentions that for HOS projects to be put up for sale starting from 2025, some provisions that have no relation to regulatory requirements will be removed according to the needs of owners, such as the kitchen cooking slab and drying rods mentioned just now. I have noticed that the relevant regulations were actually enacted as early as 1956, which is already 70 years ago ...*

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mr LEUNG Man-kwong, you should not present your observations now. Please ask your supplementary question.

MR LEUNG MAN-KWONG (in Cantonese): *I am about to ask my supplementary question. In fact, there is a need to consider improving the relevant regulations. However, before the relevant regulations are improved, may I ask whether the authorities can set up a recycling or donation programme for the removed provisions (such as the zinc basins and pedestal toilets as mentioned just now) to avoid wastage? Thank you, President.*

SECRETARY FOR HOUSING (in Cantonese): Thank you, President, and I thank Mr LEUNG for his suggestions. I have just provided information illustrating that after the use of off-site prefabricated components, the number of minor defects on the rectification list such as water seepage or incomplete tiling has significantly reduced by 50%. This proves that the off-site prefabricated components are of high quality. We will seize every opportunity to give more explanations.

As regards the question raised by Mr LEUNG, the current HOS flats are partition-free and we have streamlined the required provisions as much as possible to avoid wastage. There are two types of fittings in flats. For example, the drying rods that I have just mentioned. At present, there are a variety of drying facilities (such as floor-standing and wall-mounted types) to choose from on online shopping platforms. We believe it is more appropriate to leave the choice to individual householders.

However, some installations still need to comply with legal requirements. For example, the water supply system must be intact, and the Water Supplies Department has stipulated the requirements for water pipes in the relevant legislation. Regarding water pipes, we have to consider that water pipes need to be tested and a wash basin or zinc basin needs to be installed before the water test to avoid getting the place wet during the water test.

Why is this requirement stipulated in the relevant legislation of the Water Supplies Department? I believe there is a certain degree of reasonableness to it, because we can only take water samples for testing if the water supply system is intact to ensure the safety and hygiene of the water quality. I believe everyone understands that very well.

Various parts of the entire water supply system, including the pumps, rooftop water tanks, all water pipes and even the location of pipes, have to meet certain specifications and requirements. Therefore, we hope to first get the whole water supply system right, and only after all the procedures such as sampling and water testing are completed will the flats be handed over to the owners. In this way, the relevant records can clearly indicate the responsibilities, and the quality can also be guaranteed.

If Members think that there are certain items that we can look into further in the future, we would be happy to listen to their views. In addition, our colleagues have been collecting views from HOS flat buyers through questionnaires. Our decision to remove drying rods from HOS projects to be put up for sale starting from 2025 is based on our understanding that the households felt that it would be more appropriate for them to select such provisions on their own. Thank you, President.

IR LEE CHUN-KEUNG (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. Recently, Kai Yan Court, an HOS estate, has become a hot topic in town, arousing public concerns about MiC. As far as I know, Kai Yan Court has not adopted MiC, but rather volumetric precast bathroom and kitchen (VBK), which is commonly used by developers in the market and is the predecessor of MiC. However, some flat buyers are concerned about the potential problems of water leakage and poor quality of these volumetric precast components. As the Secretary just mentioned, these problems can indeed be solved through rectification.*

As for MiC, it has a history of several decades and has been commonly adopted in the Mainland, not only to enhance speed and efficiency but most importantly to reduce manpower and time costs. Can the Secretary explain why MiC can enhance the quality of construction? I would like the public and people in various parts of the world to clearly understand and realize that this is the future trend of construction, thereby reducing misunderstandings. Thank you, President.

SECRETARY FOR HOUSING (in Cantonese): I would like to thank Ir LEE Chun-keung for his supplementary question. I have already touched on this in the main reply and I would like to take this opportunity to explain to Members that HA

started introducing the “volumetric precast bathrooms and kitchens” as early as 2002, i.e. more than 20 years ago. As we all know, in HA projects, there are as many as 800 units in a building, and there can be more than 20 units on each floor. If all the units have to be built on site and each worker has to do the waterproofing, tiling and other procedures in the kitchen and bathroom of each unit properly on site, there are indeed difficulties in terms of supervision. Years ago, the colleagues in HA did a good thing by sending the parts including the kitchens and bathrooms, which were particularly prone to waterproofing and leakage problems, to the factory for prefabrication. The tiling, final finishing touches, as well as the pedestal toilets and wash basins of these volumetric components were completed in the factory as far as possible.

Why is the quality of factory prefabricated components so much better? Firstly, the factories use a flow-line production model. This can be imagined, and we have visited many factories that use the floor assembly line model. For decoration or cement work, workers do not have to transport building materials to each unit on site, which may be 20 or 30 storeys high. The scale of the factory has also increased significantly, and robots are now used extensively, leading to great improvements in quality control and pre-delivery testing. Data shows that the adoption of volumetric prefabricated components has significantly reduced the need for remedial works by 50% compared to the traditional method. Although there are still problems, they are minor ones, such as a small number of scratches or broken tiles in the course of transportation to the units being renovated.

Therefore, we hope to leverage the rich experience HA has gained over the past 20 years or so to further expand the scope of application of volumetric prefabricated components to the entire unit, including windows, light switches and some basic decorations, and have them all manufactured in the factory, thereby making good use of the advantages of the Greater Bay Area. This will significantly reduce the manpower required on site. Experience from current MiC projects suggests that the manpower requirement can be reduced by 30% or more. Of course, the wastage of materials in the whole process has also been greatly improved. In the past, bricks and tiles had to be transported to the site, slowly cut and laid, and then removed and redone if they were not laid properly. In the factory, all works procedures can be arranged properly, making the whole process more environmentally friendly. Of course, the safety of the workers is also better protected. Thank you, President.

MR YANG WING-KIT (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. The current design of HOS flats has been in use for more than 20 years, and many owners have reservations about the design of “putting toilets by the front door”. Moreover, every owner wants to maximize every inch of space, so even a 300-odd sq ft flat is partitioned into three rooms. With the changing times, many owners nowadays do not mind the open kitchen design. Of course, I am glad to know that the Secretary has indicated in the main reply a while ago that the authorities will conduct a study on this.*

In order to grasp the demand more accurately, may I know whether the Secretary will conduct a questionnaire survey to find out the number of existing HOS applicants who are willing to accept open kitchens? Apart from the 200-odd sq ft flats just mentioned by the Secretary, how great is the demand for this design in flats of 300-odd or 400-odd sq ft? Can relevant studies be conducted on this? Thank you.

SECRETARY FOR HOUSING (in Cantonese): Thank you, President, and I thank the Member for his supplementary question. The Member has just mentioned a situation that has been reported from time to time in the community, namely that when the front door of an HOS flat is opened and the toilet door is not closed, one can see directly into the toilet, which may cause embarrassment during visits by guests. In view of this, I carried out a site inspection and asked my colleagues about the original intention of this design. I learned that it was well intentioned. As we all know, the flat is small and space is limited, so my colleagues wanted to reserve a 2 m space at the front door to allow more room for a sofa or a cupboard. But if we abandon the design concept of the 2 m space and fine-tune the position of the front door to reduce the reserved space from 2 m to 1 m or so, this can avoid the front door facing the toilet, and visitors will not see the toilet when they enter from the main door. We will make improvements correspondingly as it is entirely feasible to move the position of the front door in terms of design. We are grateful to the public for their continuous feedback, which allows us to improve the design.

As for open kitchens, our tentative idea is to start with smaller flats, as it has been observed that single persons and small two-person families are less likely to cook with open flames. In fact, cooking with open flames may also cause problems. For HOS estates with more than 20 households on each floor and more

than 800 households in the whole block, there will always be households who still prefer to cook with open flames. We need to consider the fire safety issue carefully, and the fire-fighting equipment required for conversion into an open kitchen is also one of the aspects that needs to be carefully studied. Thank you, President.

DR WENDY HONG (in Cantonese): *There is “interchangeability” in the design of HOS flats and public rental housing (“PRH”) flats. Both are designed and built at the same time, with identical layout, materials and appearance, and it is only at the sales stage that a decision is made as to which will be HOS flats and which will be PRH flats. Although this provides flexibility for the Government, the result is that PRH flats are exactly the same as HOS flats, which are purchased for hundreds of thousands of dollars, and residents cannot experience any improvement in quality. Worse still, in order to meet the KPI (key performance indicator) for HOS production, HOS flats are generally smaller and even smaller than PRH flats, so well-off PRH tenants would rather have a pay cut than move out of their PRH flat and buy an HOS flat.*

May I ask the Secretary whether she will review the “interchangeability” of the design of HOS flats and PRH flats to improve the quality of HOS flats, so as to realize the value of the housing ladder? Thank you.

SECRETARY FOR HOUSING (in Cantonese): Thank you, President, and thank you, Dr HONG. First of all, there is no “interchangeability” between PRH flats and HOS flats, only between PRH flats and Green Form Subsidised Home Ownership Scheme (“GSH”) flats. HOS flats have a different design. For PRH, there are four types of flats (i.e. A, B, C, D). The average size of HOS flats is slightly larger than that of PRH flats.

There is indeed “interchangeability” between GSH and PRH flats. Firstly, the supply of GSH flats is relatively small. Secondly, we have maintained the “interchangeability” between GSH and PRH flats, and sometimes we need to make adjustments to the supply. GSH flats are intended for PRH tenants. As their incomes and assets gradually increase, they may wish to achieve home ownership. We have added an extra rung to the housing ladder to enable upwardly mobile PRH tenants to buy their own homes.

We have been concerned about the design of HOS flats. Firstly, the average size of the flats is larger. Secondly, there are various aspects such as the design of the lobby. We will continue to make improvements and take on board Members' views. We also understand Members' wish to further improve the design of SSFs, which are of higher quality. We will continue to conduct relevant studies on this. Thank you, President.

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

Land grant policy

6. **DR WENDY HONG** (in Cantonese): *Regarding the land grant policy, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *of the current number of sites granted by the Government under short-term tenancies ("STTs"), the area of the sites involved and their utilization (including their uses and actual tenancy periods);*
- (2) *as it is learnt that the Government will resume and re-tender sites with expired STTs, or renew such tenancies with the same tenants on a quarterly basis, and that about 40% of the STT tenants have rented the relevant sites for over 20 years after repeated renewals of tenancies, with the longest period being 55 years, and there are views pointing out that the continuous renewal of tenancies with the same tenants has turned STTs into long-term tenancies, whether the Government will rationalize the current STT policy to reduce instances of constantly re-tendering existing sites or continuously renewing their tenancies on a quarterly basis, and provide medium- to long-term land tenancies of, for example, 10 to 20 years for industries with demand, large investments and long payback periods, so as to facilitate enterprises' long-term planning and investments, and increase the Government rent revenue and potential tax revenue for the Government; and*
- (3) *given that the Government will grant land by way of private treaty for specified use for a longer term in justified circumstances to meet Hong Kong's economic, social and community needs, and in the light of the*

current objective of promoting the diversification of industries and re-industrialization, whether the Government will grant more land by such way, so as to provide operating sites with more certainty for the development of the industries concerned?

SECRETARY FOR DEVELOPMENT (in Cantonese): President, the Government grants land in different ways to support economic development.

In particular, the Government will normally grant leases with a 50-year tenure for commercial or industrial sites which are suitable for long-term development by way of open tender. Another way is private treaty grant (“PTG”) whereby, under the premise of facilitating implementation of individual policy and social development, land is directly granted to designated enterprises or institutions without tender for specified use with policy support. PTGs are mostly for special purpose leases and, subject to policy consideration, the lease tenure may be shorter than 50 years. Whether the land is granted by way of tender or PTG, both methods involve granting land in the form of land lease, which bring greater certainty for leaseholders and is conducive to long-term planning and investment. With the benefit of lease certainty, leaseholders are required to make a one-off upfront payment for land premium before execution of the leases.

On the other hand, the Government also grants short-term tenancies (“STTs”) by way of tender or direct grant. STTs support various social and economic activities and bring regular rental revenue for the Government. According to the land policy implemented for years, the fixed term of STT normally does not exceed seven years, and the tenancy may continue subject to the circumstances upon expiry of the fixed term. While the fixed term of STT is normally shorter than the tenure of a land lease, it provides greater flexibility for the Government in terms of land use and is particularly suitable for Government land not yet needed for long-term development or in respect of which the long-term planned use has yet to be determined. Tenants are also not required to pay an upfront lump sum of land premium, but only need to make regular rent payment and accept periodic market rental adjustment by the Government within the tenancy period, which is also a merit to tenants.

My reply to the various parts of the question raised by Dr HONG is as follows:

- (1) As of end-February 2025, the Lands Department (“LandsD”) managed over 5 800 STTs (involving a total of around 3 000 ha of land), covering many different uses. STTs for uses related to people’s daily lives take up around 60%, which include public fee-paying car parks, education, social welfare, religion, leisure and recreation; while STTs for commercial and economic activities take up around 40%, which include shops, workshops, cargo container handling, open or indoor storage and shipyards.
- (2) Upon expiry of the STT fixed term, if the site is still not needed for long-term development in the coming few years, LandsD will normally re-tender the site so as to give other interested operators in the market fair opportunities of bidding the site and maintain healthy competition. That said, many direct grant STTs related to commercial or economic activities may, with policy support or owing to special historical reasons, continue quarterly for a relatively long period upon expiry of the fixed term. According to the statistics of LandsD, among the direct grant STTs, there are some 1 600 cases with cumulative tenancy period exceeding 10 years after multiple renewals. Each of these cases has its specific reasons, with the majority of which (over 1 400 cases) belong to a few major categories, including STTs granted for relocation of businesses affected by public works (such as shipyards in earlier years); STTs gradually converted from Government land licences in the early years (usually for shops or workshops); and some sites for public utilities or franchise operation (such as franchised bus depots).

Currently, the main options under our land grant policy are land leases with tenure as long as 50 years or STTs with a fixed term of at most 7 years. We agree that there is room to review whether STTs with a fixed term longer than seven years could be granted to encourage long-term planning and investment by industries and to meet the diversified demand for economic land. In this regard, the Development Bureau (“DEVB”) will approach different Policy Bureaux to understand the nature and needs of various industries and economic activities, and study whether there may be a more flexible arrangement in terms of granting STTs. As mentioned above, while tenants of STTs do not need to pay an upfront land premium under

tenancies, they will need to face the uncertainty during the longer tenancy period arising from periodic rental adjustment due to the longer tenure. Therefore, different operators may have different views on this issue. On the other hand, if the Government grants land via tenancies with longer period without adopting the mode of land lease that charges an upfront land premium, we will also need to consider the financial implications to the Government. Nevertheless, we are willing to tap the views of Members and the trade during the review.

- (3) To tie in with the policy goal of developing innovation and technology and other emerging industries, as well as the “industry-driven” land planning approach emphasized in the Northern Metropolis, DEVB will, from the perspective of land administration policy, support the relevant bureaux in exploring and adopting different modes of land grant, including considering the granting of sites for industries by way of open tender, restricted tender, or PTG so as to attract leading Mainland and overseas enterprises to come to Hong Kong for bringing in new capital and technology and generating job opportunities as well as creating new growth areas for our economy. We believe that the relevant bureaux will make announcement at suitable juncture on the appropriate arrangement for the industries under their policy purview. Thank you, President.

DR WENDY HONG (in Cantonese): *President, earlier, I received a request for assistance from a building material processing enterprise that had invested more than \$200 million to build an automated processing plant of more than 30 000 sq m. The company subsequently entered a period of steady development, but it was later informed that the seven-year lease of the site would expire and that the Government would reclaim the site and put it out for re-tender to allow other interested enterprises in the industry to participate in competitive bidding so as to ensure fairness. This left the company in a state of uncertainty. If it failed to win the tender, the 30 000 sq m plant would have to be razed to the ground.*

President, the development of an enterprise is not a short-term endeavour, especially for industries with large investments and long payback periods. Without a stable and long-term supply of land, enterprises will definitely be

reluctant to invest or innovate. Unfortunately, industrial land in Hong Kong has long been subject to this STT model, with a tenancy period of one to five years and a maximum of seven years, after which the land is reclaimed for re-tendering or the tenancy is renewed on a quarterly basis.

I am very grateful to the Secretary for agreeing just now that there is room for review. The Secretary pointed out in the main reply that there are quite a number of government sites which are not yet needed for long-term development or in respect of which the long-term planned use has not yet been determined, and which are sitting idle for the time being. In view of the industry's demand for land, such sites are leased to the industry on STTs, giving the Government both convenience and flexibility to resume the sites at any time.

The prevalence of industrial land leased under STTs shows that there is a fundamental lack of long-term planning for much of Hong Kong's land. Now that Hong Kong has a clear goal of promoting the diversification and solid development of Hong Kong's industrial structure, a stable and long-term supply of land is essential. May I ask the Secretary whether she will promptly review the situation of industrial land, and formulate a comprehensive and long-term industrial land use planning, so as to change the current practice of meeting industrial land demand through a large number of STT sites and inject long-term perspectives into industrial development?

SECRETARY FOR DEVELOPMENT (in Cantonese): President, first of all, I would like to explain that the existence of a lot of land under STTs does not mean that we lack long-term planning. In fact, STTs are granted for use of certain land mainly under two circumstances.

The first circumstance is that the planning has not yet been completed and the future long-term planning is not yet known. However, this is relatively rare, especially in the Northern Metropolis, where we are now carrying out planning work and have specified the long-term use of the land.

The second circumstance in which STTs are granted is that the planned use is known and the Government has a long-term plan. For example, we may want to use a site for logistics purposes, i.e. for a particular industry. However, that

industry concerned may not want the authorities to grant a land lease with a longer tenure for the time being. As I pointed out in the main reply earlier, since land lease provides certainty, the Government hopes to fairly charge an upfront land premium, so that all parties can carry out their own business planning with certainty. However, even if some industries are compatible with the designated land use, i.e. the relevant land is suitable for the operations of these industries in the long term, they still want to retain flexibility and prefer to make regular rent payments rather than commit to long-term land leases, which results in STTs being granted over extended periods.

The views expressed by Dr HONG today, as well as those expressed previously by individual industries and Honourable Members here, all revolve around whether the fixed term of STT can be made more flexible. Can the term not be fixed at seven years, but be longer than seven years? As I mentioned in the main reply, we are willing to conduct a review later and hope that it can be completed it as soon as possible. Thank you, President.

MR LAU KWOK-FAN (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. I am very pleased to hear Secretary LINN say that she hopes to adopt a more flexible approach to land grant for the development of the Northern Metropolis and, in particular, to consider granting STTs with an exceptionally long tenancy period. I suggest that the authorities should make reference to special purpose leases, which currently have to be processed by the relevant Policy Bureaux, and see if this can be turned into a regular mechanism for granting exceptionally long-term tenancies.*

Regarding flexible land grants, I have recently proposed an enhanced version of “pay for what you build”. I know that the Secretary has responded very positively at the Legislative Council’s Ante Chamber Exchange Session just now, saying that she would conduct a study. May I ask the Secretary whether it is possible to implement the “pay for what you build” approach in the Northern Metropolis, whereby the amount of the premium is determined according to the actual scale of development and the actual use of the development by the enterprise or developer, as well as the percentage of the scale that can be developed, so as to encourage more private enterprises to participate in the development of the Northern Metropolis and speed up the development of industries?

SECRETARY FOR DEVELOPMENT (in Cantonese): Regarding the first part of the Member's supplementary question, that is, we will review the tenancy period of STTs, the Member is right, as STTs currently cover a wide range of uses that fall under the purview of different Policy Bureaux. In the future, we will proactively engage with different Policy Bureaux to understand the needs of different industries. At present, many STTs are related to the logistics and recycling industries, and some are related to religious or educational uses. We will approach the relevant bureaux to understand the ecosystems of these industries and the expectations and perspectives of industry stakeholders. This work will be proactively undertaken by DEVB, as the STT policy is essentially a land policy, but we will collaborate and communicate with other bureaux during the process.

Second, it is about the concept of “pay for what you build”. At the Legislative Council's Ante Chamber Exchange Session this morning, what I said was to allow developers to “pay a land premium for what they will build” in the case of lease modification. We do intend to explore this, not only in the Northern Metropolis, but across Hong Kong. If a flexible arrangement on lease modification can facilitate the optimal use of private land, we hope to complete our study and implement the relevant measure as soon as possible.

However, the subject under discussion today is STT. I believe that there is still room for us to review the way in which rents are set for STTs, in particular by making greater use of standard rents rather than assessing the value in respect of each tenancy agreement individually. This approach has already been adopted in some cases, for example, standard rent is applied to STTs involving front yard gardens. However, can standard rent be applied to more STTs on different economic land? This is the direction we will explore. Thank you, President.

MR FRANKIE YICK (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. I believe that the Secretary is aware that for some time in the past, I have been following up with her on the various problems faced by STT sites. Today, I finally see that the Secretary has stated in the main reply that the Government considers that there is room to review whether the tenancy period can exceed seven years, a move that is very much welcomed by the industry. I hope that the Secretary will provide options when considering extending the tenancy period, such as 10, 12 or 15 years, rather than imposing a uniform requirement.*

In addition, I have noted the concern raised by the Secretary in the main reply, namely, that although tenants will not have to pay an upfront land premium under a longer lease term, they will have to face the uncertainty caused by periodic rent adjustments during the longer tenancy period. I do not think this problem should occur because STT sites are basically for uses by specific industries, such as shipyards, cargo handling areas and container yards mentioned in the Secretary's reply. These industries are operating under difficult conditions but are an indispensable part of social development.

Under the current approach, suppose that after I have leased a site, the adjacent site is sold at a high price for commercial use. If the Government reassesses the rent for our STT site based on the value of that site, we will not be able to survive. The industry hopes that the Government will consider adjusting the rent according to inflation or a specific index agreed by both parties in order to bring certainty and avoid the uncertainty mentioned by the Secretary. I hope the Secretary will consider this suggestion.

SECRETARY FOR DEVELOPMENT (in Cantonese): President, I thank Mr YICK for his very specific suggestion. After we have completed our study, in the future, can the tenancy period be longer than seven years? Can the same industry be given a certain option or classification? Will there be a classification of tenure for different industries? This will certainly be one of the directions of our study.

Secondly, on the issue of the rent for STTs, the suggestion made by the Member just now centres on simplifying the rent adjustment arrangements. We hope to adopt a more standardized approach to rent adjustments. As I said earlier, a certain standard can be applied in determining the standard rent and subsequent adjustments can be based on certain indicators. The Member has just mentioned some possible indicators to be adopted. This approach will not only facilitate the industry, but also provide a pressing impetus at this time, as various departments (including LandsD) have to reduce manpower and cope with existing workloads, or even more workloads, with fewer manpower. Much of the work must be standardized to avoid case-by-case handling, so as to improve work efficiency. So now is the right time to provide the impetus for us to complete this task. Thank you, President.

DR CHAN HAN-PAN (in Cantonese): *Thank you, President. Land is a precious resource, and I welcome the Government's recent introduction of policies to facilitate land applications through streamlined procedures and a facilitator mindset. However, although land is precious, there are still many sites awaiting development. The functional positioning of these sites, the approval procedures and the channels for applying for leases often require considerable time, manpower and resources. It may take even longer to obtain policy support. Some projects that could provide development opportunities or benefit industries have been lost due to the prolonged application process.*

Will the Government consider gradually leasing some STT sites or long-idle sites through a statutory body in one go, so as to more proactively grant the sites to enterprises that are beneficial to the development of industries and the economy of Hong Kong? These enclosed sites, which are excluded from the list of sites available for lease, have been lying idle for a long time. If the statutory body can bundle them up and lease them out in one go once a tenant is found, it would be possible to make better use of the sites and maximize their value. Will the Government further streamline ...

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Dr CHAN Han-pan, you have already asked your supplementary question. Please sit down.

Secretary, please reply.

SECRETARY FOR DEVELOPMENT (in Cantonese): President, if a site has development potential or has been planned for development, we should not allow it to sit idle for a long period of time. Even if a site is left idle to wait for favourable market conditions for sale, there is no need to wait too long. In the interim period, we will usually take the initiative to put the site out to tender, most commonly for use as a car park, as this can be arranged relatively quickly.

The Member has pointed out that many small parcels of land have been left idle for a long period of time. These land parcels usually have no development potential, but they have been fenced off by LandsD because they have been illegally occupied in the past. We will endeavour to upload information about these land parcels onto the LandsD website. However, as these land parcels are relatively scattered and not in the best locations, the level of interest in applications is not

high. If any enterprise or organization is willing to apply to lease the sites in the form of a “package”, we are absolutely willing to consider and facilitate it. Thank you, President.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Information security of government departments and public organizations

7. **MR JEFFREY LAM** (in Chinese): *Last month, an information security incident occurred in Invest Hong Kong (“InvestHK”) in which its computer systems were attacked by malicious ransomware, affecting its internal Customer Relationship Management system, intranet, website operations, etc. Regarding the occurrence of cybersecurity incidents in government departments and public organizations, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *of the following information on malicious ransomware attacks on government departments and public organizations in the past three years: (i) the number of cases, (ii) the government departments and public organizations involved, (iii) the number of cases involving leakage of personal, customer or internal data, and (iv) the number of culprits arrested in connection with such cases;*
- (2) *given that Hong Kong is actively attracting businesses and talents, whether the Government has received public complaints or enquiries about the aforesaid information security incident of InvestHK; if so, of the number; whether the Government has assessed if the information security incident has dampened investors’ confidence in the information security of InvestHK, or even investors’ interest in investing in Hong Kong; and*
- (3) *of the measures the Government has put in place to strengthen the security of the computer and information systems of government departments and public organizations, and the expected time for conducting a review of the effectiveness of such measures, so as to continuously ensure the security of the relevant systems of such departments and organizations?*

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Innovation, Technology and Industry** on 26 March 2025 is in **Appendix 1**.

The United States' imposition of additional duty on products of Hong Kong

8. **MR TOMMY CHEUNG** (in Chinese): *The United States (“US”) Government has imposed additional duties on products from China, and Hong Kong products are likewise subject to such additional duties. As at the 4th of this month, a cumulative 20% duty has been imposed on Hong Kong products. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) of the Government’s progress in filing a complaint regarding the matter with the World Trade Organization to defend Hong Kong’s legitimate rights; whether it has estimated how long it will take to process the complaint;*
- (2) whether the Government will consider working with the country to take countermeasures, including imposing additional duties on certain US products and placing some US enterprises on the export control list; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and*
- (3) how the Government assesses the impacts of the additional duties on the exports of Hong Kong products, and of the proactive corresponding measures to minimize the negative impacts and identify new opportunities?*

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development** on 26 March 2025 is in **Appendix 1**.

New Capital Investment Entrant Scheme

9. **MR HOLDEN CHOW** (in Chinese): *The Chief Executive announced in the 2024 Policy Address enhancements to the New Capital Investment Entrant Scheme (“New CIES”) to further strengthen Hong Kong’s status as an international asset and wealth management centre. The enhancement measures have taken effect from the 1st of this month. Regarding the implementation of New CIES, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) of the respective numbers of applications received and approved by the authorities since the launch of New CIES;*

- (2) *whether the authorities have compiled statistics on the types of approved investment of the integrated financial assets of the applicants since the launch of New CIES, together with a breakdown in table form by total investment amount (in descending order);*
- (3) *as the scope of investment of New CIES has been extended to cover single residential properties with a transaction price of no less than \$50 million since 16 October last year, whether the authorities have compiled statistics on the number of transactions involving the sale and purchase of such residential properties since that date;*
- (4) *from the implementation of New CIES to the effective date of the enhancement measures, whether the authorities have compiled statistics on the total number of applicants or their dependants who have set up family offices in Hong Kong during this period; if so, of the details; and*
- (5) *whether the authorities have plans on when to review the effectiveness of the enhancement measures, and further enhance New CIES where necessary, for example, by lowering the threshold for the permissible investment in single residential properties of no less than \$50 million to no less than \$30 million, so that the attractiveness of New CIES can be enhanced?*

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury** on 26 March 2025 is in **Appendix 1**.

Primary healthcare services

10. **MR TANG KA-PIU** (in Chinese): *Regarding primary healthcare services, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *of the following information on the District Health Centres (“DHCs”) in Hong Kong (set out by the 18 districts across the territory):*
 - (i) *the contract expiry date of the existing service contractors (“contractors”); and*

- (ii) *the planned timetable and arrangements for the new round of tendering of contractors;*
- (2) *of the following information on the relevant assessment of DHCs' service performance:*
 - (i) *the assessment methods, specific indicators and assessment standards;*
 - (ii) *the assessment cycle (i.e. the average interval of years between assessments);*
 - (iii) *whether there were cases in the past in which the service performance of the contractors was not up to standard; if so, of the details (including the measures taken at that time and their effects); and*
 - (iv) *whether channels are available for the public to access the performance ratings of various DHCs;*
- (3) *of the respective assessment details of DHCs/DHC Expresses in the Kwun Tong district and Wong Tai Sin district in the past (including the service performance of these DHCs/DHC Expresses);*
- (4) *given that the Secretary for Health indicated at the meeting of the Panel on Health Services of this Council on 10 May last year that priority would be accorded to the reorganization of services in Elderly Health Centres and Woman Health Centres, of the following information on the relevant service reorganization:*
 - (i) *the current numbers of members of these centres, with a breakdown by age group and gender;*
 - (ii) *the timetable for service reorganization, and set out the specific timelines and targets for each phase; and*
 - (iii) *the service transitional arrangements for the current users of these centres and details of the support measures during the period; and*

- (5) *whether it has compiled statistics on the current number of community pharmacies (including those operated by profit-making and non-profit-making organizations) in Hong Kong, and the districts in which such pharmacies are mainly located?*

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Health** on 26 March 2025 is in **Appendix 1**.

Applications for short-term tenancies of land and payment of land premium

11. **DR CHAN HAN-PAN** (in Chinese): *It has been reported that the current application procedures for lease of government land by way of short-term tenancy are complicated, and that the procedures for landowners to apply for payment of land premium also take a relatively long time, thus impeding economic development and the efficient use of government land resources to a certain extent. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *whether the Government has compiled statistics on the respective average time taken from acceptance to completion of the procedures for each application for short-term tenancy of land and payment of land premium in the past three years (set out in a table);*
- (2) *whether the Government will consider consolidating land resources which have been left vacant for a long time, such as offering several pieces of vacant government land in a certain district for lease as a package to statutory bodies or non-governmental organizations which will then be responsible for management and leasing arrangements, so as to expedite the effective use of land resources; and*
- (3) *given that the current arrangement for charging land premium at standard rates has been extended to New Development Area projects under the Enhanced Conventional New Town Approach, whether the Government will consider extending the arrangement for charging land premium at standard rates to the entire territory; whether the Government will consider streamlining the process of granting land leases, such as establishing simplified procedures for granting leases*

and payment of land premium, so as to shorten the time taken for vetting and approval?

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Development** on 26 March 2025 is in **Appendix 1**.

Employment Support under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme

12. **MR CHAN KIN-POR** (in Chinese): *According to the paper submitted by the Government to the Panel on Welfare Services of this Council on 22 November last year, the Employment Support Services (“EmSS”) under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (“CSSA”) Scheme will expire in September this year, and the Social Welfare Department (“SWD”) will replace EmSS with the Support Programme for the Unemployed (“SPU”) for two years to assist recipients to enhance employability, better integrate into society and reduce reliance on CSSA. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) of the number of able-bodied persons receiving CSSA due to unemployment or low income and their average duration on CSSA in each year since 2023;*
- (2) given that, as advised by the Government at the meeting of the Panel on Welfare Services of this Council on 22 November last year, the non-governmental organizations commissioned by SWD to operate EmSS are required during the contract period from 1 April 2020 to 30 September 2025 to assist at least 25% of EmSS recipients in successfully securing employment or returning to mainstream education for at least one month, and at least 20% of EmSS recipients to do the same for three months, but the respective percentages only stood at 22.8% and 17.9% as at 30 September last year, temporarily failing to meet the service performance requirements, of the counter-measures taken by the Government in this connection, and whether it has evaluated the effectiveness of the services concerned;*
- (3) as there are views pointing out that the objectives of EmSS and SPU differ from one another in that while the former provides counselling*

services to recipients and requires them to make sustained job-seeking efforts, the latter focuses on ensuring meaningful engagement of participants through unpaid work, whether the Government will set service performance requirements for SPU to make it distinct from EmSS; and

- (4) *given the views that the Government used to measure the effectiveness of EmSS by “the number of successful job placements”, neglecting the evaluation of employment quality (e.g. wages and job stability), whether the Government has considered including more specific data (e.g. proportions of those still remaining in the job at least one, three and six months after taking up employment, wage levels, and numbers of working hours) in its analysis of the long-term effectiveness of SPU, so as to ensure that future policy adjustments can be made based on empirical evidence?*

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Labour and Welfare** on 26 March 2025 is in **Appendix 1**.

Developing Hong Kong into an international innovation and technology centre

13. **MR MARTIN LIAO** (in Chinese): *On developing Hong Kong into an international innovation and technology centre, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *as there are views pointing out that there is more than sufficient room for trial and error for start-ups in Hangzhou, including a failure-tolerant institutional design at the policy level, government subsidies for research and development (“R&D”) and a science and technology innovation fund on the funding front, and multi-capital in the market to patiently accompany their growth, whether the Innovation and Technology Industry-Oriented Fund set up by the SAR Government will formulate reference guidelines to increase the weighting of multi-dimensional indicators, such as innovative capability, growth potential and R&D intensity of enterprises, when guiding patient capital investments;*

- (2) *as there are views that Hangzhou's continuous progress in implementing "one visit at most" service is a result of Mainland departments streamlining administration and delegating power, as well as deepening reforms of the administrative vetting and approval system, whether the SAR Government will draw on Hangzhou's administrative and entrepreneurial experience to conduct a comprehensive review of the efficiency and quality of the services provided by government departments, including the speed of vetting and approving applications for supporting funds and the efficiency of resource docking, and urge the relevant government departments and public organizations to formulate guidelines to enhance efficiency; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;*
- (3) *as the 2025-2026 Budget proposes to establish the Hong Kong AI Research and Development Institute, with the expansion of application scenarios being one of its focuses, and as there are views that industry-specific vertical large models can promote "Artificial Intelligence ('AI') Plus" and empower various industries on the condition of vertical large models being integrated with industry-specific data and knowledge, what plans the Government has put in place to mobilize the innovative power of enterprises and guide leading enterprises, small and medium enterprises, data service providers, etc. to step up the supply of high-quality industry-specific data elements; and*
- (4) *as it is learnt that Hangzhou and its surrounding regions are able to provide start-ups with comprehensive industrial chain support (e.g. Deepseek's industrial chain is entirely based in Hangzhou, while Hangzhou Yushu Science And Technology Co., Ltd. relies on the resources of Hangzhou and two of its neighbouring cities, namely, Yiwu and Shanghai), what measures the SAR Government has put in place to promote cooperation with other Mainland cities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area in terms of resources for the AI industry in order to improve the AI industrial chain?*

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Innovation, Technology and Industry** on 26 March 2025 is in **Appendix 1**.

Introduction of cutting-edge technological medical devices

14. **MR PAUL TSE** (in Chinese): *It has been reported that a businessman has earlier on donated two non-invasive, no-radiation histotripsy medical devices specifically designed for liver cancer treatment (“the Device”) to two teaching hospitals. However, it is suspected that the Device has been left idle and failed to benefit patients as the SAR Government has all along failed to include it in the scope of services available to members of the public. The Device has ended up being transferred to private hospitals, and only private hospitals can use it to treat liver cancer patients. There are views pointing out that the incident has deprived grass-roots patients of the opportunity to use cutting-edge technologies for low-cost cancer treatment in an efficient manner. A Member of this Council has explicitly indicated that the situation has led to unfavourable perception among patients. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) of the respective numbers of new cases of liver cancer diagnosed and deaths from liver cancer in Hong Kong in each of the past three years;*
- (2) whether private hospitals are required to register with or report to the Government in respect of the introduction of cutting-edge technological medical devices and techniques; of the Government’s regulatory measures and system for the introduction or use of new technological medical devices by private hospitals, so as to ensure patient safety;*
- (3) as the private hospitals that have obtained the Device have already offered pricing packages for the use of the Device with coverage provided by insurance companies, and the Hospital Authority (“HA”) has pointed out that the Device is still at the clinical research/trial stage and is not yet qualified for use in clinical services, whether the Government has assessed if the aforesaid practice of the private hospitals is safe and whether it is contradictory to the public healthcare policy; and*
- (4) as a former Director of HA has pointed out in a newspaper that the length of time taken by HA to introduce a new technology depends on its complexity, and that six months’ time is a bit short in the case of histotripsy, which is a cutting-edge technology, whether the Government will review if the time taken to introduce new technological medical devices is too long; whether it has policies to*

shorten the time for introducing new technological medical devices, so as to develop a high-end healthcare service economy (especially in the light of the huge demand from a large number of Mainlanders who intend to come to Hong Kong for the use of new technologies in liver cancer treatment), and encourage more capable members of the community to invest in introducing and donate more cutting-edge technological medical devices, thereby benefiting patients (especially grass-roots patients); if it has, of the details; if not, whether a study can be conducted expeditiously?

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Health** on 26 March 2025 is in **Appendix 1**.

Illegal stay and employment of foreign domestic helpers in Hong Kong

15. **DR NGAN MAN-YU** (in Chinese): *Under the laws of Hong Kong, a foreign domestic helper (“FDH”) whose contract is terminated prematurely is permitted to remain in Hong Kong for 14 days after the termination of the contract or the remainder of the permitted stay, whichever is earlier. However, my office has recently received a number of requests for assistance involving FDHs who, after being dismissed, were suspected of making false accusations against their employers of maltreating them or child abuse, etc., in order to apply to the Immigration Department (“ImmD”) for extension of stay in Hong Kong as visitors and take up illegal employment. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *at present under what circumstances may FDHs’ applications for extension of the limit of their stay in Hong Kong as visitors be accepted by ImmD after they have been dismissed by their employers; of the relevant procedures, requirements, and restrictions and validity period of their visas (e.g. whether they are allowed to work with their visas and whether they can re-enter Hong Kong after leaving);*
- (2) *of the number of applications received by ImmD for extension of the limit of stay in Hong Kong as visitors in the past three years, together with a breakdown by the type of applicants, reasons for extension of stay, and the outcome of the applications (including the number of approved and rejected cases); and among them the number of such cases involving FDHs;*

- (3) *of the number of law enforcement operations conducted by the departments concerned in the past three years to combat illegal workers, and the respective results of such law enforcement operations; the number of illegal workers found during the law enforcement operations who were FDHs and those who had extended their stay in Hong Kong as visitors, and the respective results of such law enforcement operations; and*
- (4) *whether the Government has considered stepping up cooperation with other departments to further combat the situation of FDHs overstaying in Hong Kong and engaging in illegal employment, and reviewed the existing mechanism for FDHs to extend the limit of their stay in Hong Kong as visitors and considered revising the related policies, so as to prevent FDHs from engaging in illegal activities by abusing the mechanism; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?*

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Security** on 26 March 2025 is in **Appendix 1**.

Pilot Rehabilitation Programme for Employees Injured at Work

16. **MR LAM CHUN-SING** (in Chinese): *The Government launched a three-year Pilot Rehabilitation Programme for Employees Injured at Work (“the Pilot Programme”) on 23 September 2022 to facilitate injured workers’ early recovery and return to work. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *of the current staff establishment and strength of the Work Injury Rehabilitation Office (“WIRO”), which is responsible for implementing the Pilot Programme, as well as the average number of cases followed up by each of its case manager;*
- (2) *of (i) the number of reported work injury cases received by the Labour Department (“LD”) in each of the past three years and this year to date and, among them, (ii) the number of cases identified as eligible for participating in the Pilot Programme (and its percentage), and (iii) the number of cases participating in the Pilot Programme (and*

its percentage in the total number of cases eligible for participating in the Pilot Programme), and set out in Table 1 a breakdown by (a) construction industry, (b) catering and hotel industry (the industry covered since May last year), and (c) transportation and logistics industry (the industry covered since May last year);

Table 1

Case category	2022			2023			2024			This year to date		
	(a)	(b)	(c)	(a)	(b)	(c)	(a)	(b)	(c)	(a)	(b)	(c)
(i)												
(ii)		Not applicable			Not applicable							
(iii)												
Total												

- (3) *in respect of the cases participating in the Pilot Programme mentioned in (2)(iii), of (i) the types of work injury sustained by the injured workers involved, and (ii) the time taken between they agreed to participate in the Pilot Programme and received their first medical consultation from the case doctors, together with a breakdown by industry (i.e. (i) construction industry, (ii) catering and hotel industry, and (iii) transportation and logistics industry);*
- (4) *given that in the reply to a question raised by a Member of this Council on the Estimates of Expenditure 2024-2025, the Government has indicated that the authorities will (a) analyze and compare the data of the participants of the Pilot Programme against (b) the data of the injured employees who sustain similar work injuries but have not participated in the Pilot Programme, so as to assess the effectiveness of the Pilot Programme, of the respective numbers and ratios of cases in which the employees referred to in the aforesaid (a) and (b) have recovered after treatment, as well as the respective average time taken for recovery, together with a breakdown by industry (i.e. (i) construction industry, (ii) catering and hotel industry, and (iii) transportation and logistics industry);*
- (5) *among the cases participating in the Pilot Programme mentioned in (2)(iii), of the number of those in which employees have recovered after treatment, and set out in Table 2 a breakdown and the respective*

percentages of such cases by return-to-work status (i.e. (i) engaging in the same kind of work, (ii) engaging in work of a different nature, (iii) return-to-work status under follow-up, and (iv) unable to return to work during the follow-up period for the time being) and the industry to which they belong (i.e. (a) construction industry, (b) catering and hotel industry, and (c) transportation and logistics industry); the main reasons for cases of return-to-work status still being followed up and those of not being able to return to work during the follow-up period for the time being;

Table 2

<i>Return-to-work status</i>	<i>Industry</i>		
	<i>(a)</i>	<i>(b)</i>	<i>(c)</i>
<i>(i)</i>			
<i>.....</i>			
<i>(iv)</i>			
<i>Total</i>			

- (6) *of the respective numbers and nature of enquiries and complaints received by the authorities about the Pilot Programme since its implementation; and*
- (7) *whether it will consider extending the Pilot Programme to cover more industries, including those with higher risks of work injury such as the manufacturing and retail industries, as well as extending or regularizing the Pilot Programme, so as to benefit more injured workers in need; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?*

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Labour and Welfare** on 26 March 2025 is in **Appendix 1**.

Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination programme offered outside Hong Kong

17. **PROF WILLIAM WONG** (in Chinese): *It is learnt that the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (“HKDSE”) is widely recognized, and its multiple pathways have attracted quite a number of students outside Hong*

Kong to register for it. To meet the needs of students, the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority has accepted four Mainland schools in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area as “participating schools” and allowed them to present their eligible candidates to register for HKDSE as “school candidates”. These participating schools have been accredited by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications as meeting the requirements for offering HKDSE programmes. In addition, other eligible students may register for HKDSE as private candidates. There are views that, on the contrary, the quality and qualifications of teachers of HKDSE programmes offered by non-participating schools and other training institutions outside Hong Kong vary, and problems even frequently arise in some training courses for HKDSE operated under affiliated overseas organizations, not only affecting the students but also tarnishing the image of HKDSE. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) *of the number of cases with people outside Hong Kong registering for HKDSE as private candidates were rejected in the past three years, and the reasons for that; among such cases, the respective numbers of review applications involved and successful review applications;*
- (2) *of the following information on the requests for assistance or complaints received by the authorities in the past three years in relation to training programmes for HKDSE offered outside Hong Kong: (i) the number of cases received, (ii) the main details of the cases, (iii) the specific follow-up measures taken by the authorities, (iv) the number of cases for which follow-up actions were completed, and (v) the time taken by the authorities to complete the follow-up actions on these cases; and*
- (3) *whether the authorities have considered setting up a qualification accreditation system for teachers, teaching materials and curricula of HKDSE programmes offered outside Hong Kong; if so, of the specific standards and procedures; if not, the reasons for that?*

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Education** on 26 March 2025 is in **Appendix 1**.

Kai Tak Development Area

18. **DR STARRY LEE** (in Chinese): *There are views that the Kai Tak Sports Park (“KTSP”), being the most-recently completed key facility in the Kai Tak Development Area, is developed on a world class scale with multi-functional positioning. The community hopes that the authorities will make use of KTSP as a starting point to drive development of the Kai Tak Cruise Terminal (“KTCT”), the “Youth Post” hostel and even the entire Kai Tak area, and transform Kai Tak into a hub featuring diversification and integrated development of sports, culture, tourism and youth, by consolidating resources and facilitating cross-domain collaboration. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) of the specific plans in place to drive the coordinated development of KTCT, the “Youth Post” hostel and the entire Kai Tak area centring around KTSP, such as the specific measures in terms of policy formulation, resource allocation and cross-departmental collaboration;*
- (2) of the plans in place to improve the external ancillary transport facilities for the “Youth Post” hostel and KTCT, so as to strengthen the connectivity of the two facilities with KTSP, and facilitate the cross-district movement of tourists and members of the public;*
- (3) of the measures in place to promote business collaborations of KTSP with KTCT and the “Youth Post” hostel, so as to attract cross-location spending from tourists and members of the public, and foster the overall economic benefits to be brought to the Kai Tak area;*
- (4) of the plans in place to make use of technology to consolidate resources of KTSP, KTCT and the “Youth Post” hostel, so as to offer seamless guided tours and proposed itineraries to enhance the overall experience of tourists and members of the public, and to provide consolidated information on the activities to be held at KTSP, thereby promoting cross-facility interactions; and*
- (5) of the strategies in place to build a distinctive cultural brand of Kai Tak, with KTSP as the core, integrating the tourism flows of KTCT*

and the creative energy of the “Youth Post” hostel, so as to enhance the cultural uniqueness and the international appeal of the district?

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism** on 26 March 2025 is in **Appendix 1**.

The capitalist system and way of life in Hong Kong

19. **MR LAM SAN-KEUNG** (in Chinese): *Article 5 of the Basic Law provides that Hong Kong’s “previous capitalist system and way of life shall remain unchanged for 50 years”. The President of the State has also repeatedly praised that “one country, two systems” is a good policy which “must be adhered to in the long run”. Moreover, there are views that the Extension of Government Leases Ordinance (Cap. 648), which came into force in July last year, ensures that the vast majority of land in Hong Kong will have the leases automatically extended for a term of 50 years upon their expiry in 2047. However, it is learnt that the international community and global investors have all along been worried that there is a “2047 time limit” for Hong Kong’s capitalist system. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council of the efforts made to allay the concerns of the international community about the 2047 time limit, and how to strengthen the relevant publicity work in the future?*

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs** on 26 March 2025 is in **Appendix 1**.

Health screening work conducted by the Department of Health at various boundary control points

20. **MR KENNETH FOK** (in Chinese): *There are views in the community that following the comprehensive lifting of immigration-related epidemic preventions and control measures, manpower deployment of the Department of Health (“DH”) to conduct health screening at various boundary control points (“BCPs”) is excessive, and that as the Government has already installed infra-red thermo-imaging machines at all BCPs, DH should actively explore leveraging artificial intelligence technology to enhance quarantine efficiency at BCPs. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *whether the Government has reviewed the current staffing arrangements for health screening at various BCPs, and conducted regular assessments to ensure that the number of DH officers deployed at various BCPs is commensurate with needs, thereby avoiding potential wastage of manpower and public funds; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;*
- (2) *of the average daily number of officers deployed by DH to conduct body temperature screening of travellers at various BCPs in each of the past five years, with a breakdown by BCP as set out in the table below;*

<i>BCP</i>	<i>2020</i>	<i>.....</i>	<i>2024</i>

- (3) *as it is learnt that the Government has installed body temperature screening facilities (including infra-red thermo-imaging machines) at all BCPs, of the relevant expenditure incurred in the past five years, including expenditure on the procurement of equipment, repair and maintenance, and operation;*
- (4) *whether it has assessed the current operational status of the body temperature screening facilities at various BCPs (including whether their technical advantages have been maximized), and whether complementary measures have been adopted to reduce reliance on manual body temperature screening; whether the authorities have formulated plans to further enhance the effectiveness of the body temperature screening facilities at various BCPs; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and*
- (5) *as it is learnt that mobile robots for smart fever screening developed by local innovation and technology companies have been trialed and used by government departments in recent years, whether the authorities have plans to introduce more advanced technologies (including smart body temperature screening systems) in the future and apply them at various BCPs, thereby achieving a better balance between manpower deployment and use of smart equipment, while at*

the same time enhancing screening efficiency and improving the arrangements for health screening work?

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Health** on 26 March 2025 is in **Appendix 1**.

Electronic Health Record Sharing System

21. **REVD CANON PETER DOUGLAS KOON** (in Chinese): *Regarding the Electronic Health Record Sharing System (“eHealth”), will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) of the number of healthcare providers registered with eHealth so far, together with a breakdown by type of institutions (i.e. public hospitals, public clinics, private hospitals, and private healthcare institutions (including clinics, residential care homes for the elderly and social welfare organizations providing healthcare services));*
- (2) of the number of healthcare personnel registered with eHealth so far, together with a breakdown by profession (i.e. doctors, dentists, Chinese medicine practitioners and other healthcare personnel);*
- (3) given that in the reply to my question on the Estimates of Expenditure 2024-2025, the Secretary for Health has indicated that as the health data contribution to eHealth by private healthcare institutions has remained extremely low, the Government has rolled out the eHealth Adoption Sponsorship Pilot Scheme to facilitate seamless data upload from the clinical management systems of private doctors to eHealth, and will progressively require all private healthcare institutions participating in all government-funded or subsidized health programmes to upload health records of the relevant service users onto eHealth, whether the Government has assessed the effectiveness of the aforesaid measures;*
- (4) as the Government indicated last year that it would consider amending the Electronic Health Record Sharing System Ordinance (Cap. 625) to require healthcare providers to deposit specified*

essential health data in the personalized eHealth accounts of members of the public and to streamline the consent process of eHealth, of the progress of the relevant legislative amendment exercise;

- (5) *as it is learnt that quite a number of members of the public, especially the elderly, choose to seek medical treatment on the Mainland at present, whether the Government will make more extensive use of electronic health records across the boundary, such as by enhancing the eHealth system to allow members of the public to upload their non-local health record information onto the eHealth for local healthcare professionals' reference, thereby achieving the data connectivity between two places; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?*

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Health** on 26 March 2025 is in **Appendix 1**.

Regulation of veterinary surgeons

22. **MR LUK CHUNG-HUNG** (in Chinese): *Some organizations have reportedly found that the current disciplinary inquiry system of the Veterinary Surgeons Board of Hong Kong (“VSB”) is not well-established, lacks sufficient transparency in information disclosure, and has unclear regulatory oversight of general sales and services within veterinary clinics. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (1) *whether, with reference to the Medical Council of Hong Kong's practice of posting on its website the judgments of its disciplinary inquiries held since 2 July 2008 and the Dental Council of Hong Kong's practice of posting on its website the judgments of its disciplinary inquiries handed down since 17 September 2009, it has considered extending the enquiry period for the judgments of the disciplinary inquiries conducted by VSB's Inquiry Committee and the orders made by it, as well as including the names of the veterinary surgeons involved in the relevant case summaries; if so, of the implementation timetable; if not, the reasons for that;*

- (2) *given that in reply to a question raised by a Member of this Council on the Estimates of Expenditure 2024-2025, the Secretary for Environment and Ecology stated that VSB's Inquiry Committee had completed 36 inquiry cases between 2021 and 2023, of which 29 were found to be substantiated, involving 30 veterinary surgeons, but that only two of these veterinary surgeons had been sanctioned with "removal of names of relevant veterinary surgeons from the register for three and six months respectively, along with a reprimand and compulsory participation in continuing professional development programmes or professional seminars", and it is learnt that many pet owners consider such sanctions to be dissuasive, whether the Government will review VSB's existing arrangements for handing down judgments in disciplinary inquiries and consider imposing heavier penalties; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;*
- (3) *given that item 22 of Schedule 3 to the Trade Descriptions Ordinance (Cap. 362) ("the Ordinance") provides that a registered veterinary surgeon, as defined by section 2 of the Veterinary Surgeons Registration Ordinance (Cap. 529), is an exempt person under the Ordinance, and yet it is learnt that some pet owners have pointed out that veterinary assistants often promote nutrition supplements, pet food, over-the-counter drugs (such as deworming drugs), and medicinal fur cleaners, etc. to them while their pets are undergoing treatment at veterinary clinics, and that some veterinary clinics even promote pet accessories on online social media platforms, coupled with the view that the general conduct of sales within veterinary clinics should be regulated under the Ordinance, whether the Government has considered regulating the general conduct of sales and services within veterinary clinics; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;*
- (4) *whether the Government has considered collaborating with relevant Mainland departments to enable local veterinary surgeons to acquire Mainland professional qualifications through agreements for mutual recognition of professional qualifications or professional qualification examinations under the framework of the Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement?*

The written reply provided by the **Secretary for Environment and Ecology** on 26 March 2025 is in **Appendix 1**.

GOVERNMENT BILLS**First Reading and Second Reading of Government Bills****First Reading of Government Bills**

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Government Bills: First Reading.

**ELECTORAL LEGISLATION (MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENTS)
BILL 2025****BUILDINGS ENERGY EFFICIENCY (AMENDMENT) BILL 2025****ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORD SHARING SYSTEM (AMENDMENT)
BILL 2025****SUPPLEMENTARY MEDICAL PROFESSIONS (AMENDMENT) BILL
2025****MERCHANT SHIPPING (SAFE AND ENVIRONMENTALLY SOUND
RECYCLING OF SHIPS) BILL**

CLERK (in Cantonese): Electoral Legislation (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill
2025

Buildings Energy Efficiency (Amendment) Bill 2025

Electronic Health Record Sharing System (Amendment)
Bill 2025

Supplementary Medical Professions (Amendment) Bill
2025

Merchant Shipping (Safe and Environmentally Sound
Recycling of Ships) Bill.

*Bills read the first time and ordered to be set down for Second Reading pursuant
to Rule 53(3) of the Rules of Procedure.*

Second Reading of Government Bills

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Government Bills: Second Reading.

**ELECTORAL LEGISLATION (MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENTS)
BILL 2025**

SECRETARY FOR CONSTITUTIONAL AND MAINLAND AFFAIRS (in Cantonese): President, I move the Second Reading of the Electoral Legislation (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025 (“the Bill”).

On 11 March 2021, the Decision on improving the electoral system of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (“the Decision”), which clearly sets out the basic principles and core elements that the SAR should follow in improving the electoral system, was passed by an overwhelming majority vote at the fourth session of the 13th National People’s Congress. The adoption of the Decision serves to plug the loopholes in the electoral system of Hong Kong at that time, fully implement the principle of “patriots administering Hong Kong” in terms of the institutional mechanism, ensure the Central Government’s overall jurisdiction over Hong Kong and provides a solid and powerful constitutional guarantee for Hong Kong’s long-term prosperity and stability, as well as for the steady and successful implementation of the “one country, two systems” principle. With the strong support of the Central Government, the SAR Government has amended the relevant local electoral legislation in accordance with Annexes I and II to the Basic Law as amended, and the amendments have been scrutinized and passed by the Legislative Council (“LegCo”). Under the new electoral system, we have held the 2021 Election Committee (“EC”) Subsector Ordinary Elections, the 2021 Legislative Council General Election (“LCGE”), the 2022 Chief Executive Election and the 2022 LegCo EC Constituency By-Elections. The principle of “patriots administering Hong Kong” has been fully implemented, and Hong Kong has formally entered a new stage from governance to prosperity. Subsequently, the SAR Government has improved district governance and reformed the District Councils (“DCs”) in 2023 to put the principle of “patriots administering Hong Kong” into practice at the district governance level and ensure that DCs will perform their duties of conducting consultation and providing services at the district level in strict accordance with the Basic Law, enhance the effectiveness of district governance, and do practical work for the well-being of the public.

Improving the electoral system and the district governance system and reforming DCs are crucial to the stable and successful implementation of “one country, two systems”, and to the good governance and long-term stability of the SAR. At present, the governance of the SAR is firmly in the hands of the patriots, and the executive authorities and the legislature have realized positive interaction, complementing and facilitating each other, while working together to reform and develop Hong Kong, improve people’s livelihood and build a future. In addition, DCs have achieved the goal of “relaying instructions from above and reporting situations from below”, endeavoured to do practical things for the community and strive for its well-being, and continuously enhanced the public’s sense of fulfilment and well-being. As President XI Jinping stated, “The new electoral system is a political and democratic system that aligns with the principle of ‘one country, two systems’, fits the realistic conditions of Hong Kong, and meets the developmental needs of Hong Kong, which must be treasured and adhered to in the long term.”

As clearly pointed out by the Chief Executive in the Supplement to the 2024 Policy Address, the Government will adhere to the improved electoral system in the long run to ensure that elections are conducted in a fair, just, honest, safe and orderly manner; continue to enhance the electoral arrangements, and further the application of information technology and smart technologies in the election process to enhance efficiency and make the arrangements user-friendly.

With the term of office of the Seventh LegCo coming to an end on 31 December this year, the Chief Executive has announced that LCGE will be held on 7 December this year to elect the 90 Members of the Eighth LegCo. Before LCGE, the Government will hold EC subsector by-elections in accordance with the law on 7 September to fill the vacancies of elected members of EC so that they could nominate candidates in LCGE and vote in the EC constituency. The Chief Executive has indicated that the Government will work closely with the Electoral Affairs Commission (“EAC”) to actively prepare for the elections, and to ensure that they will be held smoothly in a fair, just, honest, safe and orderly manner.

After the Bill has gone through the First and Second Readings in LegCo today, it will be introduced for Members’ deliberation. The Bill seeks to amend the existing electoral legislation in three main areas.

Firstly, after the improvement of the electoral system in 2021 and the enhancement of the district governance system and the reforming of DCs in 2023, the delineation of the existing LegCo geographical constituencies (“GCs”) and the

DC GCs is no longer necessarily related. As there is no need to link them directly from the perspective of the operation of the elections, we propose to remove the statutory connection between the two.

The second amendment mainly relates to the enhancement of the counting procedures. Drawing reference from the successful experience of the current practice of using counting machines in the EC subsector elections and the LegCo EC constituency elections, we propose to empower EAC to use counting machines to replace part of the manual counting process in the LegCo functional constituencies elections, thereby enhancing speed and efficiency as well as achieving savings in manpower and expenditure. In addition, we propose to consolidate the ballot paper accounts for the relevant constituencies to further enhance the counting procedures and enhance efficiency.

Thirdly, we propose that the Electoral Registration Officer be empowered to expedite the compilation of some of the EC subsector registers, so that in each LCGE year, including this one, the publication of the subsector registers for that year can be suitably advanced to enable the EC subsector by-elections to be conducted on the basis of the latest information in the registers.

President, all of the amendments mentioned above reflect the SAR Government's wish to make continuous progress while maintaining stability after the improvement of the electoral system. They also show the Government's endeavour to enhance the electoral arrangements to ensure that the elections are fair, just, honest, clean, safe, orderly and efficient, while catering for various actual circumstances and needs as well as keeping abreast of the times.

To ensure the smooth conduct of the two important elections this year, we are working actively with EAC on all aspects of the preparatory work and to make contingency plans as instructed by the Chief Executive. We will endeavour to ensure that the general election for the Eighth LegCo will be held smoothly, and that a new term of capable and committed LegCo Members who love our country and Hong Kong will be elected to serve the people of Hong Kong and our country.

With these remarks, President, I hope Members will support the passage of the Electoral Legislation (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill 2025.

Thank you, President.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the Electoral Legislation (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill 2025 be read the second time.

In accordance with the Rules of Procedure, the debate on the Second Reading is adjourned and the Bill is referred to the House Committee.

BUILDINGS ENERGY EFFICIENCY (AMENDMENT) BILL 2025

SECRETARY FOR ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY (in Cantonese): President, I move the Second Reading of the Buildings Energy Efficiency (Amendment) Bill 2025 (“the Bill”).

Currently, buildings account for 90% of Hong Kong’s electricity consumption, and over 50% of Hong Kong’s carbon emissions are attributable to generating electricity for them. Therefore, the Government has been actively promoting policies and measures to enhance the energy efficiency of buildings. Among them, the Buildings Energy Efficiency Ordinance (“the Ordinance”), which has come into full operation since September 2012, requires buildings to comply with the energy efficiency standards of building services installations when they are newly constructed or when major retrofitting works are carried out, and commercial buildings to conduct energy audits at intervals no longer than 10 years, so as to explore and implement opportunities to save energy.

Since the implementation of the Ordinance, more than 2 300 new buildings and more than 15 000 major retrofitting works in existing buildings have complied with the energy efficiency standards. About 2 700 buildings have completed the first energy audit, and about half of them have completed the second energy audit.

To further promote energy savings in buildings, the Government proposes to amend the Ordinance and its subsidiary legislation to enhance the buildings energy efficiency management regime of Hong Kong in the following five areas:

- (1) Including all data centres in the scope of regulation of the standards for buildings energy efficiency: Considering the high electricity consumption of data centres and that more of them will be completed, we propose to include stand-alone data centres and portions of industrial buildings being built as and converted into data centres as

they are newly constructed or when major retrofitting works are carried out in the scope of regulation of the standards for buildings energy efficiency, i.e. to increase the types of buildings covered by the relevant parts of the Ordinance from 13 to 15;

- (2) Requiring more types of buildings to conduct regular energy audits: According to the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department's data on buildings that have conducted the second energy audit, the energy utilization index of these buildings has dropped by an average of 20% as compared with that of buildings that have conducted the first energy audit, indicating that energy audits are conducive to promoting energy savings in buildings. We, therefore, propose to require more types of buildings to conduct regular energy audits, including buildings used as government offices, for education purposes, community purposes, municipal services and medical and healthcare services, i.e. to increase the types of buildings that are required to conduct regular energy audits under the Ordinance from 2 to 11.

On the other hand, in light of the comments received during the consultation period, we recommend that with the exception of data centres, small- and medium-sized buildings with a gross floor area not exceeding 7 000 sq m (i.e. about 75 000 sq ft) should be exempted from conducting energy audits, so as to strike a balance between cost-effectiveness and regulatory purposes;

- (3) Shortening the intervals of energy audits from the current 10 years to 5 years: To encourage the timely adoption of green and energy-efficient equipment and technologies in existing buildings, thereby utilizing the benefits of conducting energy audits, we propose to shorten the intervals of energy audits from the current 10 years to 5 years to make our practices comparable to those of our neighbouring regions, such as the Mainland, Singapore and Tokyo, Japan;
- (4) Publishing certain technical information in energy audit reports, such as the energy efficiency coefficient and energy saving potential of major building services installations to enhance data transparency; and

- (5) Including more qualifications eligible for registration as Registered Energy Assessor (“REA”): We propose to include engineers in the energy discipline and professional members of the Hong Kong Institute of Qualified Environmental Professionals to be eligible persons to apply for registration as REA. This will increase the potential number of REAs to meet the new demand for conducting energy audits and facilitate the implementation of the amended Ordinance.

If the Bill is passed by the Legislative Council (“LegCo”) and fully implemented, it is estimated that an additional 500 million kWh of electricity will be saved annually by 2035, which is equivalent to the annual electricity consumption of 150 000 three-person households.

Since November 2023, we have conducted extensive consultation on the above proposals with trade associations, the property management sector, the construction industry, professional bodies, public services bodies and other stakeholders. We have also consulted the Energy Advisory Committee, the Council for Carbon Neutrality and Sustainable Development and the Advisory Council on the Environment in January 2024, December 2024 and February 2025 respectively, and the LegCo Panel on Environmental Affairs in January 2025. The stakeholders and the Panel were generally supportive of the proposed amendments. I would like to thank Members in particular for their support and views.

Subject to the passage of the Bill by LegCo, we will implement the amendments in two stages. In other words, we will update the qualifications eligible for registration as REA three months after the passage and gazettal of the amended Ordinance, and bring the remaining provisions into operation 15 months after the gazettal, with a view to bringing the amended Ordinance into full operation within 2026.

President, we hope that by amending the Ordinance, we can achieve a multi-win situation: firstly, saving electricity tariffs for buildings; secondly, reducing carbon emissions; and thirdly, promoting the development of a green economy. We will fully cooperate with LegCo in the scrutiny of the Bill and hope that Members will support the early passage of the Bill so that our buildings energy efficiency regime can keep abreast of the times.

I so submit.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the Buildings Energy Efficiency (Amendment) Bill 2025 be read the second time.

In accordance with the Rules of Procedure, the debate on the Second Reading is adjourned and the Bill is referred to the House Committee.

ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORD SHARING SYSTEM (AMENDMENT) BILL 2025

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH (in Cantonese): President, I move the Second Reading of the Electronic Health Record Sharing System (Amendment) Bill 2025 (“the Bill”).

The Electronic Health Record Sharing System (“eHealth”) is a city-wide electronic health record sharing system launched by the Government in 2016. The Electronic Health Record Sharing System Ordinance (“eHRSSO”), which came into effect in 2015, serves as the legal basis governing the establishment and operation of eHealth.

In the 2023 Policy Address, the Chief Executive announced the initiative to roll out a five-year plan of “eHealth+” aimed at developing eHealth into a comprehensive healthcare information infrastructure that integrates multiple functions of data sharing, service delivery, and care journey management. It will be transformed into a core tool for healthcare system reform, including promoting primary healthcare, improving workflow efficiency, and facilitating cross-boundary services, thereby providing citizens with more coherent and high-quality healthcare services. It is therefore necessary to amend eHRSSO to expand and enhance the data collection, sharing, usage, and protection mechanism of eHealth. The Bill covers four major aspects.

(THE PRESIDENT’S DEPUTY, DR STARRY LEE, took the Chair)

Building a comprehensive personal electronic health record for citizens

The first aspect is to provide a legal framework to help build a comprehensive personal electronic health record for citizens. In addition to streamlining the consent mechanism, the Bill will empower the Secretary for

Health to require specified healthcare providers (“HCPs”) to deposit important specified health data into the personal eHealth accounts of citizens. Should the requirement be implemented in the future, we will ensure that there are sufficient technical support and adequate communication with relevant stakeholders on the detailed implementation arrangements, including the types of specified health data, implementation approach, and timetable.

Supporting primary healthcare development and service process management

The second aspect is to further support the operational needs of primary healthcare development and citizens’ self-management of healthcare service process. To support the primary healthcare services provided by multi-disciplinary teams, the Bill will expand the scope of healthcare professionals (“HCProfs”) who can access health data on eHealth. In addition to the existing 13 types of HCProfs subject to statutory registration, HCProfs registered with the accredited professional bodies under the Department of Health’s Accredited Registers Scheme for Healthcare Professions, and other specified HCProfs in healthcare facilities controlled or managed by the Government and the Hospital Authority will also be included.

Furthermore, to facilitate convenient access to and use of electronic medical documents by citizens, the Bill will provide a clear legal framework for governing electronic medical documents issued or authenticated through eHealth, and enabling the Government to designate eHealth as the only platform for issuing certain medical documents under appropriate circumstances, in order to facilitate the centralized management and support the usage of these documents.

Supporting citizens in using healthcare services across the boundary

The third aspect is to introduce provisions to recognize individual HCPs and public health record systems outside Hong Kong, subject to sufficient protection of data privacy and system security as well as due compliance with specified requirements and conditions. Citizens can choose to authorize a recognized HCP to securely access their personal eHealth records and deposit the health records into their personal eHealth accounts, with a view to enhancing the quality and safety of cross-boundary healthcare services. Under no other circumstances will eHealth records be transmitted across the boundary.

Refining the legal provisions for the access to and use of eHealth data

Finally, we will refine the legal provisions governing the access to and use of eHealth data. For instance, the Bill will specify that citizens and specified categories of related persons, such as parents of minors and authorized caregivers, may provide and obtain eHealth records, thereby empowering citizens' self-management of health records.

The Health Bureau briefed the Legislative Council (“LegCo”) Panel on Health Services on the legislative framework of the Bill in February 2024, and obtained support from members of the Panel.

The Government will fully cooperate with LegCo in its scrutiny work. I hope that Members will support the passage of the Bill to facilitate the functional enhancement and further development of eHealth so that it can benefit the public.

I so submit. Thank you, Deputy President.

DEPUTY PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the Electronic Health Record Sharing System (Amendment) Bill 2025 be read the second time.

In accordance with the Rules of Procedure, the Second Reading debate is adjourned and the Bill is referred to the House Committee.

SUPPLEMENTARY MEDICAL PROFESSIONS (AMENDMENT) BILL 2025

SECRETARY FOR HEALTH (in Cantonese): Deputy President, I move the Second Reading of the Supplementary Medical Professions (Amendment) Bill 2025 (“the Bill”).

The Supplementary Medical Professions Ordinance (“the Ordinance”) regulates five supplementary medical professions (“SMPs”), including physiotherapists, occupational therapists, optometrists, radiographers and medical laboratory technologists. Under the Ordinance, they are regulated by the Supplementary Medical Professions Council (“SMPC”) and the five boards of SMPs in accordance with the principle of professional autonomy.

There are three main objectives in amending the Ordinance, the first of which is to recognize the increasingly important and specialized roles of SMPs in the local healthcare system. We propose to replace the previous title of “supplementary medical professions” with the term “allied health professions” (“AHPs”) which is commonly used in the healthcare sector. SMPC will also be renamed the Allied Health Professions Council.

Secondly, to ensure that the legislation can keep abreast of the development of primary healthcare and the trend of cross-disciplinary collaboration in recent years, two proposals have been put forward. They include (1) allowing patients to seek physiotherapy and occupational therapy services directly without referral from medical practitioners under specified conditions, and (2) allowing AHPs to receive referrals from Chinese medicine practitioners (“CMPs”).

We hope to promote the participation of physiotherapists and occupational therapists in primary healthcare on the premise of ensuring patient safety and to encourage the public to make good use of the healthcare professional network in the districts in respect of degenerative diseases that are rather common in the community. The Bill has incorporated different risk management arrangements. For example, physiotherapists and occupational therapists must provide treatment to patients in accordance with the clinical protocols issued by the referencing authority specified in the Bill or the guidelines issued by the Primary Healthcare Commission (“PHCC”) on cross-disciplinary collaboration arrangements. They may be subject to disciplinary actions if they breach the Codes of Practice or the protocols.

We also propose to allow patients to seek service from physiotherapists and occupational therapists for a condition which has been previously diagnosed by a registered medical practitioner or a CMP within the last 12 months, thus avoiding the need for them to attend a follow-up consultation again to obtain a referral letter within a short period, so as to achieve the goals of streamlining processes and reducing costs.

The Bill will provide a legal framework for AHPs to receive referrals from registered CMPs, covering CMPs providing services to patients under the governance of The Chinese Medicine Hospital of Hong Kong (“CMHHK”) and other CMPs practising in the community. There is a practical need for CMPs to make referrals for other treatments as clinically necessary and to use modern diagnostic technologies to enhance the accuracy of clinical diagnosis and monitor the effectiveness of treatment.

To implement the referral arrangement in an effective and orderly manner, the Chinese medicine profession and AHPs need to reach a consensus on the required professional standards in terms of knowledge, skills, professional competence, conduct, etc. and to update the relevant Codes of Practice. In this regard, the Chinese Medicine Council of Hong Kong and the boards of AHPs have already started a series of coordinating work to prepare for the implementation of the referral arrangement to benefit the public promptly.

The third objective is to consolidate the manpower supply of local AHPs. According to the Healthcare Manpower Projection 2023, the five AHPs will experience manpower shortages of varying degrees shortly. The Bill introduces a new pathway of “limited registration” to allow qualified non-locally trained AHPs to be employed by designated institutions to undertake specified types of work. The limited registration will be valid for three years and renewable, but professionals with limited registration cannot directly migrate to full registration. However, if they have completed a local course recognized by the relevant board or passed a practising certificate examination, they can apply for full registration through the existing pathways. We will require the employing institutions (including the Hospital Authority, the Department of Health, PHCC, CMHHK and training institutions) to give priority to employing locally trained AHPs.

Furthermore, the current legislative proposals include making changes to the composition and structure of SMPC and the five professional boards to better regulate the sectors and promote cross-disciplinary collaboration, introducing other technical amendments and making continuing professional development a mandatory requirement for renewal of practising certificates.

Deputy President, we have conducted extensive consultation on the proposals. We updated the Legislative Council (“LegCo”) Panel on Health Services on the latest progress of our work on amending the Ordinance in September 2022 and December 2023. Since the second half of last year, we have launched a new round of consultation covering the five AHPs, the medical profession, the Chinese medicine profession, primary healthcare practitioners and patient organizations, including holding a total of 16 consultation sessions. The current Bill represents the greatest consensus reached after taking into account the views of different sectors.

I look forward to Members’ support for the passage of the Bill, and the Government will fully cooperate with LegCo in its scrutiny of the Bill.

I so submit. Thank you, Deputy President.

DEPUTY PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the Supplementary Medical Professions (Amendment) Bill 2025 be read the second time.

In accordance with the Rules of Procedure, the debate on the Second Reading is adjourned and the Bill is referred to the House Committee.

MERCHANT SHIPPING (SAFE AND ENVIRONMENTALLY SOUND RECYCLING OF SHIPS) BILL

SECRETARY FOR TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS (in Cantonese): Deputy President, I move the Second Reading of the Merchant Shipping (Safe and Environmentally Sound Recycling of Ships) Bill (“the Bill”).

Legislative background

The purpose of the Bill is to give effect to the Hong Kong International Convention for the Safe and Environmentally Sound Recycling of Ships, 2009 (“HKC”). It is worth mentioning that HKC’s name originates from the fact that the Convention was adopted at the Diplomatic Conference of the International Maritime Organization (“IMO”) held in Hong Kong, China from 11 to 15 May 2009. It aims to ensure that ship recycling does not pose any unnecessary risk to human health, safety or the environment by addressing various issues in relation to ship recycling concerned by IMO’s member states and other relevant parties.

Hong Kong’s ship recycling industry has been in gradual decline since the 1970s. Due to high labour and land costs, coupled with low demand for recycled materials, there are no longer companies or shipyards that specialize in ship recycling in Hong Kong. Hence, there will be few instances in which local ship recycling facilities will need to comply with HKC. However, given that HKC also applies to ships registered in Hong Kong, and that Hong Kong is the fourth largest shipping register with more than 2 300 registered ships operating around the world, it is important to ensure the compliance of Hong Kong-registered ships with HKC regardless of their locations, so as to minimize the risks associated with ship recycling operations.

While some objectives and requirements of HKC align with those of the current local legislation, the provisions of HKC could not be fully implemented under the current local legislation. Therefore, we need to enact a new ordinance with a new subsidiary legislation to ensure the full implementation of HKC.

Hong Kong is an Associate Member of IMO. Currently, the Central People's Government is proactively considering the approval of the application of HKC to the HKSAR. We plan to pass the Bill before HKC comes into full effect worldwide, i.e. by 26 June 2025. We are actively preparing the subsidiary legislation for expeditious submission to the Legislative Council ("LegCo") for approval and passage, so that the Ordinance can come into force to implement HKC once the Central Government applies it to the HKSAR.

Legislative proposals

The Bill and the subsidiary legislation to be enacted seek to regulate all matters relating to ship recycling, including compliance with HKC's requirements on ship recycling, as well as the working and environmental conditions in ship recycling facilities. The Bill primarily consists of empowering provisions, while all implementation details and requirements are to be set out in the subsidiary legislation.

Firstly, the Bill empowers the Secretary for Transport and Logistics to make regulations. The Bill also provides for other powers to be conferred on the Director of Marine ("the Director") under the regulations, including authorizing recognized organizations to perform functions that may be performed by the Director under the Bill.

Secondly, the Bill empowers authorized officers to board ships to carry out inspections for the purpose of ensuring compliance with the requirements of HKC. It also sets out clearly the requirements for entry into premises used as ship recycling facilities in emergencies and non-emergencies for inspection, examination or investigation purposes. Authorized officers are also granted the right to apply for a magistrate's warrant for entry into such premises. During inspections, authorized officers may take samples of objects, detain the said objects, take photographs, require certain relevant officers to answer relevant questions, produce documents, etc.

Thirdly, the Bill empowers the Director to give a direction to the owner or master of a ship or the operator of a ship recycling facility if a deficiency is identified in complying with HKC regarding a person or circumstance, requiring that the ship may not proceed to sea or the facility may not continue to carry out ship recycling until the deficiency is rectified. In addition, the Director may exempt any ships and ship recycling facilities from any requirement of the Ordinance, either absolutely or subject to specified conditions.

Public consultation

The Government briefed, and obtained support of, the LegCo Panel on Economic Development and the industry, in particular the Hong Kong Fleet Operation Advisory Committee, on the above legislative proposals. I urge Members to support the early passage of the Bill, so as to enable Hong Kong, a responsible member of the international maritime industry, to align its ship recycling regulation with international standards.

I so submit. Thank you, Deputy President.

DEPUTY PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the Merchant Shipping (Safety and Environmentally Sound Recycling of Ships) Bill be read the second time.

In accordance with the Rules of Procedure, the Second Reading debate is adjourned and the Bill is referred to the House Committee.

Resumption of Second Reading Debate on Government Bill

DEPUTY PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): This Council resumes the Second Reading debate on the Courts (Remote Hearing) Bill.

Prof Priscilla LEUNG, Chairman of the Bills Committee on the Bill, will first address the Council on the Committee's Report.

COURTS (REMOTE HEARING) BILL**Resumption of debate on Second Reading which was moved on 4 December 2024**

PROF PRISCILLA LEUNG (in Cantonese): Deputy President, in my capacity as Chairman of the Bills Committee on Courts (Remote Hearing) Bill ("the Bills Committee"), I hereby report the deliberations of the Bills Committee.

The Courts (Remote Hearing) Bill (“the Bill”) aims at providing for the application for, and the operation and effect of, remote hearings for court proceedings in Hong Kong. The Bills Committee has held six meetings and invited written submissions from the public. Members are generally supportive of the Bill and consider that the use of remote hearings in proceedings can effectively enhance the efficiency of the administration of justice in Hong Kong and the work efficiency of the sector, while enabling the courts to better tackle unforeseen and complicated situations, such as epidemics.

Members agree that no proceeding of a case concerning national security, whether it be criminal or civil, should be conducted through a remote medium as provided under the Bill. They also agree to the Bill’s inclusion of criminal trials and hearings before the Juvenile Court as excluded proceedings that should not be conducted through a remote medium. Members have noted that despite the inclusion of criminal trials as excluded proceedings, certain witnesses will still be allowed to give evidence remotely during criminal trials if the judge considers it appropriate. Some members have enquired about the intent behind the provision.

The Judiciary Administration has explained that a criminal trial may involve a defendant being remanded in custody, during which there may be a need for a witness to attend the hearing remotely due to special reasons, and without the evidence of the witness, the rights of the defendant may be affected (e.g. the defendant may have to remain in custody for a longer period should it take time to arrange for the witness to return to Hong Kong for the hearing).

There are concerns from members as to how to ensure that witnesses participating in remote hearings do so voluntarily without being coerced or interfered with. In response, the Judiciary Administration has pointed out that under clause 9 of the Bill, the court must consider various applicable factors in making, varying or revoking a remote hearing order for a proceeding, including “the measures to be taken to ensure that evidence is given freely without coercion or other influence” under clause 9(j).

Members are also concerned about the Judiciary’s defence against cybersecurity threats, such as computer virus implantation or leakage of network information, in adopting remote hearings. There are also worries about the possibility of lawbreakers deceiving the court by impersonating witnesses through deepfake technology to participate in remote hearings. The Judiciary Administration has stated that the Judiciary sets great store by data protection and

information technology security, and mechanisms relating to the actual operation of remote hearings are put in place to prevent imposters from participating in remote hearings.

The Bill also proposes the introduction of new offences to criminalize unauthorized recording and publishing of both physical and remote hearings, and of the broadcast of such hearings. As the Bill also provides for the defence for these offences, members are concerned if the defence provisions are too lenient. The Judiciary Administration has explained that in determining whether an offence is committed by an act of recording on court premises, the Department of Justice will consider the seriousness of the matter involved or the availability of reasonable excuse before contemplating prosecution.

Members are concerned about the possible alteration to the right of defendants (particularly litigants in person) to be present at appeal-related hearings as a result of the Bill's proposed amendments to the Criminal Procedure Ordinance and the Hong Kong Court of Final Appeal Ordinance. In response to members' concern, the Administration will move amendments to keep the relevant provisions under the two aforesaid ordinances intact and explicitly empower the court to dispose of an application for leave to appeal on paper when the court considers it appropriate.

In the course of scrutiny by the Bills Committee, members have raised many questions on the appropriateness and applicability of some legal terms in the Bill, or the accurate usage of the Chinese and English languages. The Government will move amendments in active response to the views of some members. In addition, a number of textual and technical amendments to improve the provisions will be moved in response to other views raised by members and the Legal Adviser to the Bills Committee.

The Bills Committee supports the amendments proposed by the Administration.

Deputy President, the following are my personal views on the Bill.

In today's world and society, where smart government and smart legislation are on everyone's lips, smart justice is of course not to be missed out. As I can remember, during the epidemic a few years ago, court operation was ground to a halt for more than half a year, with significant implications on the rights and

interests of the parties concerned and on the administration of justice. Many Honourable Members of the Legislative Council (“LegCo”), myself included, have proposed to the Judiciary on multiple occasions the prompt introduction of a systematic method to conduct remote hearings. The Judiciary replied then that corresponding legislation was needed in this regard, but the relevant legal basis was absent at the time. Given that many countries and places (especially the Mainland) have moved far ahead in terms of smart justice and have provided a lot of experience we can learn from, we strongly support the Bill.

On the implementation of the Bill, I would like to raise the following concerns.

Firstly, while it is an irreversible trend for the court to embrace technology, it is equally important to ensure the due administration of justice and to uphold the dignity of judicial officers and judges and the solemnity of the court. As an incidental topic for reference, I am aware that the local courts and the Judiciary are active in promoting live broadcast of proceedings, a practice that has been adopted on the Mainland for many years. The only point I wish to make is whether all cases are suitable for live broadcast. As for the experience on the Mainland, many judges have told me that if the proceedings of all cases are to be live-streamed with everything made public, like Honourable Members of LegCo facing the media, it will put enormous pressure on the judicial officers and even the lawyers involved. Very often, they may find it difficult to speak freely out of concern over how their performance is captured in camera. Therefore, when contemplating the live broadcast of all proceedings, I believe that the authorities should be very careful about the types of cases to be involved (e.g. the proceedings of cases that involve significant public interests should be live-streamed across-the-board).

Today’s Bill matters not only to the justice or the legal sector, but also to every member of the public. The legal effects of giving testimony and conducting hearings remotely, as well as the legal liabilities of everyone involved, are exactly the same as those of physical hearings. For this reason, I think it is important for the Judiciary, the Government and we in LegCo to make it loud and clear to the public that this Ordinance has to be taken seriously. Giving testimony in a court of law when summoned, even if done remotely, is everyone’s duty, and one that comes with legal liabilities.

My third concern is due to the current development of advanced technologies. I even experienced it personally when I sent vibrant greetings in eight languages using eight AI-generated avatars of myself at a global summit

forum. With the development of advanced technologies in the future, abilities to fake will also be enhanced massively. For example, is it possible that while the face image is real, the giving of testimony is under coercion and done with AI-generated language? Can we tell the difference? I think we need to pay attention to the issues of credibility and procedural seriousness that are involved.

In this regard, I highlighted to the Judiciary at the Bills Committee's meetings the question regarding the courts' readiness to embrace technology in terms of having the adequate security measures in place, such as the defence against computer virus implantation, data forgery or data leakage. The reply I got was that additional resources had been approved by LegCo for the purpose, and the relevant research and development work would be managed entirely within the control of the Judiciary and free from outside influences. In my opinion, the Judiciary should report to LegCo regularly on the standard of technological application attained by the court, given the utmost importance of ensuring the due administration of justice and the credibility of testimony in the process of embracing technology.

The fourth point is about the location of testifying. I have raised questions about the location where the testifying takes place, especially when it is done outside Hong Kong. Is it possible that the place is easily broken into outside the camera's view, resulting in the witness giving testimony against his will? Will consideration be given to appointing authorized persons to supervise the operation of remote hearings, using the borrowed office of reputable law firms outside Hong Kong as the location of testifying, or even working with local governments to secure the provision of venues by the latter, so as to protect the safety of the witness and enhance the credibility of the testimony given? I am glad that the Judiciary has indicated willingness to take into account our views and to examine the possibility of improving the relevant operation in some countries or places.

Fifthly, we have discussed the inclusion of criminal trials and hearings before the Juvenile Court as excluded proceedings, to which I personally agree. I also agree with the comments of the two legal professional bodies about the high degree of sensitivity required for criminal trials as they involve the defendant's personal rights and possibly long sentences, and likewise for hearings before the Juvenile Court. I therefore agree that it is not advisable to conduct these proceedings remotely, at least for the time being. I agree with this proposal under the Bill.

Sixthly, speaking of remote hearings, there are worries about the possibility of having to use the remote mode for all hearings from now on. The fact is that this is not the case. The judgment of whether remote hearing is appropriate for the case rests ultimately with the trial judge, taking into account the nature of the case, the circumstances involved as well as the witnesses to testify. The Bill only provides the Judiciary with more legal tools and options, so I think it is worth supporting.

Seventhly, in our discussion, it has been asked whether the remote mode, once authorized, must remain in use through the whole process without any change. The answer is no. Clause 9 of the Bill states clearly that the court and the judge have the power to affirm, vary or revoke a remote hearing order. There are some noteworthy requirements in this regard. For example, under clause 9(e), the court and the judge have the discretionary power to make instant decisions if there are abnormalities or changes in the physical conditions, psychological health or mental state of the subject person, parties to the case or witnesses. This also applies to situations such as the court detecting insecurities in the facilities at the location of giving testimony or signs of possible coercion.

Therefore, I believe that the Bill is worthy of our support. I would like to thank all members of the Bills Committee for their hard work and dedication. We have discussed the Bill thoroughly, not missing the use of even a single word in the English text or the accuracy of the Chinese and English renditions of provisions in the Bill. Moreover, I am grateful to the Judiciary and the Administration Wing for being so receptive throughout the discussion process on the Bill. In addition to listening to members' view attentively, the authorities have also studied the issues effectively and accurately and proposed the corresponding amendments upon taking constructive advice.

I so submit.

MR MARTIN LIAO (in Cantonese): I would like to first declare that I am a barrister practising in Hong Kong.

Deputy President, one of the legacies of the COVID-19 epidemic is the newly-found acceptance of the public and enterprises to conduct web-based meetings through the use of audio-visual technology. The Judiciary has been

conducting remote hearings for civil proceedings at different levels of courts and tribunals where appropriate since 2020, and over 2 000 remote hearings for civil proceedings have been conducted so far.

Deputy President, remote hearing is not only an important part of the Judiciary's application of technology, but also an initiative that can enhance the operational efficiency of the court. Although the Judiciary has issued four guidance notes on the conduct of remote hearings, and the Chief Justice may also direct that a criminal proceeding in the Court of Final Appeal be heard remotely by exercising his power under rule 78 of the Hong Kong Court of Final Appeal Rules (Cap. 484A), Hong Kong still needs a clearer legal basis to allow courts and tribunals at different levels to order the conduct of hearings remotely, subject to the dual requirements of open justice and fair hearing. In particular, as Hong Kong positions itself as a major centre for international legal and dispute resolution services in the Asia-Pacific region, we should further promote the use of remote hearings in line with the practice in other jurisdictions.

Deputy President, the Courts (Remote Hearing) Bill ("the Bill") seeks to provide a comprehensive legal framework for the application for, and the operation and effect of, remote hearings for legal proceedings. Part 2 of the Bill provides for the basis on which the court may make, affirm, vary or revoke a remote hearing order and the factors to be taken into account. It is not hard to see that ensuring the due administration of justice is a consistent principle at the core of the Bill. On the one hand, a remote hearing order can be made, affirmed, varied or revoked only if the court is satisfied, upon considering the factors set out under clause 9, that it is in the interests of justice to do so in the circumstances of the case. Such factors include: the views of the parties; the ability of the parties to engage with and follow the proceeding if the proceeding is conducted through a remote medium; the maintenance of the rights of the parties; whether the privileged communication between the parties and their respective legal representatives may be affected; the potential impact of the order on the assessment of the credibility of witnesses and the reliability of the evidence presented; whether the right to a fair trial can be effectively maintained; and the quality and security of the remote hearing facilities and their availability to the parties.

On the other hand, the Bill expressly sets out the exceptional circumstances in which remote hearings should not be used, also for the purpose of due administration of justice. That includes all proceedings relating to national security, as well as criminal trials and hearings before the Juvenile Court which are stipulated as excluded proceedings. In addition, the vulnerable witness is

removed from the definition of a participant in a proceeding under the Bill. Meanwhile, as a balancing act, it is provided under clauses 6(4) and (5) of the Bill that the court may, on its own motion or on application by any party to an excluded proceeding, order the giving of evidence or taking of examination through a remote medium subject to its satisfaction that it is in the interests of justice to make the remote hearing order upon considering the factors specified under clause 9 of the Bill. As regards avoiding denial of justice, I am grateful that the Administration has clarified to the Bills Committee with examples that “the use of remote hearings is generally inappropriate for a defendant’s first appearance before a magistrate in criminal proceedings, and in the hearing for the first time of any bail application of the defendant”, and its proposal that “whilst remote hearings may be adopted for criminal proceedings, a defendant should be physically present in court at the time of his plea, verdict and sentence”.

Deputy President, due to the development of the Internet and social media platforms, the use of remote hearings may make the unauthorized recording and publishing of proceedings easier things to do. I therefore agree with the Bill’s proposal to introduce new offences to criminalize unauthorized recording and publishing of hearings, both physical and remote, as well as the broadcast of such hearings without reasonable excuse, so as to increase deterrence and to ensure that proceedings conducted remotely are as fair and just as those conducted physically.

Meanwhile, I am pleased to note that in response to the views of the Bills Committee, the Administration has taken the initiative to propose amendments which delete clauses 41 and 42 and add the proposed new clauses 41A, 41B and 42A in order to maintain consistency with the existing legislation that provides for the defendant’s right to be present at appeal-related hearings. On the other hand, the court is also empowered to dispose of an application for leave to appeal on paper, which serves as a balancing tool.

Deputy President, two rounds of consultation have been conducted on the Bill, during which major stakeholders (including the Hong Kong Bar Association, The Law Society of Hong Kong and law enforcement agencies) have all expressed their support. In my opinion, the Bill has achieved a reasonable balance between the dual objectives of ensuring the due administration of justice in the use of remote hearings and enhancing the operational efficiency of the court after the views of stakeholders and the Bills Committee have been taken into account.

With these remarks, I support the Bill and the amendments.

DR JOHNNY NG (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President. Hong Kong enjoys high international reputation for its standards of judicial independence and the rule of law. In view of the extensive application of digital technology, Hong Kong's Judiciary has been active in embracing technology in recent years to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of court operations, and the use of remote hearings is one of the key initiatives. In addition to facilitating the communication between the court and court users, it is also useful to the court in dealing with situations where the conduct of physical hearings is not possible, as well as unforeseeable contingencies such as the sudden occurrence of epidemics, public health issues or other emergencies.

Remote hearing means the conduct of legal proceedings through a remote medium and on the web by a court order. In fact, remote hearings have been in wide use in foreign countries, especially for deliberations or hearings for which the physical presence of the defendant is not required. Many of our neighbours including cities on the Mainland, Singapore and Dubai have moved far ahead in digitalizing their court operations. On the Mainland, remote hearings on the web have long been in use, in addition to digital courtroom facilities which have greatly reduced the time used by the court for handling case papers.

Due to legal constraints, the use of remote hearings is currently not possible for most criminal cases in Hong Kong. For example, under the current law, the physical presence of the defendant is generally required at different stages of the trial. As for civil proceedings, although remote hearings are allowed ostensibly under the law, no specific provisions are in place to govern the handling of various matters under the remote mode. It is exactly the Bill's aim to provide for the application for, and the operation and effect of, remote hearings for legal proceedings in Hong Kong, and to provide a comprehensive legal framework for the use of remote hearings by the court.

In my opinion, the appropriate use of remote hearings in legal proceedings can effectively enhance the efficiency of the administration of justice in Hong Kong, reduce the time spent on proceedings by legal practitioners and parties to the proceedings, and make the judicial procedures in Hong Kong more accessible and usable abroad, which is conducive to publicizing and promoting the construction of the rule of law in Hong Kong. I therefore support the expeditious passage of the Bill.

In view of the increasing prevalence of cybercrimes in recent years, I have expressed concern over the Judiciary's defence against cybersecurity threats in adopting remote hearings during the deliberations of the Bills Committee. Examples of such threats include the leakage of trial information and video records, computer virus implantation in the system, and deepfake technology that makes it more and more difficult to tell what is true. I have reminded the Judiciary of the possibility of lawbreakers deceiving the court by impersonating witnesses through deepfake technology to participate in remote hearings. Looking forward, it is also necessary to keep abreast of the latest development in digital technology, and to review the system and update the facilities in a timely manner to ensure an uncompromised and safe environment for the conduct of remote hearings.

In the light of the deliberations of the Bills Committee, the Administration intends to move a number of amendments that will improve the clarity and soundness of the Bill, to which I agree. Among them are the amendments related to the right of the defendant to be present at the hearing of an application for leave to appeal and at the hearing of an appeal. The original intent was to exempt the defendant from attending certain hearings and proceedings, so as to enhance the work efficiency of the court. In view of the opinion that such an alteration to the law may be seen as depriving the defendant (particularly a litigant in person) of the right to be present at appeal-related hearings, the Administration has proposed amendments to keep the relevant provisions intact, and to add new provisions that empower the court to dispose of an application for leave to appeal on paper when it considers appropriate, in addition to specifying the transitional arrangements. I consider the above approach very appropriate and useful in enhancing the protection of defendants' rights.

Furthermore, the wider use of remote hearings also bodes well for establishing Hong Kong as an intellectual property ("IP") centre, and its development direction of becoming a centre for international legal and dispute resolution services in the Asia-Pacific region as set out under the National 14th Five-Year Plan. It is because the use of remote hearings will make it possible for the copyright owner to participate in the real-time hearing of the case and provide evidence and opinions without the need to travel to Hong Kong in person. In addition to enhancing the convenience and efficiency of litigation, the travelling and time costs that would otherwise be incurred to overseas copyright owners for being physically present in Hong Kong to participate in the trial will also be largely reduced, which translates into more effective combat against copyright infringements. I suggest that after the passage of the Bill, the Administration

should step up its efforts to publicize Hong Kong's adoption of remote hearings, our IP protection, and our positioning as a centre for IP trade and international dispute resolution to overseas parties.

In conclusion, the use of remote hearings is an irreversible trend. I am glad that the Judiciary is making use of technology to enhance the operational efficiency and capability of the court, and to strengthen its services to the public.

Thank you, Deputy President. I so submit.

MR LAM CHUN-SING (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President. The use of remote hearings is an important initiative of the court to enhance its operational efficiency with the use of technology, which will also allow the court to conduct trials when its normal services are rendered unavailable by epidemics or other extreme circumstances. Under the existing legal framework, the court may direct that hearings be conducted remotely subject to the principles of open justice and fair hearing. The Courts (Remote Hearing) Bill (“the Bill”) is a step further to provide a comprehensive legal framework for the application for, and the operation and effect of, remote hearings, under which the powers of the judge and the factors to be considered by the court regarding remote hearing orders are also covered.

The wider use of remote hearings will enhance the efficiency of court operations. However, I agree that remote hearings are not suitable for some proceedings in some circumstances due to the risks involved and practical constraints. Those include proceedings relating to national security, criminal trials, and situations that involve vulnerable witnesses. Since well-established procedures are in place to address these situations specifically, I agree that they should be excluded.

On the other hand, I am particularly concerned about the availability of adequate guidance and support for people who are not legally represented, such that all parties to a proceeding can make use of remote hearing without problems, even if they are not legally represented. Let us take the Labour Tribunal (“LT”) as an example. From 2021 to 2023, a total of 58 LT hearings were conducted using video conferencing facilities. With 38 cases in record, the number of remote hearings was the highest in 2022, probably due to the COVID-19 epidemic. However, the number then dropped in 2023. Workers in general are probably unfamiliar with LT's procedures and not legally represented, let alone aware of the option of remote hearing. Therefore, I hope that the Judiciary will carry on with

its publicity work on remote hearings after the passage of the Bill, and provide parties to proceedings with more specific guidance and a full picture of the details and operation. Unions can also be used as a conduit to explain to workers, so that the litigants may choose whether to use remote hearing. A problem we now face is that employees who are involved in labour disputes are in most cases no longer employed in the job concerned, and it is difficult for them to take leave from a newly-found job to attend the court hearing. It is thus believed that remote hearings will be both flexible and convenient for them. Under certain circumstances, registered trade unions can be authorized by a party to attend a hearing subject to LT's permission. In this regard, the Government's representatives have told us in the Bills Committee that in the case of remote hearing, the representatives of trade unions are also allowed to participate. I am glad that this is the case.

I am also concerned about the due administration of justice in adopting remote hearings. How can we be sure that the witness participating in the remote hearing is doing so voluntarily without being interfered with or coerced? For example, is there a possibility of off-camera interference or influence, or even the use of on-screen prompts to guide the giving of testimony? It is hoped that the court will be as vigilant as possible in its arrangement of remote hearings. Clause 9 of the Bill provides that the judge may vary or revoke the remote hearing order and require all parties to be physically present at the hearing if he considers that the use of remote hearing will compromise the credibility of witnesses and the reliability of the evidence made available. I believe that with the specific operational arrangements in place and the judge in control, due administration of justice can be ensured.

In addition, the Bills Committee has discussed at its meetings whether failure to attend a remote hearing constitutes the offence of contempt of court. The legislative intent of clause 14 of the Bill is to make the consequences of failure to attend a remote hearing the same as those of absence from a physical hearing. I agree that remote hearings should be respected like physical hearings, as they are both solemn legal processes. While the Bill does not expressly state that absence from a remote hearing will result in contempt of court, absence that may compromise the due administration of justice may still constitute the criminal offence of contempt of court. During a remote hearing, a party may have problems participating in the process effectively due to technical issues with the computer or the network, or even the sound reception. Under such exceptional circumstances, I hope that leniency will be given if the absence from the remote hearing is not intentional and comes with reasonable explanation. The

Government's representatives have also indicated that the consequences of failure to attend a court hearing (including a remote hearing) vary depending on the role of the absent participant, the reason for the absence, the nature of the proceeding, and other relevant circumstances of the case. It is believed that the court will make the due assessment.

Finally, I hope that the Judiciary will continue to explore the use of more technologies to enhance the operational efficiency of the court in line with the times.

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

MR LAM SAN-KEUNG (in Cantonese): Deputy President, President XI Jinping mentioned the term “common law” twice in his speech on 1 July 2022, and emphasized that Hong Kong should “maintain the common law”. Hong Kong is also positioned as a centre for international legal and dispute resolution services in the Asia-Pacific region under the National 14th Five-Year Plan. All these are clear signs of the Central Authorities' concrete actions to support Hong Kong in maintaining and giving full play to the unique advantages of our common law system.

Hong Kong is the only common law jurisdiction in China and the only bilingual common law jurisdiction that uses Chinese and English in the world. With such unique advantages, we have every reason to become our country's bridgehead for the construction of rule of law in relation to foreign affairs, cradle of legal talents dealing with foreign parties, and pioneer in enhancing the standards of international legal services.

Having said that, we must also face up to the fact that the progress of digitalization in Hong Kong's courts leaves room for criticism. We may have established ourselves firmly as a common law city, but we are lagging far behind in terms of digitalization and becoming information-based.

I remember that when I paid a duty visit to Singapore 25 years ago (i.e. in the early 2000s), the electronic filing system was already adopted by the courts there. It was really ahead of its time. The World Bank also hailed Singapore's court automation as an example of best practice in the world.

The Hangzhou Internet Court, a court specialized in handling disputes relating to e-commerce platforms, was established as early as in 2017. It is plausibly the first bona fide internet court in China, if not the world. The whole judicial process, from case filing to conclusion, is handled online. That is not the end. In the years that followed, Mobile Micro Court has been introduced in other Mainland cities, through which defendants, plaintiffs and even lawyers can all participate in remote hearings at home or in their own office using a mobile app. The convenience and efficiency are indeed remarkable.

Looking back on ourselves in Hong Kong, the digitalization of court operations started in the 1990s, so we do make some progress. However, frankly speaking, most court procedures are still paper-based. Lawyers carrying huge stacks of paper is still a common sight, and documents are still being processed manually in court, which means that we are really far behind our time. According to a study of the World Bank in 2019, Hong Kong scored 1 on a scale of 0 to 4 in “court automation”, so our situation is far from satisfactory.

As the saying goes, “Justice delayed is justice denied.” It should be made clear that adoption of courtroom technology is an indispensable tool to enhance the quality of judicial administration for the maintenance and promotion of justice, rather than just for the sake of scoring high points in surveys. As an international legal services centre and our country’s window to the outside world, Hong Kong must work hard to keep in pace with the times by making our justice system smarter and more modernized.

To that end, I gladly welcome and support the enactment of the Courts (Remote Hearing) Bill (“the Bill”) by the SAR Government to institutionalize and standardize the use of remote hearings which started during the epidemic. After the passage of the Bill, the scope of application, technical requirements and procedural safeguards for remote hearings will be more clearly defined under the regulatory regime, resulting in higher flexibility and efficiency of court operations. This is good news for lawyers, judges and even parties to proceedings as time and monetary costs are reduced and judicial services are made truly accessible.

In the past three years, the Judiciary has made swift progress in digitalizing court operations, which is commendable. In particular, I would like to thank Chief Justice Andrew CHEUNG, the Chief Justice of the Court of Final Appeal, and Ms Esther LEUNG, the Judiciary Administrator, for their efforts over these three years.

However, the passage of the Courts (Remote Hearing) Bill only marks the beginning of digitalization of Hong Kong's court operations.

What comes next will be the need to allocate adequate resources in support of the implementation of the Bill. In particular, lawyers and judicial officers must familiarize themselves with the new system, and this cannot be achieved overnight. Therefore, it is necessary for the Department of Justice and the Judiciary to allocate adequate resources to the provision of comprehensive training, which may include workshops, mock trials or even a technical support hotline to ensure that lawyers are familiar with the operation of the remote hearing platform.

Moreover, for the purpose of due administration of justice, the court should formulate practical rules that will ensure that a witness participating in a remote hearing is not interfered with or provided with cues by someone near him. This is particularly important nowadays, as deepfake technology is so powerful that you cannot trust any image to be genuine. In this regard, is it possible for the offices outside Hong Kong and the Economic and Trade Offices of the Hong Kong Government or even the Chinese Consulates overseas to provide venues for the conduct of remote hearings when needed? In that case, the evidence and testimony given would be more secure and reliable.

Given the rapid development of technology nowadays, our journey is not finished with the use of remote hearings. We need to look further ahead by referring to the new technologies on the Mainland and in other countries, such as the use of AI in the judicial process.

Courts in Shenzhen Municipality have adopted the self-developed AI-assisted trial mechanism since last year. The system provides all-round support both before and during the trial, including case facts analysis, push rules and generation of hearing records, which greatly reduces the time required for hearing preparation and enhances the efficiency of court operations.

Courts in Zhejiang and Guangdong Provinces have set up “evidence room in cloud”, which helps judges' and lawyers' access to the information of the physical evidence in the case through the use of 3D imaging technology to capture the 3D data of the physical evidence and the use of blockchain technology for data storage and management. With the help of 5G data transmission system, the full picture of the physical evidence is made available to judges, lawyers and witnesses even if the hearing is conducted remotely.

Courts in Guangzhou Municipality goes even further. In dealing with intellectual property (“IP”) disputes involving trade marks or products, 3D data of the physical evidence are used to conduct AI-assisted comparison between the genuine trade marks or products and those suspected of IP infringement. This helps the judge gauge the degree of similarity and make his judgment of the validity of the infringement claim.

The new judicial technologies being applied in our country are not only useful to the judges in deciding on cases, but also to law enforcement. An example of this is the use of digital seals with Internet of Things (“IoT”) technology in Jiangsu Province to facilitate the court’s distraint of properties. This is to protect the legitimate rights and interests of the prevailing party in a civil proceeding by preventing the selling of properties as attempts to delay enforcement and evade the civil liability of compensation.

I do not mean that AI can replace the judges. My point is that Hong Kong will be much more competitive in the international market of legal services if we make good use of AI, IoT and other technologies, and we can overtake others at the bend and come ahead in the race.

Deputy President, while Hong Kong’s common law system provides a solid foundation for our core competitiveness, the adoption of courtroom technology is also an indispensable part of our future judicial development. The Courts (Remote Hearing) Bill is not only part of our tangible effort to keep in pace with the times, but also our important message to the world on Hong Kong’s judicial excellence and a key step to fulfil the mission entrusted to Hong Kong by our country.

Deputy President, with these remarks, I support the Bill.

MS MAGGIE CHAN (in Cantonese): Deputy President, I speak in support of the passage of the Courts (Remote Hearing) Bill (“the Bill”), which provides a clear legal basis for judges and judicial officers, as well as responds to the expectations of court users and the community, for greater use of technology in the Judiciary, so as to enhance judicial efficiency, consolidate judicial justice and strengthen Hong Kong’s position as an international centre for legal and dispute resolution services.

This is not the first time that the technology of remote hearing is used in civil proceedings. Since the Judiciary's promotion of remote hearing in 2020, it has been used in more than 2 000 civil cases so far. The sufficient experience accumulated in the use of remote hearing demonstrates its effectiveness in upholding judicial justice and enhancing judicial efficiency. In my opinion, the passage of the Bill will give further legal basis to and set out standards for remote hearing, as well as provide a clear legal framework for various levels of courts and tribunals. This is especially true for the Labour Tribunal, Small Claims Tribunal, etc., as workers in labour disputes often need to take leave to appear in court, which is a great burden to them, and the use of remote hearing will facilitate the participation of workers in the proceedings. Similarly, a clearly enforceable remote hearing is beneficial to all parties to cases of small monetary claims. This will facilitate members of the general public to seek justice quickly, efficiently, conveniently and economically, and save the time and money used for litigation.

I fully support the exclusions of remote hearing as stipulated in the Bill, including proceedings concerning national security, criminal trials and hearings before the Juvenile Court. Regarding general proceedings for criminal cases not involving a trial, such as bail applications and call-over hearings, allowing the use of remote hearing in such cases can greatly enhance the judicial efficiency of the court and ensure the coexistence of judicial justice and efficiency. Another example is the frequent use of telephone hearings in some civil proceedings at present, such as for handling extension of time summons and three-minute hearings, and the operation has been rather smooth so far. The Bill, if passed, will also greatly expand the applicability and standardization of remote hearing in civil proceedings.

I also support clause 9 of the Bill, i.e. the factors to be considered by a court in handling remote hearings, which I think are appropriate, detailed and complete at this stage. With regard to civil and criminal case management, be it remote or physical hearing, prior to the passage of the Bill, judges have the discretion in case management at present, and this will remain unchanged. However, as the circumstances of each case are different, the practice directions issued by the Judiciary after the passage of the Bill and the directions given by judges at case management meetings will play a very important role in safeguarding the enforceability of the Bill and maintaining judicial justice. I also hope that the Judiciary will actively communicate with the legal profession and conduct timely reviews to enhance the ease of operation of remote hearings, so that members of the general public can have a clearer understanding of the relevant proceedings. I also suggest studying the need for updates to the Guide to Judicial Conduct so that

there will be more transparency in the timing of judges exercising their discretion when making decisions on remote hearings, and that judicial discretion will be fair and just and members of the general public would understand the decisions more easily.

In respect of technical support, I hope that the Judiciary will provide adequate training and assistance to the legal profession and the public, especially unrepresented litigants, such as operating hotlines, email enquiries and application guidelines, so as to ensure the effective and convenient implementation of remote hearing. Given the rapid advancement of technology, I suggest that the Government should review from time to time whether the application of remote hearing as well as the security, storage and application of information and data are up-to-date. It should also actively seek cooperation and exchanges with the Mainland courts to jointly promote the use of high-end technology in remote hearings for cross-boundary cases.

Lastly, I hope that the Government will step up publicity of remote hearing to various sectors of the community, attach importance to promoting the use of remote hearing to court users, and consider expanding its use to various District Offices, the Labour Department, District Councils, places of detention and prisons (except for those in Lai Chi Kok, Tai Lam and Stanley, where it is already available). Suitable rooms and facilities may also be made available at the courts, law firms as well as the Government's Economic and Trade Offices outside Hong Kong to facilitate the conducting of remote hearings at Hong Kong courts.

Thank you, Deputy President. I so submit.

MS YUNG HOI-YAN (in Cantonese): Deputy President, I speak in support of the Courts (Remote Hearing) Bill ("the Bill"). The Bill not only represents a milestone in the modernization of the administration of justice, but also addresses the community's urgent needs for judicial efficiency. At the same time, through the empowerment of technology, transparency in the administration of justice will be further enhanced and public confidence in the rule of law will be strengthened.

Amid the dual challenges of the pandemic and digital transformation faced by the world over the past few years, it is necessary for the Judiciary to innovate in order to adapt to the new normal. Since 2020, pilot remote hearings have been conducted for civil proceedings at various levels of courts in Hong Kong, with over 2 000 successful cases. Remote hearing is proven to have significantly enhanced

judicial efficiency, such as shortening the travelling time of lawyers to and from the courts, speeding up the conduct of short hearings, and even allowing overseas witnesses to participate in the proceedings without having to come to Hong Kong in person. Such experience has helped laid a solid foundation for the Bill. The introduction of the Bill fills an existing legal gap by providing a uniform and clear legal framework for all courts and tribunals to enable judges to make flexible use of technology under the dual requirements of open justice and fair hearing, while striking a balance between efficiency and justice.

The crux of the Bill lies in the establishment of a comprehensive regime for remote hearing. It provides that apart from the trial proper of criminal trials and cases concerning national security, various levels of courts may, depending on the nature of the cases, order civil proceedings or case management procedures to be conducted remotely or allow witnesses to give evidence by video conferencing. This will not only greatly enhance the efficiency of handling cases, but also reduce legal disputes through standardization. For this purpose, the Judiciary will develop its own remote hearing system, combining encryption technology and multiple identity verification (e.g. requiring participants to produce proof of identity) to ensure procedural security. The system will also enable public access to public hearings through designated links to maintain judicial transparency. Judges are required to decide whether to adopt remote hearing based on the factors set out in clause 9 of the Bill (including credibility of evidence and capability of participants). They may vary or revoke such order any time to ensure that the use of technology will not prejudice the administration of justice.

During the course of the Bills Committee's scrutiny, members have attached great importance to balancing technological efficiency and the protection of defendants' rights. Under the Bill, the trial proper of a criminal trial is expressly listed among "excluded proceedings", where all defendants are required to appear before the court in person. As a criminal trial will have direct bearings on the defendant's liberty, the judge has to observe in person the reaction of the defendant, the demeanour of the witnesses as well as their evidence to ensure that the trial is conducted in a rigorous manner. Members have expressed the view that such exemption could safeguard the bottom line of judicial impartiality. Even though remote hearing is excluded for criminal trials, the Bill would still allow a judge to order a witness (other than a vulnerable witness) to give evidence remotely under special circumstances. If a witness is unable to appear before the court to give evidence in person due to health issues or being overseas, the court may order the witness to give evidence by video conferencing.

In relation to the relevant amendments in Part 8 of the Bill, members have expressed concern about the amendments made to section 83U of the Criminal Procedure Ordinance (Cap. 221) and section 36 of the Hong Kong Court of Final Appeal Ordinance (Cap. 484) by clauses 41 and 42 of the Bill in relation to a defendant's right to be present at the hearing of an application for leave to appeal and an appeal. I am pleased to note that the Judiciary has taken into account members' concern as to whether the right of a defendant, in particular an unrepresented defendant, to be present at appeal-related hearings will be affected. In this connection, the Government has proposed amendments to keep the existing provisions of section 83U of Cap. 221 and section 36 of Cap. 484 intact, and to add new provisions in the two ordinances to empower the court to dispose of an application for leave to appeal on paper when the court considers it appropriate, in addition to making a related amendment and specifying arrangements. We are pleased to note that with the Government's amendments in this regard, a defendant's right to appear before the court to give evidence or make representations will not be affected.

The Bill also provides for penalties to uphold the solemnity of judicial proceedings. Any person who records or publishes court proceedings without authorization is liable on conviction to a maximum penalty of five years' imprisonment and a fine of HK\$100,000. This will help prevent court proceedings from being maliciously undermined. Another amendment explicitly prohibits the unauthorized recording or publication of any image in court premises. Drawing this red line in law will safeguard the integrity of court proceedings and strengthen public trust in the judicial system.

Through the integration of technology, the court is able to flexibly deploy its resources, shorten the waiting time for cases, and reduce the work pressure of judges as well as the legal profession. At the same time, open and transparent remote procedures will facilitate public understanding and their access to judicial operations.

Therefore, I support the Bill, which I hope will enable Hong Kong's judicial system to continue to lead the world in the digital age and become a model of fairness, transparency and efficiency.

Deputy President, I so submit.

MR DENNIS LEUNG (in Cantonese): Deputy President, the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions (“FTU”) has been upholding the concept of “striving for workers’ rights and interests as well as social justice” in this Council. Today, on behalf of FTU, I express unequivocal support for the legislative exercise relating to the Courts (Remote Hearing) Bill (“the Bill”). We firmly believe that the Bill, while representing an important reform of the judicial system for the progress of our society, is also a key initiative to protect the grass roots’ right to judicial participation and alleviate their burden of litigation.

I will now elaborate on the core reasons for supporting the Bill from the standpoint of FTU and address some of the concerns of the community.

To wage earners in general, participating in judicial proceedings often means sacrificing their working hours, incurring extra expenses or even sustaining loss of income. For example, a grass-roots worker earning just a few hundred dollars a day has to travel across districts to appear before the court. In addition to travelling and other expenses, his employer’s appraisal of him may also be affected due to the frequent taking of leave. Apart from earning less, he may lose his job as well. Therefore, the implementation of remote hearing would allow the parties concerned to participate in litigation through network technology, greatly reducing the time and cost of travelling to and from the court and enabling closer public access to judicial procedures.

FTU particularly cares about the needs of the underprivileged, such as the chronically ill, the disabled, women who need to take care of their families, or employees who have difficulty in taking leave due to the nature of their work. In the past, they might have to put aside their legal rights due to practical difficulties. Nowadays, remote hearing provides them with a more equal access to justice to realize the core value of “justice for the people”.

There are often backlog cases arising from the current judicial procedures as a result of the long waiting time for court hearings, as well as occasional rescheduling, geographical constraints, etc. As we all know, the number of court cases in Hong Kong has been on the increase, which undermines the rights and interests of the parties concerned. Remote hearing can break through the spatial limitation and speed up the handling of cases, especially for cases with clear evidence and fewer disputes (e.g. labour disputes and small claims). The corresponding increase in judicial efficiency would not only reduce the burden on the courts, but also enable quicker access to justice by the public to avoid delayed justice.

In addition, remote hearing can ensure that judicial procedures are not disrupted and social stability is maintained in the event of public emergencies (e.g. the COVID-19 epidemic in 2020). Over the past three years, there has been suspension of court operations in Hong Kong due to the epidemic, and many labour-related cases have been adjourned, adding to the financial and psychological pressure of the parties concerned. The regularization of remote hearing will provide the judicial system with the flexibility to respond to emergencies and guard the rights and interests of the public against the impact of sudden crises.

FTU has also noted the concerns in the community about the technical stability, privacy protection and procedural fairness in relation to remote hearing. In this regard, we consider that adequate measures have already been proposed under the Bill to address those concerns, including the following four aspects. First, under the principle of voluntary participation, the parties concerned can choose whether or not to adopt the remote format. As such, their litigation rights will not be undermined. Second, with the mechanism of technical support in place, the court will provide equipment and operating guidelines to ensure equal participation by people not familiar with technology. Third, with the protection of data security, encrypted transmission technology will be adopted to strictly regulate the use of video and audio recording to prevent data leakage. Fourth, given a judge's discretionary power, if a case involves significant public interest or review of complicated evidence, the judge is empowered to require a physical hearing.

FTU suggests that the Government should step up public education concurrently through community talks, Announcements in the Public Interest, etc., to help the public understand the operational procedures and legal effects of remote hearing and eliminate unnecessary misunderstanding.

There are views that remote hearing may affect the solemnity of the court or call into question the truthfulness of witness statements. In this regard, we must emphasize that judicial justice is based on the examination of evidence and the applicability of the law, rather than the form of participation. Remote hearing has already been widely adopted in many common law jurisdictions, including the United Kingdom and Singapore, and is proven not to have affected the quality of judgments.

On the other hand, it is also clearly stipulated in the Bill that judges have the right to flexibly decide whether or not to adopt remote procedures in accordance with the nature of the case, aspirations of the parties concerned as well as the

technical conditions. Such people-oriented setup, which respects the judicial tradition and embraces technological innovation, is indeed a pragmatic initiative for making steady progress.

Deputy President, FTU is deeply convinced that the Bill is an important milestone in Hong Kong's judicial system. It not only addresses the aspirations of the digital age, but also embodies deep care for the plight of the grass roots, allowing every worker and member of the general public to efficiently exercise their legal rights at lower thresholds.

FTU urges the Government to work on three aspects during the stage of implementation. First, the stability of the technical system should be monitored to ensure that the underprivileged groups will not be restricted by the digital divide. Second, the implementation progress should be regularly reviewed, and operational guidelines should be optimized according to the actual needs. Third, cooperation with labour groups should be strengthened to provide tailor-made support services for the common cases of work-related injury claims, labour disputes, etc.

Judicial reform always seeks to improve access to justice for the progress of the community. Our promotion of remote hearing today is aimed at building a more inclusive, efficient and people-oriented judicial system for Hong Kong.

Deputy President, I so submit.

MR ROCK CHEN (in Cantonese): Deputy President, all people are equal before the law, whether they are far or near. I think we still remember the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic in 2020, when many of the public activities were forced to stop, including court hearings, as about 18% of court cases could not be handled as scheduled. If a similar pandemic reoccurs in the future, will there be a repeat of court suspension like the one five years ago? Therefore, I speak in support of the Government's Courts (Remote Hearing) Bill, which allows the Judiciary to designate certain proceedings to be heard remotely, so that if legal practitioners, parties to litigation and witnesses are unable to appear before the court in person due to an epidemic or an unforeseen event in the future, they will still be able to attend hearings by means of technology such as live video streaming. I have the following views and suggestions.

Since the epidemic in 2020, the Judiciary has introduced video-conferencing facilities and telephones for remote hearing. According to statistics, between 2020 and 2023, the total number of remote hearing cases exceeded 2 000, with most of them being civil cases. Criminal cases cannot be heard remotely owing to existing legal impediments. Civil cases are allowed to be heard remotely, but there are no clear implementation details. Therefore, the current amendments to the relevant legislation will provide a clear legal basis for remote hearing.

Firstly, remote hearing can alleviate the resource constraints of the court and shorten the waiting time for cases. According to the data submitted by the Judiciary to this Council, about 527 000 cases were handled by the courts in 2023, 9% more than in 2022, and the pressure on waiting time has become increasingly acute. Therefore, I believe that the introduction of remote hearing will allow eligible litigants to choose to participate in hearings at suitable remote locations without the need to come to the court in person. Even if they are outside a jurisdiction, they can still participate in court hearings smoothly. This not only alleviates the resource constraints of the court, but is also expected to significantly shorten the waiting time for cases.

With reference to the Mainland's experience, remote hearing has long been an important tool for enhancing judicial efficiency. Remote court hearing has been put on trial in the Mainland since around 2015 through the use of video technology to enable remote participation by judges, lawyers and the parties concerned. Since then, it is promoted across the board progressively. According to the figures of the Internet Courts in the Mainland, an average court trial lasts only 29 minutes, about three-quarters less than that of conventional offline litigation.

However, the implementation of remote hearing requires the support of well-established facilities. The authorities should put in sufficient resources to secure high-speed and stable webcasting facilities to avoid any impact on the progress and quality of hearings arising from network disconnection or delay. On the other hand, it is necessary to ensure that the facilities are adequately sound-proof to prevent the hearings from being overheard by others. At the same time, staff should be arranged to offer protection and assistance in respect of personal security to avoid situations where people are barred from speaking freely as a result of harassment. Furthermore, regular maintenance and upgrading of equipment is required to ensure network stability as well as satisfactory audio and video quality, such that all parties can accurately convey and receive information to and from each other.

In addition, when it comes to remote hearing, the solemnity and detail of court procedures need to be taken into account. In a physical hearing where solemnity prevails, judges and lawyers are required to observe dress codes, such as the wearing of gowns by lawyers; there are court ushers and judicial staff to maintain order; and people appearing before the court are required to dress appropriately, and they should not eat, drink or engage in behaviour unrelated to the hearing, otherwise they will be asked to leave the court. However, in remote hearings, as participants are situated in different locations and the atmosphere is not as solemn as in a physical court, they may find it difficult to stay focused or comply with those rules. More importantly, judges used to meet witnesses face-to-face to observe their subtle facial expressions, body language and pauses in speech before making any judgment. In a remote setting, there may be problems of video quality compression, limitation of camera angles as well as occasional split-second network delays, which may all undermine the judges' mind-reading and affect the fairness of their judgment.

Therefore, clear rules on remote hearing should be formulated (such as promulgating a code of conduct to regulate participants' dress codes and behaviour, as well as standards of live broadcasting equipment, room environment and safety conditions) for extensive publication on the Judiciary's website and social media platforms. This would reduce the risk of participants breaching the rules inadvertently due to unfamiliarity with them.

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

MR BENSON LUK (in Cantonese): Deputy President, I speak in support of the Courts (Remote Hearing) Bill ("the Bill"). As a member of the Bills Committee, I have participated in the scrutiny of the Bill.

The Bill provides a legal basis for judges and judicial officers to order remote hearings at various levels of courts and tribunals where appropriate, having regard to all relevant factors as well as the dual requirements of open justice and fair hearing. This will reduce the time and cost of travelling to and from the court for the parties involved, witnesses and lawyers, especially for those living in remote areas or having mobility problems. In addition, on extraordinary occasions, such as an epidemic, the court can continue to operate as usual. Therefore, both the Business and Professionals Alliance for Hong Kong and I support the Bill.

As for the significance of the Bill to the general public, some people who have been involved in lawsuits have particularly expressed to me their expectation of enhanced court efficiency arising from the passage of the Bill, so that their cases can be dealt with as soon as possible. Therefore, during the scrutiny of the Bill, I have also expressed the relevant concerns. For example, how will the efficiency of the courts as well as the Judiciary as a whole be enhanced after the passage of the Bill? How much can the processing of pending cases be accelerated? Will there be any savings in litigation-related lawyer fees? Despite the authorities' claim that there are no estimates or specific targets in this regard, they recognize that there will certainly be enhancement to work efficiency. For example, lawyers will no longer have to travel to the courtrooms at court buildings for three-minute hearings, thus saving the time and money for travelling or even the lawyers' fees.

In addition, I have also raised my concerns about the proceedings conducted remotely, including how to ensure that witnesses are free of outside interference when giving evidence. In response, the authorities have pointed out that under clause 9(j) of the Bill, judges will consider measures to be taken to ensure that evidence is given freely without interference, such as setting two cameras, one facing the witness and the other behind him to capture the relevant computer screen or to show whether there are other people in the room engaging in irrelevant behaviour. Depending on the circumstances of individual cases, judges may also require witnesses to return to the court for hearings at any time. When any party to litigation sees something wrong, he can also make such a request to the judge, who would then exercise his power of case management and make appropriate assessment from different perspectives. I believe that the relevant arrangements can address public concern in this regard.

Of course, as many Honourable colleagues have mentioned, will AI-enabled face-swapping tamper with the conduct of remote hearings? As a matter of fact, AI technology is advancing by leaps and bounds. If the courts seek to arrange for remote hearing or pursue digital upgrading, the relevant regulations must catch up with the technology advancement in order to continue to safeguard the fairness and impartiality of SAR courts, so that the courts and Hong Kong's judicial system will remain steadfast in their pursuit of fairness and impartiality in tandem with the application of digital technology.

Therefore, I hope that the Bill marks only the first step in promoting judicial reform. In the future, the courts can develop along the direction of technology and digitalization so as to speed up the processing of cases under the premise of fairness and impartiality, thereby alleviating the backlog of court cases.

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

MR HOLDEN CHOW (in Cantonese): Deputy President, I speak in support of the Courts (Remote Hearing) Bill (“the Bill”). First of all, with regard to the Bill, I would like to thank the authorities for spending a lot of time in the meetings with us and adopting a number of suggestions made by members. I will elaborate on this later on.

First of all, regarding the arrangement of remote hearing, as mentioned by a number of Honourable colleagues just now, we have stressed in the course of the Bills Committee’s deliberations that such an arrangement is highly appropriate to civil trials, but we are adamant that caution is needed in respect of criminal cases. Indeed, if remote hearing is to be conducted for criminal trials, it might affect the legitimate rights of the defendant in the trial. In my view, this matter needs to be handled with great care.

I am also grateful to the authorities for listening to the views of our members throughout the scrutiny of the Bill. Therefore, the arrangement of remote hearing is basically not applicable to criminal trials. However, for simple procedures, such as three-minute hearings and mention hearings, such an arrangement can still be applied as the procedures concerned do not involve the trial of cases as a whole. I think we need to explain this point clearly.

In addition, we have particularly mentioned in the Bills Committee’s deliberations that for places where remote hearing is to be conducted in the future, they should be in strict compliance with the directions given by the court, including the requirement that participants are free from any harassment there. As I recall, one of the best practices mentioned by Honourable colleagues in the Bills Committee is that the venue for remote hearing outside Hong Kong should preferably be provided by a third party (such as law firms), and that the conditions required by the court must be met while ensuring that participants will not be disturbed or interfered by anyone. This is an important requirement, and one that has been clearly reflected in the overall provisions of the Bill.

Deputy President, I am particularly grateful to the Government for being receptive to good advice. As we all know, section 83R of Cap. 221 originally stipulates that insofar as general applications for appeal are concerned, the applicant may attend the hearing unless under certain special circumstances. However, the original provisions of the Bill have made changes to the drafting of section 83R. At the Bills Committee, a number of Honourable colleagues and I have raised the point that such changes may mislead some members of the general public into thinking that the applicant's right to attend the hearing of an application for leave to appeal is affected. I need to stress that this is an issue of perception.

To avoid any misunderstanding or misconception in this regard, different Honourable colleagues have expressed their views and suggested that the Administration should reconsider and amend the relevant drafting. The amendment currently proposed retains the original provisions of section 83R and adds a section 83RA to make it clear that the relevant decision can be processed in writing. I believe that this can address the concerns of the majority of people. I would also like to thank the Government for listening to the views expressed by different members in this regard and acting accordingly to propose the relevant amendments so as to avoid any misunderstanding or misconception on the part of members of the general public that the aforesaid right to attend hearings will be affected. This is very important from my point of view.

Deputy President, with these remarks, I support the Courts (Remote Hearing) Bill.

DR SO CHEUNG-WING (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President. I speak in support of the Courts (Remote Hearing) Bill ("the Bill").

Remote hearing is a global trend that facilitates the participation of all parties involved in relevant proceedings when they are physically far away or even outside the jurisdiction. It also saves the time and cost of the parties concerned, the legal profession and witnesses to achieve efficiency in proceedings, while ensuring the normal functioning of the courts in the event of any incident that may hinder the operation of the community as a whole, such as a large-scale infectious disease.

In addition, given the community's increasing demand for court services, the adoption of technology at the courts is the best way to enhance efficiency. Remote hearing is one of the key tools for diverting physical hearings in a more

flexible manner. Since the introduction of remote hearing in 2020, Hong Kong courts have heard more than 2 000 cases. The accumulation of sufficient experience has laid a valuable foundation for today's legislative exercise.

However, remote hearing is a new judicial mode, and the key of its success lies in whether it can administer justice in accordance with the law under the same spirit of the rule of law as characterized by physical courts, so as to convince the public that there is no difference between remote and physical hearings in ensuring the sanctity of the law. The current legislative exercise is of great significance, as the relevant provisions have already covered the various details of remote hearing, including its scope of application, the restrictions on its use, etc. Remote hearing is not applicable to national security proceedings, criminal trials, etc., which is a reasonable judicial arrangement in accordance with the nature and importance of individual cases.

Deputy President, while I express my support for the Bill today, I would like to raise the following suggestions for consideration by the authorities.

First of all, as remote hearing relies on the means of technology, the authorities must attach importance to corresponding online security issues. Although the Government will develop its own remote hearing system and enhance technological security, no one can rule out the possibility of fraudulent hearings given the fact that artificial images with a high degree of authenticity can now be created via AI deepfake technology. According to the Government, two cameras will be used in remote hearing, one facing the witness and the other behind him, in order to fully capture the computer screen and related scenes, thereby curbing forgery. However, AI is developing by leaps and bounds. If there is a way to create fake scenes in the future that can deceive everyone to an extent that is difficult for people to differentiate remotely, preventive measures should be put in place in the long run. The most effective way is to develop an identity authentication model that employs biometric identification technology, etc. Currently, face recognition and other authentication initiatives are adopted in the Mainland's online litigation, and Hong Kong can make reference to them. We can also cooperate with the Mainland to look into more advanced initiatives on identity and evidence authentication in order to address the concern of forgeries in hearings. Instead of being deterred, we should leverage new AI outcomes continuously to plug the technological loopholes and optimize the efficiency and quality of remote hearing.

Secondly, it is recommended that a more sophisticated online mechanism that can assist the public in resolving legal disputes be developed by making reference to the successful experience of online litigation in the Mainland and around the world. While it is inappropriate to make a direct comparison between Hong Kong and the Mainland given the different legal systems adopted, online court services are just technical issues, and it is worthwhile to make reference to the “Intelligent Court” initiative implemented by the Mainland in recent years. For example, law was enacted in 2021 to promote online litigation. As a result, the platform for “Online Services of the People’s Courts” has been developed, which allows access throughout the country to provide a wide range of support services. Through online litigation, disputes among the public can be resolved quickly and conveniently. A healthy online court has basically been formed, and people are getting used to it. In contrast, remote hearing in Hong Kong is only an extension and a branch of the physical court. In the future, we should study and make reference to the practices in the Mainland, such that advanced technology can be used to provide the public with inexpensive, fast and convenient online litigation and arbitration services, while helping to divert litigations and disputes from physical courts as far as possible.

Finally, the novel judicial service of remote hearing will be the new mode for handling proceedings in the future. The Government should step up its efforts in education and publicity to promote public acceptance of its use. At the same time, more appropriate support services should be provided, such as the provision of more comprehensive facilities for those in need, e.g. separate rooms and venues. At present, three detention centres of the Correctional Services Department are provided with rooms for such a use by persons in custody, and there are seven rooms in the courts for use by persons in need. However, the support currently available is clearly insufficient for promoting remote hearing. It is suggested that a room for remote hearing be made available in each District Office for use by members of the general public upon application.

Deputy President, I so submit.

MR TANG KA-PIU (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President. Mr Dennis LEUNG, my fellow Member from the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions (“FTU”) who has taken part in the work of the Bills Committee, has already covered our major views on the Courts (Remote Hearing) Bill (“the Bill”). I rise to speak mainly to put forward a proposal. After the passage of the Bill, we hope

that priority can be given to taking forward or developing cross-boundary remote hearing. Why do I make such a proposal? In the past, when we dealt with cases involving foreign workers—of course they came to Hong Kong legally to work in residential care homes for the elderly, etc.—we found that there were unscrupulous employers who would take away their ATM cards. On pay day, such employers would first transfer the whole sum of wage to the employees' bank accounts, looking as if there was no wage arrears. But later, they would withdraw a few thousand dollars from the same account.

Very often, these employers are just taking chances that the foreign workers concerned will not file any complaints upon completion of their employment contracts. In other cases, if the workers concerned do file a complaint, they will be dismissed right away. The unscrupulous employers are still taking chances that such employees will not pursue the matter in Hong Kong. As we can see, the SAR Government has made great efforts to step up supervision to ensure that foreign workers are not exploited. If special treatment can be made in respect of cross-boundary hearing, foreign workers will be confident that they will not be exploited. Instead, they may even warn their employers not to take advantage of their situation and exploit them because legal channels are available for them to pursue the matter and seek remedies ultimately.

Despite the host of legal and technical issues involved in beefing up the proposal, FTU is very happy to offer assistance as we have set up six consultation services centres in the Mainland. Upon receipt of a case, our staff can accompany the person involved to participate in remote hearing at our centre in Huizhou to ensure the authenticity of the proceedings. It is also not difficult to arrange the use of two cameras in the proceedings as mentioned just now. Therefore, I hope that after the passage of the Bill, the SAR Government can give priority to implementing cross-boundary remote hearing in the area I have just mentioned, so as to protect all workers and uphold Hong Kong's reputation as a city of the rule of law.

I so submit.

DR HOEY SIMON LEE (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President. I speak in support of the Bill.

As a matter of fact, remote hearing has already been adopted in many jurisdictions around the world. New technical challenges will certainly arise during the process. I am pleased that the Government has given adequate consideration to various perceived challenges and questions raised by Members, responded to them and made preparations in the legislative process. Therefore, this legislation is not only a reform in judicial proceedings, but also a serious technical undertaking in itself, so to speak.

Regarding the major technical challenges in ensuring the fairness, security and reliability of remote hearings, the Bills Committee has held discussions on various factors and considerations which mainly cover the three aspects of feasibility, data security and operational standards.

Firstly, in terms of technical feasibility, is the technology mature? Can remote hearing really replace traditional court hearing?

While video conferencing technology nowadays can support high-definition video and audio streaming, the requirements of judicial proceedings should be much higher than those of ordinary meetings. For example, when it comes to technical delays, in the event of asynchronization of questions and answers due to unstable network, will the accuracy of witnesses' testimonies be affected? In terms of identity verification, how do we ensure that the person in front of the camera is actually the witness or the defendant?

These questions have been taken into consideration during the legislative process. For example, the Judiciary Administrator may issue instructions on the technical details and standards of a remote medium; hardware, software and equipment needed; other technical requirements for participating in a remote hearing; the details of contingency measures, and so on.

Secondly, with regard to data security, it is well known that confidentiality is particularly important in judicial proceedings, and hearings touch upon a large amount of sensitive information. The legislation provides for end-to-end encryption, so as to prevent tapping or tampering with the content by third parties. All hearings will be encrypted and accessible only by the court. Measures against hacking are also included. Under the overall provisions combining the new and existing legislation, anyone who hacks into the court's video system, impersonates a speaker, or makes any unauthorized recording or screenshot will be held criminally liable.

Thirdly, how do we ensure that the rules for remote hearing and traditional court hearing are consistent so as to safeguard procedural justice? The operational standards of remote hearing must be very clear so that justice is not compromised due to technical issues. For example, individuals participating in remote hearings are required to do so in a secure and clearly visible environment during the hearing process. If a suitable venue is not available, the Judiciary can also provide a venue. Of course, the judge may also require witnesses to show on camera that they are in an undisturbed environment, or to conduct the hearing at a law firm's office, etc.

Apart from the technical issues summarized above that have raised more concern during the legislative process, I find that the legislation is able to strike a better balance between the following two aspects. Firstly, it protects the parties' right to choose. Under the existing legislation, the court may, on its own motion or on application by any party to a litigation, make an order for the proceeding to be conducted through a remote medium. The court must take into account various factors before making the decision. Secondly, there have been concerns that participating in remote hearing from home may undermine judicial solemnity, and that witnesses may appear before the camera casually-dressed or with noisy backgrounds, and so on. All these situations would be regulated within the legislation, integrating the existing law and administrative instructions.

Apart from the benefits of enhancing judicial efficiency, lowering litigation costs and being able to cope with unforeseen circumstances more effectively, remote hearing can also cover more scenarios. For example, as mentioned by some Members just now, an employee may be out of town and thus unable to return to Hong Kong shortly. In this case, a remote hearing order will allow more possibilities for instituting litigations aiming at labour protection. Therefore, with such a balance, I think it is a positive approach to adopt technology in judicial proceedings.

I so submit.

DR JUNIUS HO (in Cantonese): Deputy President, I support the Courts (Remote Hearing) Bill ("the Bill"), but there is one point that I would like to make. Although I support the Bill, there is an issue that requires special consideration. The Bills Committee may have taken that into account previously, but I did not join the Bills Committee.

I would like to point out that the main purpose of the remote hearing order is to give individuals who are unable to appear in court in person due to physical injuries or other reasons an opportunity to testify in court in a fair and just manner through remote hearings. According to clause 9 of the Bill, factors to be considered essentially include items set out in paragraphs (a) to (o), while paragraph (p) refers to “any other relevant considerations”. In other words, if someone applies to testify via remote hearing instead of appearing in court in person, the court will have to consider the factors set out in paragraphs (a) to (o), as well as other relevant factors as provided in paragraph (p).

Why do I raise this point? I notice that clause 5 of the Bill stipulates that remote hearing does not apply to legal proceedings involving national security. Deputy President, this is a very good provision, but I think there is still a shortcoming. For example, if a case does not involve national security, but a party to the trial is wanted for committing an offence under the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance, and that person applies for remote hearing claiming that he is in Canada and unable to return to Hong Kong. How should the case be handled, given that it involves only civil proceedings, it is not a national security case, and the person concerned is not represented by a lawyer but wishes to appear in court in person?

The factors to be considered under clause 9 of the Bill, including items set out in paragraphs (a) to (o), do not take into account the above circumstances. However, Deputy President, I note that the court may, considering “the potential impact of the order on the assessment of the credibility of witnesses and the reliability of the evidence presented”, refuse remote hearings. This is the only remedy that I can find to prevent the abuse of process for anyone appearing in court must establish that he is being truthful, and must not commit perjury, or else he will be subject to sanctions by the court. He must face the consequences as perjury is a criminal offence punishable by imprisonment.

According to paragraph (k) ... When the court considers giving permission to remote hearing in a civil case involving fugitives, how should the situation be handled after the passage of the Bill if these people make an application for remote hearing since they choose not to return to Hong Kong for trial because they would be arrested upon arrival? What should be done in remedy under this situation? The only remedy that I can find now is clause 9(k) which stipulates that the court must consider “the potential impact of the order on the assessment of the credibility of witnesses and the reliability of the evidence presented”. This is the only remedy that I can find, but the legal provisions are not written very clearly.

As the Bill resumes Second Reading and Third Reading today, I wish to be made known here that although I accept and support the passage of the Bill, I hope the court will bear in mind that special consideration must be given to whether the persons mentioned just now are necessarily eligible to apply for remote hearing. The court must take into account their fugitive status, credibility and impact of the offences for which they are wanted on society.

I so submit. Thank you.

MR PAUL TSE (in Cantonese): Deputy President, like my Honourable colleagues, I would like to first thank the judicial branch for further promoting the development of our judicial proceedings to make them more flexible and more up-to-date and to provide more options. Of course, this legislative proposal seeks to be as facilitating as possible, that is, to provide more options, particularly in terms of contingency measures. For example, even the Legislative Council had passed certain ad hoc motions to enable us to conduct meetings remotely during the pandemic. In this regard, if we have the opportunity to study the relevant procedures and feasibility in greater detail, we will be able to build up a more comprehensive and standardized platform in the event that we need to use these procedures in the future. Therefore, I fully support and welcome this proposal.

It is most important for this legislative proposal to strike a balance between two aspects, namely fairness and efficiency. Of course, efficiency is part of fairness per se. As we all know, justice delayed is justice denied. This is a logic familiar to everyone. Currently, the waiting time for hearings in both criminal and civil cases is indeed very long. It even feels like it is getting longer and longer. This is very unfortunate, especially for more serious cases involving national security that do not allow for bail or allow for bail only under extremely difficult circumstances. For those who are held in jail before trial, this is a very unfair procedure that seriously violates the long-standing procedural justice principle under the common law. This is an objective fact that we have to face.

Therefore, any way to shorten the waiting time is welcome, whether in criminal cases or even for some very simple civil cases, such as the so-called three-minute hearings, i.e. hearings in chambers. This is especially true for new lawyers who often waste a lot of time on procedures before the Master. The procedures are very simple, such as reading out the case name, confirming the presence of lawyers from both sides, checking for objections, extension requests or

documents filed, etc. Only a few words are said in the process which may take just a few minutes, but for that we have to travel to the court and wait before the hearing, which is totally unnecessary. This is one of the examples.

In another example, some cases are undisputed and heard in court purely for procedures' sake. This is especially common in civil cases. It is a waste of time and money to have to travel to court for hearing if the case is undisputed. Under these circumstances, I think the legislative proposal will be helpful to the overall procedures.

Take the situation mentioned by Mr TANG Ka-piu just now as another example. Some cases involve overseas witnesses, such as foreign workers, or in the case of the tourism sector which I used to represent, there are cases of theft or other criminal cases involving tourists from time to time. As they are unwilling to return to Hong Kong to testify, we are forced to drop the prosecution, which is indeed a great pity. For these cases, we will have the option of remote hearing in the future.

Certain technical issues, such as reliability, digital security and controllability as mentioned by Dr Hoey Simon LEE are all procedural issues that I need not dwell on because we have already put forward a lot of views in this regard during the scrutiny of the Bill. I am grateful to the authorities concerned for accepting our request to move a number of amendments.

However, I would like to add a couple of points. Firstly, I find the classification of civil, criminal and national security cases too rigid. Even in criminal or national security cases, there are matters that may not need to be dealt with in-person. For instance, in the case of application for bail, very often only the legal representative is there to present the grounds. Is it necessary for the party to be present? It is actually not necessarily. We are accustomed to the common law judicial proceedings. The first hearing in criminal cases tends to be quite tense because the defendant must plead guilty or not guilty. This involves procedural justice that gives the party concerned an opportunity to go through arraignment in court, i.e. plead guilty or not guilty in court and then apply for bail.

There used to be complaints from time to time that defendants had been coerced or even physically assaulted during investigation or statement-taking by the Police. So, one of the purposes of in-court hearing might be for the defendant to complain to the judge about the assault and ask the judge to issue an order of

protection or make special arrangements. However, these situations are almost non-existent under Hong Kong's system nowadays. Therefore, is it really necessary for the party or defendant to appear in court in person?

This is also true for national security cases. If we look at past cases, national security cases have to be heard in court every so often, and a lot of people are deployed every time, including armed police officers and Armoured Sabertooth vehicles. Even the entire street has to be blocked off in order to escort the defendants to court, which is actually unnecessary. Some cases do not involve any significant issues, but so many correctional officers, police officers, Special Duties Unit officers and security personnel have to be deployed every time just to complete a procedural hearing, which does not necessarily have to be held in-court. Of course, I understand that there are still a lot of concerns regarding this issue because matters have yet to be properly categorized. But looking ahead, even for national security cases, remote hearing can be considered if the procedure per se does not involve national security issue. This is the first point.

Secondly, remote hearing can sometimes be an option for civil cases, but it is not suitable for certain proceedings. Why? Honourable colleagues who have participated in video conferencing would know that attending a video conference feels completely different from attending a board meeting or a general meeting in person. In a physical meeting, people gather together. If someone says something funny, people will laugh; if someone says something silly, people may boo. Contrarily, in a remote hearing, participants can only look at the camera, and many details cannot be seen.

One of the crucial stages during a trial is observation of reactions, i.e. the testimony-taking stage, which is extremely important in both civil and criminal cases. One should not assume that civil cases do not involve this procedure. As a matter of fact, whether a witness is being truthful—we as barristers or colleagues who have trial experience will know better—even for civil cases, when it comes to the truthfulness of a witness's testimony, his interaction with the lawyers, barristers and the judge, as well as the body language, often matter more than the witness's speech. For example, the pauses in a witness's speech, his immediate reactions, the display of sadness or anger, reluctance to answer questions or hesitations can all help the judge assess the truthfulness of the witness and the credibility of the testimony.

These proceedings may not necessarily be conducted via remotely hearing. Personally, I believe that we should make the decision based on the nature of the case, rather than applying a rigid one-size-fits-all categorization of criminal, civil or national security cases.

On the contrary, in some case, such as application for bail, mention hearing or adjournment proceeding, physical presence is not always necessary even in criminal or national security cases, and remote approach can be considered.

Deputy President, I would like to spend the little time left to say a few words. I support the authorities' efforts to promote the streamlining, advancement and digitalization of judicial proceedings on all fronts as soon as possible. There are a number of areas that indeed need advancement, although they may not be entirely relevant to today's discussion, so please allow me to mention them briefly. These include e-filing that we are currently implementing, which is a right direction and being executed quite well.

The second aspect is about transcripts. We can actually use AI or other new programmes to record testimonies. The Judiciary and judges are already equipped with relevant equipment, but there is yet sharing with barristers and the legal profession. So, I hope that it can be taken forward as soon as possible, so as to enhance efficiency and substantially reduce costs.

The third aspect is the deposition system which has been implemented for a long time in the United States, especially in civil cases. Under that system, the testimony-taking stage does not have to be conducted during court trial. Cross-examination of witnesses and testimony-taking can be completed at the same time through video recording, thereby significantly reducing the trial time.

We should work towards the aforesaid directions, in an effort to make our trial proceedings fair, efficient and expeditious.

Thank you, Deputy President.

DEPUTY PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): If no other Members wish to speak, I now call upon the Chief Secretary for Administration to reply. Then, the debate will come to a close.

CHIEF SECRETARY FOR ADMINISTRATION (in Cantonese): Deputy President, first of all, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to Prof Priscilla LEUNG, Chairman of the Bills Committee on Courts (Remote Hearing) Bill, Mr LAM San-keung, Deputy Chairman of the Bills Committee, other members of the Bills Committee, as well as staff of the Secretariat for their efforts in ensuring the smooth completion of the scrutiny of the Bill. I also thank the 15 Members who have spoken in support of the Bill and put forward their valuable views.

As I pointed out when I moved the Second Reading of the Bill, it seeks to provide a clear legal basis for judges and judicial officers to order remote hearings at various levels of courts and tribunals where appropriate, having regard to all relevant factors, as well as the dual principles of open justice and fair hearing.

(THE PRESIDENT resumed the Chair)

At present, most criminal proceedings cannot be conducted remotely due to legal constraints. In civil proceedings, although there is no restriction on remote hearings, there is no clear legal provisions on how matters should be dealt with remotely.

The Bill provides for the application for, and the operation and effect of, remote hearings, including the scope of application and exceptions. It also lays out clearly the factors to be considered by the court in varying or revoking the remote hearing order, and introduces some new offences and penalties.

Just now, some Members expressed grave concern about the cybersecurity of remote hearings. According to my understanding, the Judiciary attaches great importance to IT security and updates its guidelines, systems and equipment regularly by referring to relevant policies and guidelines issued by the Government. It also lays out clear specifications of the equipment for remote hearings, so as to ensure that remote hearings can be conducted in a safe, fair and just manner.

The Judiciary has conducted more than 2 100 remote hearings at various levels of courts since 2020 and the experience has been very positive. The Bill can be applied to civil proceedings immediately after passage. As for the applicable criminal proceedings, as mentioned by Mr TSE just now, the Judiciary

expects that remote hearings will start to be conducted in about six months after the passage of the Bill, so as to allow sufficient time for stakeholders to prepare for and gradually adapt to the mode of remote hearings. After the enactment of the Bill, the Judiciary is prepared to conduct remote hearings more often where circumstances allow, and accord priority to the remote hearing mode in simpler proceedings, such as three-minute hearings.

Just now, Members expressed agreement regarding legal proceedings that are not applicable under the Bill. In fact, after consulting major stakeholders, the Judiciary considers it inappropriate at this stage to conduct criminal trials and hearings before the Juvenile Court by remote means. Therefore, these legal proceedings are defined as excluded proceedings as set out in Schedule 1 of the Bill. The Chief Justice of the Court of Final Appeal may amend the Schedule by way of negative vetting.

In addition, considering the potential risk of national security proceedings conducted by remote hearing, clause 5 of the Bill stipulates clearly that no national security proceeding may be conducted through a remote medium under this Ordinance, under the law or otherwise. This answers the question raised by Mr Paul TSE earlier.

Some Members raised a point about the need to update the Guide to Judicial Conduct (“the Guide”) in the light of the Bill, so as to regulate judicial conduct during remote hearings. In fact, Part C of the existing Guide provides guidelines on the discharge of judicial duties. Although the Guide does not specifically mention the mode of hearing, all judges are required to conduct themselves in accordance with the standards and requirements as set out in the Guide in both physical and remote hearings. The Judiciary will review the Guide when necessary.

Some Members are also concerned about the drafting of the practice directions on remote hearings. Under clause 32 of the Bill, the Chief Justice may issue practice directions on a range of operational matters relating to remote hearings, including the designation for the purposes of the definition of remote medium, the procedures and practice to be followed by a court in conducting a remote hearing, and the priority to be given to remote hearings in a particular proceeding.

After the passage of the Bill, remote hearings will be generally applicable to civil proceedings and certain non-trial criminal proceedings. The Judiciary expects to start conducting remote hearings for the latter in about six months' time so as to allow time for stakeholders to get prepared. The Judiciary will issue practice directions by phases to specify the operational details for conducting remote hearings, including the application procedures, guidelines and related issues.

Some Members also expressed concern about publicity just now. After the Bill comes into effect, the Judiciary will step up promotion and publicity on the use of remote hearings. As I mentioned earlier, the Judiciary is prepared to adopt remote hearing more frequently in suitable proceedings where practicable.

President, I am very grateful to the Bills Committee for holding six meetings to thoroughly scrutinize the provisions of the Bill, thereby refining the Bill. I am pleased to note that the Bills Committee supports the prompt passage and enactment of the Bill, so as to enable the Judiciary to fully implement and regulate remote hearings as soon as possible.

With regard to individual provisions of the Bill, the Judiciary has made amendments after considering the views of the Bills Committee. The amendments to be proposed by me later at the Committee stage mainly touch upon three aspects, including the definition of "legal representative", the right of defendant to be present at hearings and textual amendments.

President, I urge Members to support the Bill and the amendments to be moved by me later at the Committee stage. Remote hearing is one of the major initiatives of the Judiciary to promote the use of technology to continuously enhance the efficiency of court operations. The Bill meets the expectations of court users and the community in recent years for the wider use of technology by the Judiciary. The Bill, upon passage, will not only enhance the efficiency of the litigation procedures in Hong Kong, but also take the use of technology in the court to the next level, while helping the court respond more effectively to various complex and unpredictable situations that affect court operations.

President, I so submit.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you and that is: That the Courts (Remote Hearing) Bill be read the second time. 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 the Members present.

I declare the motion passed.

CLERK (in Cantonese): Courts (Remote Hearing) Bill.

Council became committee of the whole Council.

Consideration by Committee of the Whole Council

CHAIRMAN (in Cantonese): This Council now becomes committee of the whole Council to consider the Courts (Remote Hearing) Bill.

Members may refer to the Appendix to the Script for the debate and voting arrangements for the Bill.

Members have been informed that the committee will conduct a joint debate on the clauses, Schedules and amendments (including the new clauses).

COURTS (REMOTE HEARING) BILL

CHAIRMAN (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the following clauses and Schedules stand part of the Bill.

CLERK (in Cantonese): Clauses 1 to 74, and Schedules 1 and 2.

CHAIRMAN (in Cantonese): Chief Secretary for Administration will move amendments that seek to amend various clauses and Schedule 2, including deleting clauses 41 and 42, and add new clauses 41A, 41B and 42A.

Members may refer to the Appendix to the Script for details of the amendments.

Members may now proceed to a joint debate on the clauses, Schedules and amendments.

I will first call upon the Chief Secretary for Administration to speak, but he is not required to move the amendments at this stage. Then, I will call upon Members to speak.

Upon the conclusion of the joint debate, the committee will first vote on the clauses and Schedules with no amendment standing part of the Bill, and then proceed to deal with the amendments according to the arrangements set out in the Appendix to the Script.

Chief Secretary for Administration, please speak.

CHIEF SECRETARY FOR ADMINISTRATION (in Cantonese): Chairman, I move the amendments to clauses 2, 6, 8, 10, 15, 19, 21, 23, 24, 26, 41 and 42, as well as Schedule 2 of the Courts (Remote Hearing) Bill (“the Bill”). The amendments have fully taken into account the views of the Bills Committee. Contents of the amendments are set out in the paper circularized to Members. I will now briefly introduce the contents of the amendments, which fall into three main areas.

Clause 2: definition of “legal representative”

Firstly, under clause 2 of the Bill, the definition of “legal representative” originally included paragraph (d), that is, “any other person who has a right of audience before the court under (i) an Ordinance; or (ii) a practice direction issued

by the court”. In response to the views of the Bills Committee, the Judiciary proposes to revise the wording to “an individual who is entitled to participate in that proceeding under an Ordinance or a practice direction issued by the court”, and remove such individuals from the definition of “legal representative” and include them in the definition of “participant”, so as to avoid any misunderstanding that such individuals are all legal practitioners.

Clauses 41 and 42: the right of a defendant to be present at the hearing of an application for leave to appeal and at the hearing of an appeal

Secondly, the Bills Committee was concerned that the proposed amendments under clauses 41 and 42 of the Bill to section 83U of the Criminal Procedure Ordinance and section 36 of the Hong Kong Court of Final Appeal Ordinance may be perceived as affecting the right of a defendant to be present at appeal-related hearings, particularly for defendants without legal representative. In response to the views of the Bill Committee, the Judiciary proposed several amendments, the details of which are set out in the amendments. The main objectives of these amendments include:

- (a) maintaining the right of a defendant to be present at appeal-related hearings; and
- (b) clearly empowering the court to dispose of an application for leave to appeal by hearing or non-hearing means as it deems appropriate.

The amendments are in line with the policy intent of enhancing the efficiency of court hearings by providing the court with greater flexibility in choosing the approach to dispose of an application for leave to appeal as it deems appropriate. The non-hearing approach is limited to applications for leave to appeal and does not apply to substantive appeals. This is because the court, when considering applications for leave to appeal, primarily assesses whether the grounds for the application are reasonably arguable, rather than determining whether the appeal *per se* is meritorious. Therefore, if the written submission to the court clearly demonstrates whether the threshold has been met, then the application can be dealt with by non-hearing means, including in writing without the need for a hearing. This will speed up the scheduling of substantive appeals that have been granted leave. I must emphasize that it is up to the court’s case management to decide

whether an application for leave to appeal should be dealt with by physical hearing, remote hearing or non-hearing means. When making that decision, the court will continue to uphold the general principle of justice and consider all relevant factors as well as the circumstances of each case. If the court considers a hearing necessary, the right of a defendant to be present at the hearing will remain unchanged. On the other hand, if the court decides to dispose of the application by non-hearing means and the defendant seeks to be present at a hearing, the defendant may still apply to the court in accordance with the established mechanism.

Textual amendments

Lastly, in response to the views of the Bills Committee, the Judiciary has proposed some textual amendments to add consistency and clarity to the relevant provisions. The details are set out in the amendments, so I will not repeat them here.

Chairman, the aforesaid amendments have received the support of the Bills Committee. I urge Members to support the amendments.

Thank you, Chairman.

MS MAGGIE CHAN (in Cantonese): Thank you, Chairman. I support the amendments to the Bill which are proposed by the Administration having actively responded to and taken on board the opinions of members of the Bills Committee, including myself.

The amendments make adjustments to clause 2 of the Bill by amending the original definitions of “legal representative” and “participant”, so as to avoid any misunderstanding that those who speak in court are all lawyers. This amendment has not only taken on board the view I expressed at the Bills Committee meeting on the term “legal representative”, but also responded to the practical need for trade union representatives to have the right to speak in court in labour disputes. This amendment has rendered the provision clearer and more straightforward, making it easier for workers to understand and effectively avoiding potential confusion in actual operation.

Moreover, regarding the right of a defendant to be present at the hearing of an application for leave to appeal and at the hearing of an appeal which only involves dispute on a point of law, the amendments maintain the existing provisions under section 83U of the Criminal Procedure Ordinance and section 36 of the Hong Kong Court of Final Appeal Ordinance. This approach is worthy of recognition. On the premise of maintaining the rights of the defendant in a criminal case, the amendments enable the court to dispose of an application for leave to appeal in writing without requiring the parties to appear in court. It is up to the court to decide whether the application is to be disposed of in writing, by remote hearing or by physical hearing, giving the court greater flexibility in choosing the approach based on the circumstances of the case. In fact, according to my practice experience, even before the passage of the Bill, applications for leave to appeal in criminal cases and appeal hearings involving disputes on points of law were mostly dealt with in writing. Therefore, the amendments this time maintain the right of an appeal applicant to be present at the hearing, allowing the court to handle appeal applications and hearings in a more efficient and regularized manner while upholding the principle of justice.

Thank you, Chairman. I so submit.

MR LAI TUNG-KWOK (in Cantonese): Thank you, Chairman. I speak in support of the amendments proposed by the Government. I am a member of the Bills Committee and I very much enjoyed the process of the six meetings held because the interactions between members, including myself, and the Government were sincere yet serious, with a goal to do a good job in the scrutiny of the Bill. Eventually, the Government agreed to make a number of amendments. Regardless of the length of the wording of these amendments, they are of great significance to the overall design and future implementation of remote hearings.

I would like to highlight the deletion of clauses 41 and 42, which preserves the right of defendant to be present at the hearing of an application for leave to appeal under section 83U of the Criminal Procedure Ordinance and section 36 of the Hong Kong Court of Final Appeal Ordinance. Not only have a number of members and I expressed concern about this issue at the meetings of the Bills Committee, the media has also raised concern about it. I am particularly concerned that if an appellant lacks legal representation for various reasons and the

Bill as originally drafted is passed, the appellant may lose the opportunity to be present at the hearing unless he takes the initiative to inform the court of his wish to do so. I think there is room for improvement in this respect.

I am very grateful to the Government for putting forward the present proposal after careful consideration. It can be described as a “masterstroke”, which allows the court to maintain flexibility while safeguarding the defendant’s right to be present in person at the hearing. This effectively balances both sides. Therefore, I fully support this amendment.

Thank you, Chairman.

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

(No Member indicated a wish to speak)

CHAIRMAN (in Cantonese): If not, I now call upon the Chief Secretary for Administration to speak again.

CHIEF SECRETARY FOR ADMINISTRATION (in Cantonese): Once again, I would like to thank Ms Maggie CHAN and Mr LAI Tung-kwok for their precious views, which have improved the Bill.

Thank you, Chairman.

CHAIRMAN (in Cantonese): We now first vote on the clauses and Schedule with no amendment standing part of the Bill.

I now put the question to you and that is: That the clauses and Schedule with no amendment as set out in the Appendix to the Script stand part of the Bill. Will those in favour please raise their hands?

(Members raised their hands)

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

(No hands raised)

CHAIRMAN (in Cantonese): I think the question is agreed by a majority of the Members present.

I declare the motion passed.

CHAIRMAN (in Cantonese): We will now deal with the clauses and Schedule with amendments.

Chief Secretary for Administration, you may move your amendments.

CHIEF SECRETARY FOR ADMINISTRATION (in Cantonese): Chairman, I move my amendments as set out in the Appendix to the Script, which include the deletion of clauses 41 and 42.

Proposed amendments

Clause 2 (see Appendix 2)

Clause 6 (see Appendix 2)

Clause 8 (see Appendix 2)

Clause 10 (see Appendix 2)

Clause 15 (see Appendix 2)

Clause 19 (see Appendix 2)

Clause 21 (see Appendix 2)

Clause 23 (see Appendix 2)

Clause 24 (see Appendix 2)

Clause 26 (see Appendix 2)

Clause 41 (see Appendix 2)

Clause 42 (see Appendix 2)

Schedule 2 (see Appendix 2)

CHAIRMAN (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you and that is: That the amendments moved by the Chief Secretary for Administration be passed.

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

(Members raised their hands)

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

(No hands raised)

CHAIRMAN (in Cantonese): I think the question is agreed by a majority of the Members present.

I declare the amendments passed.

CHAIRMAN (in Cantonese): As the Chief Secretary for Administration's amendments, which include the deletion of clauses 41 and 42, have been passed, clauses 41 and 42 are deleted from the Bill.

CLERK (in Cantonese): Clauses 2, 6, 8, 10, 15, 19, 21, 23, 24 and 26, and Schedule 2 as amended.

CHAIRMAN (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you and that is: That the clauses and Schedule as amended just read out by the Clerk stand part of the Bill. Will those in favour please raise their hands?

(Members raised their hands)

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

(No hands raised)

CHAIRMAN (in Cantonese): I think the question is agreed by a majority of the Members present.

I declare the motion passed.

CHAIRMAN (in Cantonese): We will now deal with the new clauses.

CLERK (in Cantonese): New clause 41A

Section 83RA added

New clause 41B

Section 83Y amended (powers of Court of Appeal under Part IV which are exercisable by single judge)

New clause 42A

Section 33 amended (application for leave to appeal)

CHAIRMAN (in Cantonese): Chief Secretary for Administration, you may move the Second Reading of the new clauses.

CHIEF SECRETARY FOR ADMINISTRATION (in Cantonese): Chairman, I move the Second Reading of the new clauses just read out by the Clerk.

CHAIRMAN (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the new clauses read out by the Clerk be read the second time.

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

(Members raised their hands)

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

(No hands raised)

CHAIRMAN (in Cantonese): I think the question is agreed by a majority of the Members present.

I declare the motion passed.

CLERK (in Cantonese): New clauses 41A, 41B and 42A.

CHIEF SECRETARY FOR ADMINISTRATION (in Cantonese): Chairman, I move that the new clauses just read out by the Clerk be added to the Bill.

Proposed additions

New clause 41A (see Appendix 2)

New clause 41B (see Appendix 2)

New clause 42A (see Appendix 2)

CHAIRMAN (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the new clauses read out by the Clerk be added to the Bill.

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

(Members raised their hands)

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

(No hands raised)

CHAIRMAN (in Cantonese): I think the question is agreed by a majority of the Members present.

I declare the motion passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): All the proceedings on the Courts (Remote Hearing) Bill have been concluded in committee of the whole Council. Council now resumes.

Council then resumed.

CHIEF SECRETARY FOR ADMINISTRATION (in Cantonese): President, I now report to the Council: That the

Courts (Remote Hearing) Bill

has been passed by committee of the whole Council with amendments. I move the motion that “This Council adopts this report”.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the motion moved by the Chief Secretary for Administration 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 the Members present.

I declare the motion passed.

Third Reading of Government Bill

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Government Bill: Third Reading.

COURTS (REMOTE HEARING) BILL

CHIEF SECRETARY FOR ADMINISTRATION (in Cantonese): President, I move that the

Courts (Remote Hearing) Bill

be read the third time and do pass.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the Courts (Remote Hearing) Bill be read the third time and do pass.

Does any Member wish to speak?

(No Member indicated a wish to speak)

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 the Members present.

I declare the motion passed.

CLERK (in Cantonese): Courts (Remote Hearing) Bill.

GOVERNMENT MOTION

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Government motion. Proposed resolution under the Hong Kong Export Credit Insurance Corporation Ordinance moved by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development.

Members who wish to speak please press the “Request to speak” button.

I now call upon the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development to speak and move the motion.

PROPOSED RESOLUTION UNDER THE HONG KONG EXPORT CREDIT INSURANCE CORPORATION ORDINANCE

SECRETARY FOR COMMERCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (in Cantonese): President, I move that the motion in my name as set out on the Agenda be passed.

The Hong Kong Export Credit Insurance Corporation (“ECIC”), established in 1966 under the Hong Kong Export Credit Insurance Corporation Ordinance (Cap. 1115) (“the Ordinance”), protects Hong Kong exporters against non-payment risks arising from commercial or political events through the provision of export credit insurance services, thereby supporting the development of export trade in Hong Kong.

Section 13(2) of the Ordinance provides that the maximum indemnity percentage so specified in any contract of insurance shall not exceed 90% or such other maximum percentage as may be prescribed by the Legislative Council (“LegCo”) by resolution. The current maximum indemnity percentage was last increased from 85% to 90% in 1975.

Being an international trade centre, Hong Kong enjoys the unique advantages of the motherland’s strong support and close connections to the world under “one country, two systems”. Notwithstanding the various challenges facing the global economy over the past year and the intensifying geopolitical tension, Hong Kong’s overall economic performance has been stable, with export trade continuing to grow. Following LegCo’s passage of my motion in January last year to increase the statutory maximum liability of ECIC from \$55 billion to \$80 billion, the Chief Executive proposed in the 2024 Policy Address to raise the maximum indemnity percentage of ECIC from 90% to 95% to provide greater protection for Hong Kong exporters, demonstrating the Government’s vigour and determination in supporting the development of Hong Kong’s export trade.

With the increase in the maximum indemnity percentage, ECIC will increase the indemnity percentage for all the existing insurance policies issued under the Small Business Policy (“SBP”) for small-and-medium enterprises (“SMEs”) in one go from 90% to 95% to enhance its support and protection for SMEs. Approximately 1 200 existing SBP holders in different sectors will directly benefit from the proposed increase.

It is estimated that upon the implementation of the proposal, ECIC will see an increase of some \$13 million in claims each financial year, which represents only about 0.45% of ECIC’s current total reserves. The proposed increase will not involve extra funding from the Government. As always, ECIC will conduct its business within the bounds of prudent risk management and review its financial situation regularly.

In addition, ECIC will continue to implement other initiatives proposed in the 2024 Policy Address, which include increasing the number of free buyer credit checks available for Hong Kong exporters from 12 to 20, with the geographical coverage of service expanded from Southeast Asian countries to the Mainland and the Middle East, as well as cooperating with financial institutions to enhance support for export financing relating to e-commerce. Moreover, ECIC will continue to provide various credit insurance services to support export trade, especially the business of SMEs.

President, I beg to move and hope this Council will support and pass the motion. Thank you, President.

The motion moved by the **Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development** is in **Appendix 3**.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the motion moved by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development be passed.

MR JEFFREY LAM (in Cantonese): President, Hong Kong has always been an international trade hub, with export of goods dubbed as one of the three main engines for its economy. However, the increasingly complex and volatile

international relations, geopolitical tensions, and the impact of unilateralism and protectionism have all fuelled uncertainty for economic and trade interactions. I have always hoped that the Government could ramp up support for SMEs. I have also requested the Hong Kong Export Credit Insurance Corporation (“ECIC”) to strengthen backing for Hong Kong enterprises by, among others, expanding the scope of insurance coverage and raising the statutory maximum indemnity percentage. Therefore, I am very glad that having taken on board my views and those of the Business and Professionals Alliance for Hong Kong (“BPA”), the Chief Executive, John LEE, announced in last year’s Policy Address that the ECIC statutory maximum indemnity percentage would be raised to 95%.

President, since the inception of the Donald TRUMP administration, the tariff policy of the United States has been directly impacting our goods export and manufacturing sectors. While members of the industrial and commercial sectors are agile, with some having already moved their production lines to other parts of Asia, there are still some that will inevitably be affected. In doing business, we cannot just wait for lady luck; sometimes we should even reflect on the idea that “the enemy of our enemy is our friend”. The best strategy is to actively explore more new markets and diversify investments, so as to reduce risks.

For SMEs, however, to explore new markets is easier said than done. Hardly can they venture into emerging markets without adequate information and confidence. The current Government has made a number of visits to regions such as ASEAN, the Middle East and South America to build bridges for the business sector. Measures supporting business expansion into emerging markets have also been stepped up to boost the business community’s confidence.

Apart from raising the statutory maximum indemnity percentage, BPA and I have always hoped that ECIC could refine the “risk-sharing arrangement on domestic sales in the Mainland” by developing partnership with more banking, financial or insurance institutions in the Mainland to provide Hong Kong enterprises with more comprehensive services for credit risk assessment specifically on Mainland buyers, as well as extending the arrangement to cover the ASEAN and Middle East markets. We are therefore very supportive of the Government’s proposals to raise the ECIC statutory maximum indemnity percentage from 90% to 95% and to increase the number of free buyer credit checks to 20 with the geographical coverage expanded to include ASEAN, the Mainland and the Middle East.

I also hope that amid the turbulent trade environment, ECIC will continue to enhance its measures by further expanding the insurance coverage for SMEs, further raising the maximum amount of insurance coverage, lowering premiums, streamlining claim procedures, etc., so as to further bolster the confidence of the business sector in “going out”.

President, I so submit.

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

(No Member indicated a wish to speak)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, do you wish to speak again?

(The Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development indicated that he did not wish to speak again)

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now put the question to you and that is: That the motion moved by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development 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 the Members present.

I declare the motion passed.

MEMBERS' MOTIONS

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Members' motions with no legislative effect.

Mr Dennis LEUNG will move a motion on “Accelerating the development of a smart government to better assist the public in integrating into the life in the Greater Bay Area”.

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 Mr Dennis LEUNG to speak and move the motion. Then I will call upon Ir CHAN Siu-hung and Mr Steven HO to speak in sequence, but they may not move their 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 Mr Dennis LEUNG to speak and move the motion.

MOTION ON “ACCELERATING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SMART GOVERNMENT TO BETTER ASSIST THE PUBLIC IN INTEGRATING INTO THE LIFE IN THE GREATER BAY AREA”

MR DENNIS LEUNG (in Cantonese): President, I move that the motion, as printed on the Agenda, be passed.

The 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China has set out the task of “basically realizing the modernization of the country’s governance system and governance capacity” as one of the overall objectives of the national development by 2035. In order to realize Chinese modernization, the governance system and governance capacity must keep pace with the times, including the Government’s efforts in promoting the informatization, digitalization and intelligentization of public governance.

In respect of regional development, the General Office of Guangzhou Municipal People's Government released the "Three-Year Action Plan of Digital Greater Bay Area Construction" in 2023 with the aim to develop the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area ("GBA") into the most digitally advanced bay area in the world. Through the digital collaboration among the three places, a multi-pronged cooperation model under the guidance of the Government and led by enterprises that facilitates community participation has taken shape to promote the flow of factor resources, the clustered development of digital industries, the interconnectivity of new infrastructure facilities, the digitalization of social governance and other aspects, thereby turning digitalization into a key impetus for the GBA construction.

The Chief Executive mentioned the task of building a smart government in the 2022 and 2023 Policy Addresses. Last year, the SAR Government set up the Digital Policy Office to formulate policies on digital government, data governance and information technology ("IT"), consolidate IT resources within the Government, promote the opening up of data and coordinate various departments to offer more digital services. The SAR Government has also proactively encouraged all government departments to fully adopt "iAM Smart" in order to provide one-stop digital services and realize "single portal for online government services".

As mentioned in the latest Budget, the rapid development of artificial intelligence ("AI") technology is reshaping the medium- to long-term global economic landscape. The Third Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China has also highlighted the pivotal role of innovation and technology. The SAR Government will endeavour to developing AI as a core industry. I believe that Hong Kong will employ AI as the backbone technology for industrial development in the future and the Government will need to make more investments in developing AI technology for the delivery of public services.

In recent years, the Mainland has witnessed rapid development in terms of digital economy and digital government services. Since the full resumption of normal travel in 2023, many Hong Kong people have been attracted to visit, pursue career development and even purchase properties or settle down in the Mainland. In recent years, the Mainland has proactively engaged in AI development and promoted AI education in primary and secondary schools. At the third session of the 14th National People's Congress, the Minister of Education, Mr HUAI Jinpeng, revealed that a white paper on AI education will be released this year. In this regard, education will enter the AI stage in the future.

Last year, the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions conducted a questionnaire survey on the public's habit of using mobile applications and their digital experience in the Mainland. The findings showed that a majority of the respondents had visited the Mainland within the six months prior to the survey and they made frequent trips to the Mainland. However, over 40% of the Hong Kong elderly respondents said that they were not accustomed to the fully digitized lifestyle in the Mainland. The survey also found that the digitalization of public services can enhance the digital competence of members of the public.

As one of the “9+2” GBA cities, Hong Kong is still at the initial stage of digital development. In order to better help members of the public to integrate into GBA, the SAR Government must accelerate the development of a smart government. At present, the construction of digital government in Hong Kong still encounters problems such as slow progress, scattered data and resources, and the lack of unified coordination.

First of all, the SAR Government is still unable to provide comprehensive digital public services (e.g. applications for the use of community halls) while the online submission of a number of licence applications and funding projects is not yet fully available. In respect of scattered data and resources, the SAR Government has currently introduced 73 government mobile applications, of which 36 Policy Bureaux and departments have launched their own mobile applications. Given that data is scattered across government departments, it has affected the interoperability of data.

In addition, the existing “iAM Smart” application system is incapable of unifying all the public services. When members of the public click into the electronic services portal of “iAM Smart”, they will often be transferred to the relevant web pages for processing their requests and they cannot directly use the relevant services via “iAM Smart”. Moreover, despite the relatively rapid upgrading and replacement of smartphones and the adoption of home-grown mobile operating systems in recent years, the Government's mobile application system has failed to catch up with the demand for generational upgrade.

Regarding the application capability of members of the public, they need to shift from the traditional approach to electronic means when handling the procedures for daily public services. Without the support of corresponding publicity and education campaigns in the community, it will easily widen the digital divide in society and give rise to a phenomenon where people who are capable will

become even more capable, while those who are incapable will become even more incapable. The digital competence of many elderly people is relatively weak and their digital confidence is extremely low since they are accustomed to the established practice, coupled with the fact that their learning ability is weak and there are few, insufficient and limited learning opportunities for them.

Although the SAR Government has currently introduced the Digital Inclusion Programme for Elders (“the Programme”), many elderly people are still unfamiliar with the Programme. In addition to stepping up publicity and promotion of the Programme, the SAR Government should implement the full digitalization of public services and encourage all age groups to employ user-friendly digital technology. For example, large-scale self-service terminals can be set up in community centres or social welfare organizations in the community to provide a wide range of government services so that people who do not have smartphones can register for the use of government services at service spots near their residence, thereby minimizing the chance of certain social groups being excluded from the use of digital public services due to digital divide.

A smart government is the foundation for the development of a smart city. The SAR Government should be more proactive in spearheading the extensive use of digital applications. In the light of this, the HKSAR should take the development of digital government as a starting point and fully implement the digitalization of public services, promote the public’s habit of using electronic services and enhance their digital competence, while at the same time deepening the in-depth use of big data, opening up data for shared use and expeditiously enhancing the digital integration and data interchange in GBA.

I implore Members to speak their mind freely and support my motion.

President, I so submit.

Mr Dennis LEUNG moved the following motion: (Translation)

“That with the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (‘GBA’) actively developing the ‘Digital Bay Area’ in recent years, the HKSAR, as one of the important central cities in GBA, must accelerate the digitalization and smart development of the city; in order to complement the development of the ‘Digital Bay Area’, the SAR Government must adhere to innovation-driven development, systematic collaboration, green and

low-carbon development, and the opening up and sharing of data to perfect the construction of digital government; a smart government is an important component for driving the construction of a smart city, and various government departments should promote data flow to eliminate ‘information silos’ and use technologies such as big data, cloud computing and artificial intelligence to analyse and share data, so as to more accurately and efficiently manage public services for citizens, enable more open and transparent allocation of social resources, make early projections of demand for various services, and further promote cross-boundary data interchange; to this end, this Council urges the SAR Government to expeditiously implement the full digitalization of public services, regularly optimize and review the design and operation of ‘iAM Smart’, and implement various effective measures to assist citizens with different needs in using electronic public services, so as to promote the HKSAR’s integration into the development of smart cities in GBA.”

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

IR CHAN SIU-HUNG (in Cantonese): President, I rise to speak to thank Mr Dennis LEUNG for proposing the motion.

Various kinds of economic and social activities take place in a city, and its governance model and planning are closely related to the economic development. City governance does not only have a bearing on the public’s sense of fulfilment, security and happiness, but also has an impact on the economic development.

The modernization of city governance and the economic and industrial pattern can give rise to push-pull interaction with the development process. Take automated driving and low-altitude economy as examples. In addition to the support of artificial intelligence (“AI”), they require the coordination of various systems such as position navigation, environmental sensing and route planning. A reliable real-time communication network and a central computer system capable of processing a large volume of returned data behind the scenes are indispensable. This kind of centralized data centre is commonly known as the “city brain”.

To enhance the liveability, sustainability, resilience and competitiveness of Hong Kong, the Government has released the Smart City Blueprint for Hong Kong and the Blueprint 2.0 in 2017 and 2020 respectively and introduced a number of initiatives in six areas including “smart mobility” and “smart government”. After all these years, have the relevant measures achieved any tangible results? In the following, I will focus on the field of transportation.

In order to enhance the carrying efficiency of road network, the Government has adopted a two-pronged approach. The first one is the infrastructure construction. In 2021, the Government planned to employ AI to analyse real-time traffic conditions and adjust traffic signals in real time based on the vehicular flow so as to reduce road traffic congestion. According to the trial data collected by the Transport Department (“TD”) at various independent and linked signalized junctions through the “Real-time Adaptive Traffic Signal System”, the average waiting time for vehicles passing through the junctions has decreased by about 5% to 10%.

TD currently plans to install the system at about 50 independent signalized junctions across the territory by 2026 and it is identifying linked signalized junctions with relatively high vehicular flow as pilot sites to simultaneously test out the installed system and relevant technologies in other places.

On the other hand, TD and the Digital Policy Office have jointly developed the Traffic Data Analytic System, which makes use of big data to analyse past and real-time traffic and weather data and combines them with weather forecast data provided by the Hong Kong Observatory, provides the estimated travel time in real time and in the next 15 to 90 minutes and disseminates the information to the public through the HKeMobility and Open Data Portal.

Recently, the Police and TD have jointly developed a smart traffic management system to carry out 24-hour real-time monitoring of the traffic flow at some major streets through closed-circuit television cameras and collect the data of vehicular flow and road conditions, with a view to facilitating targeted enforcement actions and scaling down regular enforcement operations.

President, unlike the comprehensive and integrated city brain platform in the Mainland, Hong Kong’s model of smart city construction leans toward a multi-field and decentralized implementation approach.

In my view, the application of data and the development of infrastructure facilities are complementary to each other. However, in Hong Kong, the situation remains that data is managed by government departments respectively. Will Hong Kong be able to catch up with the pace of the times with this development model? This has inevitably aroused people's concerns. Therefore, I very much agree with the suggestion in the original motion about facilitating data flow among government departments and eliminating "information silos".

I suggest that Hong Kong may consider adopting a step-by-step approach in taking forward the construction of city brain. First, we should select the areas which have a close impact on the daily life of the public such as transportation, identify and collect the required data for analytic purposes, and prioritize them according to their level of sensitivity and importance. Next, we should sort out and identify the department(s) responsible for collecting the relevant data and the facilities through which the data will be collected before setting up an interdepartmental collaboration mechanism at the top level to avoid duplicated construction. Finally, a unified platform should be put in place for data consolidation and coordinated resource deployment and the practice should be extended to other areas after accumulating considerable experience.

President, given the increasingly frequent exchanges between the two places, the integrated transport development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area ("GBA") is expected to keep reaching new levels. Therefore, I suggest that in planning the construction of city brain in Hong Kong, the Government must properly consider how to align with the Mainland, so as to avoid greater difficulties arising from the interconnection in the future.

I am pleased to see that the relevant departments of Hong Kong and Guangdong Province have set up the Hong Kong/Guangdong Expert Group on Co-developing a Smart City Cluster to enhance the interconnection and mutual recognition of digital infrastructure between the two places and provide support for the facilitation of government services and cross-boundary e-commerce between Hong Kong and Guangdong. I look forward to exploring more industry-specific smart application scenarios as early as possible, accelerating the cross-boundary flow of data elements and promoting smart transportation connectivity in GBA.

With these remarks, I implore Members to support my amendment.

MR STEVEN HO (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. I support Mr Dennis LEUNG's motion on "Accelerating the development of a smart government to better assist the public in integrating into the life in the Greater Bay Area".

In fact, no matter whether we seek to integrate into the Greater Bay Area, there is a need to build a smart government. However, as we all know, we have approved substantial amount of funding to the HKSAR Government for the intelligentization, computerization and upgrading of the existing systems in the past. The relevant expenditure has been increasing but the work efficiency may not achieve the effects desired by Members. The SAR Government must pay more attention to this aspect.

We note that the biggest problem lies in the fact that we have earmarked funding for artificial intelligence ("AI") development and the Government has recruited a large number of staff to engage in AI development and oversee the tasks relating to intelligentization, but the original job functions and duties have remained unchanged. As a result, the Government's operation has been deteriorating. According to the Budget, the SAR Government has great potential to enhance efficiency in this area, and I hope the authorities will pay more attention to this. I do not wish to see that government departments develop their own AI systems respectively. I hope the Innovation, Technology and Industry Bureau can consider adopting a single system for shared use to avoid the situation just mentioned by Mr Dennis LEUNG, whereby there are dozens or even hundreds of applications and each department administers them in its own way with scattered manpower, thus resulting in an increase of the operating cost.

Undoubtedly, Hong Kong should seize the development opportunities brought by the intelligentization process. Therefore, first of all, we hope that the SAR Government will proactively complement the development of the "Digital Bay Area", while at the same time adhering to the principles of innovation-driven development, systematic collaboration, green and low-carbon development, the opening up and sharing of data, taking the construction of digital government as the core task, and driving the digital transformation of the economy and various fields in society.

With regard to the innovation-driven development, we believe that the Government should increase investment for the research, development and application of new emerging technologies, deploy existing resources for stepping up the construction of a smart government, and encourage civil servants to

proactively explore innovative work model and the means of service delivery, with a view to enhancing the operational efficiency and service quality of the Government. For example, the Government may introduce blockchain technology to enhance data security and transparency, make use of AI technology to optimize the decision-making process and expeditiously implement the full digitalization of public services. The Government should also deploy existing resources for stepping up the construction of a smart government, accelerate the construction and upgrading of the e-Government services system, expand the service scope and enhance the level of digitalization.

I would like to emphasize once again that we should draw reference from the experience of other places. When we submit applications for various services provided by the SAR Government, we usually have to run around different departments. Most importantly, we want to get the job done in one go without having to make multiple trips. Therefore, I hope that the SAR Government can adopt a result-oriented approach in implementing the relevant measures. Should the authorities consider reorganizing the development of the Northern Metropolis? There should be a reorganization even for the departments in place. The authorities should break away from the established practice of setting up a sports centre on the third floor, a dental clinic on the fourth floor, a clinic on the fifth floor and an office of the Transport Department on the second floor in a government complex whenever it rolls out such kind of construction project. I think the authorities need to communicate with the Development Bureau on such kind of practice again and incorporate AI-enabled services mentioned just now, so that for some services, users need not deal with the procedures in person at all.

Second, we should facilitate the data flow within the Government to eliminate “information silos”. What is the situation? At present, the flow of data between departments of the HKSAR Government is hindered by obstacles such as inconsistencies in data standard and format, making it extremely difficult for data consolidation and mutual sharing. Therefore, we believe that the Government should formulate unified data standards and specifications, as well as establish a data sharing platform to promote data interchange among the departments. I would like to raise a question: Why is there still a need to separate our identity cards from driving licences? Their numbers are actually the same. Therefore, we should start from the small matters in our daily life so that members of the public can directly witness the service improvement.

Third, regarding optimizing the data privacy and security protection mechanism, as we all know, Hong Kong attaches great importance to privacy and there is a privacy ordinance. Nevertheless, given that incidents involving the leakage of personal privacy frequently occurred in the past, I hope that the SAR Government will not trim the toes to fit the shoes in this regard and just seek to attain “zero risk”, thus resulting in a 10-fold increase in the expenditure on data processing by the Civil Service. The authorities must instead strike a balance between feasibility and risks.

Last but not the least, I would like to talk about “iAM Smart”. In fact, “iAM Smart” was not quite user-friendly in the past. I am not going to elaborate on this point. The authorities said that it has spent a lot of money on the enhancement of “iAM Smart 2.0”. I would like to reiterate the viewpoints mentioned in the first part of my speech. The Government must deliver results since it has obtained funding approval from us. We must learn a lesson from this example, that is, the smart identity card. Although the fourth-generation smart identity card has been introduced, we still do not see how smart it is. The SAR Government should not merely obtain funding approval without delivering results. We hope that the authorities will enhance collaboration with the AI industry, and prevent concerns about the so-called collusion between business and the Government from hindering cooperation with the industry. Only by strengthening communication with the industry can we build a better life for members of the public.

With these remarks, President, I support the motion.

SECRETARY FOR INNOVATION, TECHNOLOGY AND INDUSTRY (in Cantonese): President, first of all, I thank Mr Dennis LEUNG for moving the motion on “Accelerating the development of a smart government to better assist the public in integrating into the life in the Greater Bay Area”, as well as Ir CHAN Siu-hung and Mr Steven HO for proposing the amendments, which have provided an opportunity for us to express and exchange views on this topic.

The Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (“GBA”) has occupied an increasingly important position in the national development. GBA has the prerequisites for developing into a first-class international bay area and a world-class city cluster, with a population of over 86 million, massive economic scale and unlimited development potential. As an international innovation and

technology (“I&T”) centre and a key driving force for I&T development in the region, Hong Kong must seize the opportunity to leverage I&T to drive regional collaboration and economic growth and integrate into the construction of GBA.

The HKSAR Government has all along been committed to promoting digital and intelligent transformation. In particular, we have been proactively stepping up efforts in the construction of digital government, enhancing the efficiency of government operation and public services by employing innovative technologies such as artificial intelligence (“AI”), big data, blockchain, Internet of Things and cloud computing so as to benefit people’s livelihood by technologies, while promoting cross-boundary data interchange. This will not only greatly enhance the construction of a smart city and an international I&T centre in Hong Kong, but also give impetus to accelerating the development of the Digital Bay Area.

At the end of 2022, the SAR Government released the Hong Kong Innovation and Technology Development Blueprint (“the I&T Blueprint”) and set out four broad development directions and eight major strategies. One of the key directions is to “promote digital economy development and develop Hong Kong into a smart city”. Following the development strategies set out in the I&T Blueprint, various Policy Bureaux/departments have put forward, promoted and implemented initiatives relating to the construction of a smart government.

To further accelerate the construction of digital government in a forward-looking and systematic manner, we have introduced an institutional reform and set up the Digital Policy Office (“DPO”) in July 2024, aiming to optimize the top-level design and adopt a holistic strategy to speed up the construction of digital government. These include strengthening the support of digital infrastructure, promoting data interchange, and promoting innovation and smart applications within the Government, thereby speeding up the construction of digital government in Hong Kong through a top-down approach.

DPO is responsible for formulating policies and initiatives in relation to digital government, data governance and information technology (“IT”), spearheading digital transformation across government departments, and implementing data-driven, people-centric and outcome-based digital policies. These include consolidating and utilizing IT-related resources and technologies within the Government; promoting further opening up and sharing of data; strengthening the application of digital technology; changing the means of delivery of public service by the Government to meet the changing needs and public

expectations in the digital era; and providing more digital services that bring convenience and facilitation to the public. DPO is also responsible for coordinating various departments to progressively launch over a hundred of digital government and smart city initiatives, of which nearly half involve innovative applications empowered by big data analytics and AI technology.

The SAR Government has introduced a number of measures to assist members of the public in integrating into the life in GBA. For example, we signed the “Cooperation Agreement between Guangdong and the HKSAR on Cross-boundary Public Services” with the Guangdong Provincial Administration of Government Service and Data in November 2023 and launched an online service area and thematic website for “Cross-boundary Public Services”. Residents in the Mainland cities of GBA can access over 70 Hong Kong public services through the “Cross-boundary Public Services”, including common services such as tax reporting, welfare application and application for identity documents.

Looking ahead, we are confident that the construction of digital government, smart city development, as well as cross-boundary data flow and collaboration in GBA cities will further improve the quality of life of citizens and facilitate better integration into the GBA development, thereby injecting new impetus into the long-term development of Hong Kong. The SAR Government will continuously join hands with members of the public and the industry to build a smarter, more inclusive and sustainable Hong Kong.

President, I will listen carefully to Members’ views. Later, I will respond to the specific proposals in the motion moved by Mr Dennis LEUNG and the amendments proposed by Ir CHAN Siu-hung and Mr Steven HO.

Thank you, President.

MS CARMEN KAN (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. I thank Mr Dennis LEUNG for moving the motion and two Members for proposing the amendments.

I have all along been paying close attention to the issue of advancing the development of digital economy and the construction of a smart government. As early as October 2022, a motion moved by me had been passed by this Council.

To promote constructive economic and social interaction among the “9+2” cities in the Greater Bay Area, Hong Kong must echo the call of the Government Work Report delivered at the “two sessions” by “accelerating the construction of digital government”, “constructing digital and smart infrastructure” and “building a liveable, resilient and smart city”. In this regard, I put forward the following three suggestions.

First, in respect of self-development, it should be guided by big data and artificial intelligence (“AI”). According to the data as of December last year, “iAM Smart” has provided access to 458 services and over 3.1 million users have registered for the application, which is a remarkable achievement. However, I think there is still room for further boosting the user growth rate. I suggest that the Government should open up data access in a safe and orderly manner and further popularize and incentivize the use of “iAM Smart” by including more commonly used public and private services.

I am also glad to see that the HKGAI V1 large model, which was launched by the Hong Kong Generative AI Research and Development Center (“HKGAI”) in February this year, has been introduced for trial use by more than 70 government departments. I suggest that the Government should make full use of AI technology, including the data analytic capability of DeepSeek, and gradually build a safe ecosystem for data sharing among all government departments, thereby formulating plans for the construction of city brain and enhancing our governance efficacy.

Earlier, Secretary Prof SUN Dong said that the authorities will consider combining the research outcomes of HKGAI with those of the Hong Kong AI Research and Development Institute, for which a start-up funding of \$1 billion has been set aside. Having regard to the Government’s current financial position, I think this is a pragmatic approach. I suggest that the authorities should increase the funding injection in due course in the future.

Second, the Loop should be positioned as a testing ground for institutional and policy innovation. In 2023, the Development Plan for the Shenzhen Park released by the State Council specifically pointed out that one of the three major positionings of the Hetao Co-operation Zone is “a testing zone for new rules of international advanced technology and innovation”. The Development Outline for the Hong Kong Park released by the Government last year also proposed to “cultivate a testing ground for institutional and policy innovation”.

In fact, thanks to the introduction of the GBA Standard Contract facilitation measure in 2023 with finance, healthcare and credit referencing as the pilot areas, the authorities have made gratifying progress in the sharing of medical data within the Loop. Along with the establishment of the “one institute, one centre” in November last year, the Government will, as stated in the Policy Address, explore the cross-boundary use of data, samples, drugs and medical devices through the “GBA Clinical Trial Collaboration Platform” and the “Real-World Study and Application Centre” in the Loop. Among them, the “Collaboration Platform” will leverage the population base of over 86 million in GBA. However, I would like to remind the authorities that the relevant work must take into account the 20 areas including biosecurity and data security under the “holistic approach to national security”, since all of them are closely intertwined.

The GBA Standard Contract facilitation measure has been extended to all trades and industries in Hong Kong since November last year. Taking a cue from the successful implementation in the healthcare sector, I suggest that the measure should be gradually extended to transportation, transport and logistics and other areas, so as to fully leverage the strengths of the Hetao Co-operation Zone as an early starter and turning it into a testing ground for facilitating cross-boundary data flow in GBA.

President, thirdly, I think infrastructure and data security should be regarded as the core focus. The construction of the “Digital Bay Area” hinges on highly efficient and interconnected infrastructure facilities, and thus computer system, network and data security should not be overlooked.

The Protection of Critical Infrastructures (Computer Systems) Bill was passed last Wednesday. Members may recall that government departments have not been included in the regulatory scope of the ordinance. Therefore, the Digital Policy Office must exercise proper supervision and ensure the security of critical computer systems of government departments so as to enhance their capabilities to guard against cybersecurity incidents.

The emergency response mechanism in GBA is one of the initiatives for guaranteeing the successful construction of the “Digital Bay Area”. In June last year, Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao signed the Cooperation Framework Agreement to enhance the capabilities of the three places in respect of collaborative disaster prevention, mitigation and relief and their capabilities in responding to

major emergency incidents and public incidents through information sharing, technology development and joint exercises. In the future, I believe there is still a need to continue the collaboration in order to strengthen our security barrier.

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

DR JOHNNY NG (in Cantonese): President, as our country's major development strategy, the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area ("GBA") has made remarkable progress in digitalization in recent years. Being one of the core cities in GBA, the HKSAR shoulders the important responsibility to promote regional collaboration and joint development. I believe that in this new era of digitalization and smart development, Hong Kong not only needs to maintain its traditional strengths in its development, but also seize the opportunities arising from the building of smart cities and digital governments, so as to actively integrate into the construction of the Digital Bay Area.

President, I support Mr Dennis LEUNG's motion and the amendments proposed by other Members. I hope we can take this opportunity to expedite the full digitalization of the SAR Government's public services, enhance the efficiency of our smart Government, provide the public with more convenient and efficient services, and realize the in-depth digital integration between Hong Kong and other cities in GBA.

First of all, the construction of a smart government needs to be based on data, so as to break down the "information silos" between departments and facilitate the flow and sharing of data. At present, the problems of scattered data and insufficient coordination still exist in some government departments, which not only affects the efficiency of public services, but also restricts the full unlock of data values.

One of the core problems is that, the public's concerns and worries about privacy issues have hindered the sharing of data among departments. In my opinion, in order to make public administration more efficient, we need to review and amend the relevant ordinances, so as to cut the red tape for the application of big data by government departments on the premise of serving the public, thereby maximizing the public interests and enhancing the accuracy and efficiency of government services.

At the same time, we should keep optimizing “iAM Smart” to make it more convenient for the public to use one-stop digital public services. In particular, with the increasing extent of data interchange among GBA cities, the SAR Government should progressively extend the service scope of “iAM Smart” to cross-boundary scenarios. For example, we should cooperate with other cities in GBA for the integration of digital services in the fields of cross-boundary healthcare, cross-boundary elderly care, cross-boundary transport and cross-boundary taxation, so as to make people’s lives in GBA more convenient.

(THE PRESIDENT’S DEPUTY, Mr CHAN KIN-POR, took the Chair)

As a matter of fact, with GBA being a pilot zone for innovation and cooperation under “one country, two systems”, the disparities among the legal systems and administrative management of Hong Kong, Macao and the Mainland cities should not be an obstacle to their digitalization collaboration. On the contrary, these disparities should be transformed into opportunities for cooperation through technological innovation and institutional arrangements, so as to realize data interchange and coordinated development among various regions.

Hong Kong should participate more actively in the construction of digital infrastructure in GBA, jointly formulate data standards with Mainland cities, explore technology solutions for data security and privacy protection, and promote cross-boundary data flow. In the field of cross-boundary financial services, for example, a unified digital identity authentication system can be established to enable members of the public and enterprises to enjoy seamless services when conducting cross-boundary business in GBA; and in the field of cross-boundary transport, data sharing can allow members of the public to “travel around with one single card”.

Regarding the fact that many Hong Kong people often go north for spending while a large number of Mainland residents go south to visit Hong Kong in recent years, the customs clearance procedures of the two places should be streamlined as far as possible under the premise of upholding the principle of “one country, two systems”. The facial recognition pilot scheme implemented at the Chung Ying Street Checkpoint in Sha Tau Kok, which was relocated earlier, is conducive not only to enhancing the efficiency of customs clearance and facilitating the flow of people, but also to promoting Hong Kong’s in-depth integration into the

development of GBA. I believe that in the long run, facial recognition technology should be fully applied to all Hong Kong's boundary control points for the convenience of more members of the public and tourists.

Furthermore, the building of a smart government not only involves technological upgrading, but is also an important means to achieve sustainable development. We must adhere to the concept of innovation-driven development as well as green and low-carbon development. In terms of innovation-driven development, Hong Kong should strengthen cooperation with universities and scientific research institutes in GBA to promote the research and development as well as application of core technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data and blockchain, so as to nurture more innovative enterprises. As an international financial centre, Hong Kong can make use of its professional advantages to attract more digital economy enterprises and innovative talents to establish presence in Hong Kong, so as to inject new impetus into the dynamic development of GBA. This will not only help enhance Hong Kong's competitiveness, but also deepen regional cooperation.

In the long run, the building of a smart government requires comprehensive planning and continuous commitment. I hope that through the efforts of all parties, Hong Kong will be able to integrate quickly into the digitalization of GBA and serve as a model for smart city development, thereby bringing a higher quality of life to members of the public and making greater contribution to the collaborated development of the region.

Thank you, Deputy President. I so submit.

MR KENNETH LAU (in Cantonese): Deputy President, the “two sessions” concluded successfully in Beijing in March, and the Report on the Work of the Government proposed further requirements on the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (“GBA”). It is hoped that GBA will enhance its “innovation capabilities and influence”, including “hardware connectivity” for its infrastructure facilities, and “software connectivity” for its rules and mechanisms, so as to enable “people-to-people connectivity” of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao.

Today, we are discussing the motion on “Accelerating the development of a smart government to better assist the public in integrating into the life in the Greater Bay Area” proposed by Mr Dennis LEUNG, which is very much supported by the Heung Yee Kuk functional constituency to which I belong.

The deep integration of GBA cities does provide Hong Kong people with more diversified choices of jobs and lifestyles. For example, more and more Hong Kong people go north for further studies, starting up businesses, employment, spending, medical services, etc., facilitating more and more frequent exchanges between the two places. With the rapid development of innovation and technology, the development of GBA inevitably involves the use of artificial intelligence (“AI”) and cross-boundary data as an important channel for data interchange.

As an important city in GBA, Hong Kong must also actively participate in the construction of the “Digital Bay Area”, drive the full digitalization of public services, and ensure a smooth flow of cross-boundary data, which is the only way to enhance Hong Kong’s efficient integration into GBA.

Therefore, I urge the SAR Government to, on the premise of protecting privacy and complying with the laws and regulations of the two places, expedite data interchange with the Mainland, strengthen data cooperation with the relevant cities and departments in the Mainland, set up a more efficient data-sharing mechanism, provide an one-stop cross-boundary data service platform, and facilitate the use of electronic public services (including healthcare, education and transport services) by Hong Kong people in GBA, so as to boost the economic activities in GBA.

In regard to healthcare services, more and more Hong Kong people go north for scaling, purchasing medicines, seeing doctors and receiving different medical services. The scope of application of the Elderly Health Care Vouchers has also been extended to cover the hospitals in a number of GBA cities, which fully demonstrates the complementarity of healthcare resources between the two places.

To facilitate members of the public going north for medical treatments, the SAR Government should take the lead to set up a cross-boundary medical data platform to promote the standardized connectivity of medical data between the two places and coordinate the sharing of medical data between the two places. Upon ensuring that the use of data complies with the laws of the two places and that the

patients concerned have given their consent, hospitals in the two places can actually share patients' medical reports, radiodiagnostic data, etc. This will not only facilitate Hong Kong people to seek medical treatments in GBA, but also help to enhance the complementarity and mutual cooperation of the two places in healthcare services and alleviate some of the pressure on Hong Kong's public healthcare system.

Deputy President, in order to press ahead with the building of a smart city, the Government must also expedite the improvement of the relevant infrastructure development in various districts of Hong Kong, especially the improvement of the facilities in the backward rural areas. For many years, the Heung Yee Kuk has been reflecting the general backwardness of the smart infrastructure in rural areas. It is expected that supporting facilities such as telecommunications equipment, water and electricity supply and road works will be enhanced. Given the rapid development of the Northern Metropolis, the New Territories will demand more AI and data sharing services with a higher quality. If the Government can speed up the construction of smart facilities in rural areas so that rural residents can enjoy the convenience brought about by digitalization, it will certainly be conducive to the effective integration of GBA.

Deputy President, the building of a smart government not only means technological reforms, but also a change in the concept of providing government services. We must ensure that in the process of promoting digitalization, we can cater to the needs of different districts, groups and sectors, so that all members of the public can enjoy the convenience brought about by digitalization, and only in this way can we truly achieve the targets of a smart government.

With these remarks, I support the passage of the motion.

MR CHAN PUI-LEUNG (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President. Deputy President, first of all, I would like to thank Mr Dennis LEUNG for proposing this motion.

The development of smart government has long been a global trend. In recent years, the SAR Government has made a lot of efforts in building a smart government and digital infrastructure, and considerable fruitful outcomes have been achieved. The direction and key measures on how to expedite the development of a smart government have been proposed in various blueprints,

which are being implemented step by step. Last July, the Government formally set up the Digital Policy Office to further enhance the top-level design and coordination work as well as implement the building of a digital government in a more systematic manner.

The Smart City Index 2024 published by the International Institute for Management Development shows that Hong Kong ranks 20th out of 142 cities, down one place from 2023. Among Asian cities, Hong Kong ranks 6th. Compared with high ranking cities such as Singapore, Beijing and Shanghai, Hong Kong still has a lot of room for improvement. In Singapore, Asia's leading country, 97% of citizens have a digital identity, and almost the entire population will use their digital identity. As local people can easily and safely use services provided by the government and the private sector (including submitting tax returns and making medical appointments) through online and offline means, the Singaporean government is able to accelerate the digitalization of the vast majority of government services, which has become a factor for Singapore's success in developing a smart government.

I would like to focus here on “iAM Smart”. As a key infrastructure for the development of a smart government in Hong Kong, “iAM Smart” provides digital personal identity for members of the public, but there is much room for improvement in terms of coverage and functions. The Government has proposed to fully adopt “iAM Smart” in this year to provide one-stop digital government services so as to realize a “single portal for online government services”.

In the four years since the launch of “iAM Smart”, only about 3.1 million Hong Kong people have registered to use it. The coverage rate has yet to be increased. The participation of the public is a major driving force for the digitalization of government departments. Apart from stepping up publicity and promotion to the public through various channels, it is more important for the Government to let the public understand that “iAM Smart” can improve and facilitate their living, which requires government departments to continue to optimize the functions of “iAM Smart”. Apart from consolidating the online services of different government departments, the Government should, in the long run, explore more practical uses of the “iAM Smart Personal Code”, so as to facilitate the public to use their digital personal identities provided by “iAM Smart” when seeking the services of public organizations and even cross-boundary services related to healthcare, education and living, so as to truly achieve the goal of being “one-stop”.

In addition, the level of e-Government service provision varies among different bureaux and departments (“B/Ds”), and hence the public’s experience also varies. Last year, the Innovation, Technology and Industry Bureau advised that over the past five years, various B/Ds had developed 116 mobile applications in total, of which 38 had been taken off the market. Some of these applications have only been downloaded several hundred times. The ease of use, smoothness and clarity of information vary greatly from application to application.

I suggest that the Government may introduce a smart government index for various B/Ds and set different KPIs (key performance indicators) to measure the effectiveness of various measures. At the same time, we need public comments and feedback, so that the Government can better cater to the public’s experience and meet the needs of users when implementing measures. Can various departments think and act more for the public? Do they have enough resources, momentum or energy to provide smart government services? Can the initiatives achieve the desired results and cost-effectiveness? With the continuous development of different functions of “iAM Smart”, are some of the applications still worth keeping? Can they be further consolidated? All these require careful consideration and regular reviews by various B/Ds. Otherwise, we will not be able to truly build a smart government and cultivate smart citizens.

With these remarks, Deputy President, I support Mr Dennis LEUNG’s original motion and other Members’ amendments.

MR JIMMY NG (in Cantonese): Deputy President, the construction of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (“GBA”) is a major national strategy personally devised, personally planned and personally driven by President XI Jinping. Through further deepening of cooperation among Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao, leveraging the complementary advantages of the three places, and promoting coordinated economic development, we can further enhance our international competitiveness.

The 11 cities in GBA have their own cultures and systems. To promote coordinated development, the keyword is “connection”. In November 2023, the Guangdong Provincial Government announced the relevant Action Plan, proposing to deepen “Bay Area Connection” and accelerate the construction of the “Digital Bay Area” over a period of three years according to detailed implementation procedures. The Action Plan contains “six connections in GBA”, namely:

“connection of data”, “connection of bases”, “connection of businesses”, “connection of industries”, “connection of governance practices” and “connection of ways of living”. These six “connections” bring connectivity in GBA on all fronts.

The key to properly achieving these “six connections in GBA” is whether we are “smart” enough. By “smart”, I am referring to the construction of a smart government. So how far have we developed our “smartness” and what is the progress in “connectivity”? At the end of 2022, the Government announced the Hong Kong Innovation and Technology Development Blueprint, which includes two major strategies. One of them is “to accelerate the development of digital economy and smart city”, and the other one is “to deepen innovation and technology cooperation with the Mainland for better integration into the overall national development”. The former enhances “internal smartness” and the latter strengthens “interconnection”.

The 2023 Policy Address proposed integrated management by merging the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer and the Efficiency Office. In mid-2024, the Digital Policy Office (“DPO”) led by the Commissioner for Digital Policy was finally established. According to this year’s Budget, DPO will undertake a number of tasks, including enhancing “smartness” and strengthening “interconnection”.

I have consolidated the main features into “six connection tasks of DPO”:

1. to oversee and implement initiatives in relation to digital government and smart city;
2. to take forward the improvement of the “iAM Smart” platform with a view to promoting the full adoption of “iAM Smart” by all departments by the end of this year;
3. to promote among the elderly the use of digital technology through various programmes;
4. to continue to facilitate the sharing and application of data among various bureaux and departments;
5. to collaborate with Guangdong Province to coordinate the provision of cross-boundary government services by various departments in GBA; and
6. to oversee the implementation of the “Standard Contract for the Cross-boundary Flow of Personal Information Within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (Mainland, Hong Kong)” and to study other measures to facilitate the cross-boundary flow of personal information.

In my opinion, the Administration’s direction is already very clear. The “keyword” now lies in “expediting the promotion”, and this topic precisely emphasizes “accelerating the development”. In order to encourage Hong Kong people to go to other cities in GBA for development and living without worries, I

suggest that the following three tasks should be done properly. Firstly, instead of doing things in a piecemeal manner, we should start from top-level planning, followed by the formulation of a comprehensive layout for the development of a smart city, and in case we come across any obstacles, we must cut red tape immediately. Secondly, we should further expand the “cross-boundary government services”, which should be “two-way”, and it is suggested that more service points should be set up in Hong Kong to facilitate members of the public to deal with Mainland government services, such as replacement of Mainland bank cards. Thirdly, healthcare service is the greatest concern of the public. Recently, the Government has been proactively promoting the “Cross-boundary Health Record” function of eHealth, which I very much support, and I hope that the authorities will continue to improve the relevant measures to enhance the convenience of access to healthcare services, so as to assist members of the public in better integrating into the life in GBA.

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

PROF CHOW MAN-KONG (in Cantonese): Deputy President, in my opinion, the SAR Government should expedite the use of technology to enhance public service efficiency, so as to enable the public to truly feel the changes, convenience and high efficiency that technology has brought to the operation of the city.

On the subject of today’s motion, I have the following three suggestions.

Firstly, the Government should consolidate its nearly 80 mobile applications and consider transferring some of their functions to the “iAM Smart” platform, so as to provide the public with integrated public services and save the substantial costs for maintaining those individual mobile applications.

Since 2018, the Government has spent \$100 million to develop the “iAM Smart” platform, and in 2023, the Finance Committee approved an additional \$200 million for upgrading the platform. These provisions, however, have not included the recurrent expenditure on system maintenance. With such a huge investment of resources, we certainly hope that, apart from being more convenient for public use, “iAM Smart” can, more importantly, realize a “single portal for online government services” so as to consolidate and reduce the costs and manpower invested by the Government to maintain other applications, and to deploy resources to the most needy areas.

Last year, in its replies to written questions raised for the special Finance Committee meetings, the Government mentioned that as at January 2024, various bureaux or departments had put in place a total of 78 mobile applications for download by the public. According to our observation, the cost-effectiveness of some of these applications can be improved. For example, the Environmental Protection Department's "GREEN\$", which costs \$1.3 million a year to maintain, records only 420 000 downloads; the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department's "E&M Connect" application, which costs over \$400,000 a year to maintain, has only 27 000 downloads; and the Buildings Department's "Quick Guide for MBIS/MWIS" (mandatory building and window inspection) application, which costs \$330,000 a year to maintain, has even only 25 000 downloads.

Now that we have the "iAM Smart" application, the Government may as well transfer most of the public services to the "iAM Smart" platform, so that the public can choose all government services on a single platform. This is also an important measure that can streamline administrative procedures, facilitate the public and save the Government a lot of maintenance costs, so why not do it?

Secondly, in the process of developing a smart government, there is no need to start everything from scratch. Consideration can be given to drawing on the experience overseas or in the Mainland to directly introduce and procure systems the operation of which is already mature, so as to put technologies into practice more quickly, and at the same time, align with the Mainland and overseas standards.

After the epidemic, I often drove to the Mainland to attend different meetings. Local residents (especially those in Shenzhen) told me that the operation of the local traffic management system "12123" was very mature. While the Transport Department of Hong Kong was still at the stage of putting forward legislative amendment proposals on electronic vehicle licence to the Legislative Council, the "12123" application can already serve as a "single portal for online government services" to provide a wide range of functions, including issuing electronic vehicle licences, checking the number of points being deducted, paying fines, and even offsetting deducted points with the attendance of online training. I cannot help wondering whether the electronic vehicle licence system that Hong Kong initially proposed to develop could have been procured directly from the Mainland and then adapted for local use.

Similarly, in two days' time, the Legislative Council Finance Committee will deliberate on a provision of \$220 million for the Government to develop a port community system. I support the system in principle as it is conducive to the upgrading and transformation of Hong Kong's shipping industry. However, has the Government considered ways to reduce costs more effectively during the policy formulation process? Since there is already an existing system in the Mainland, why do we not consider procuring a similar system directly instead of choosing to develop our own system from scratch? I strongly believe that it is essential to calculate the cost-effectiveness in developing a smart government or a smart city. In particular, it is very important to streamline the administrative procedures and facilitate the public.

Thirdly, we should bridge the digital divide so that the public (especially the elderly) can enjoy the convenience and opportunities brought by technology.

One of the principles of Singapore's "Smart Nation 2.0" announced in September last year is that the government should promote the development of all sectors of society through the development of a smart city. This also reminds us that in the process of developing a smart government, it is important to be people-oriented and cater to the needs of the elderly.

According to the information available, the smartphone ownership rate among elderly people was close to 91% in 2022, representing an increase of more than 20% over the previous two years. Given that the popularity of smartphones among the elderly continues to grow, I suggest that the authorities should appropriately incorporate elderly-friendly measures into mobile applications commonly used by the elderly, such as "iAM Smart" and "HA Go", so as to benefit all people.

Deputy President, I so submit.

MR CHAN CHUN-YING (in Cantonese): Deputy President, a smart government is one that makes use of advanced technologies, such as the Internet of Things, cloud computing, big data and artificial intelligence, to enhance the level of intelligentization of the Government in its daily operation, regulatory work, provision of services and decision-making, so as to facilitate the Government to evolve from traditional management to a modern mode of governance that is both highly efficient and technology-based. I would like to thank Mr Dennis LEUNG

for proposing this motion today to urge the SAR Government to accelerate the development of a smart government to better assist the public in integrating into the life in the Greater Bay Area (“GBA”). I will support the original motion and the two amendments.

The “e-Government services” platform is an important part of the construction of a smart government. In order to assist the public in integrating into the life in GBA, the SAR Government has set up a thematic website for “Cross-boundary Public Services” and additional self-service kiosks to make it more convenient for the public to use public services and to save them the trouble of travelling across the boundary. However, further improvements can be made to the thematic website. For example, consideration can be given to introducing online customer services or smart assistants for answering enquiries, so that users can receive timely and appropriate assistance when they encounter problems. At the same time, prominent announcement pages should be put up for major policy adjustments or updates of application procedures, so that users can be informed of these kinds of latest information in the first instance.

In fact, the development of “e-Government services” platforms in Mainland provinces and municipalities has been very rapid. For example, Shenzhen’s “iShenzhen” provides a full range of government, public and convenient services to citizens and enterprises, truly realizing a “single portal for online government services”. In contrast, Hong Kong is still lagging behind in this area of development, which needs ongoing optimization and improvement.

After repeated rounds of improvement and promotion by the Digital Policy Office, the number of actual users and registered users of “iAM Smart” have increased significantly, which is commendable. However, there is in fact no obvious improvement regarding the situation in which users will have to be redirected to the websites of other departments after logging into the platform. It is hoped that the platform will continue to evolve, so that as time goes by, most of the applications for government services can be processed in a “zero redirection” and “paperless” manner with “no face-to-face meeting”.

The Hong Kong Generative AI Research and Development Center announced in February the launch of the first artificial intelligence (“AI”) model “HKGAI V1” in Hong Kong. “HKGAI V1” has been fine-tuned and trained by DeepSeek, and is now put to trial use in more than 70 departments to assist in certain document processing tasks. Apart from enhancing the administrative

efficiency within the Government, “HKGAI V1” is also expected to facilitate the public’s access to government services. For instance, many government websites, such as the Education Bureau’s website, the 1823 website and the Buildings Department’s website have provided chatbots or smart assistants for answering questions. However, they can only handle some very basic enquiries at the moment. Their intelligence level needs further improvement. If we can speed up the integration of the Hong Kong version of AI into these government websites to enhance the intelligence of their chatbots and assistants, I believe that they will be able to provide more accurate and humanized answers to improve the overall experience of the public in using government services.

In terms of enhancing its government services capacity, Guangzhou has fully adopted the big DeepSeek model in the provision of government services, so as to promote the in-depth application of AI models in the areas of government service efficiency, livelihood services and city governance. Shenzhen has also applied DeepSeek to enhance the level of intelligentization of government services. The Mainland has in fact accumulated a wealth of successful experience in building a smart government, providing Hong Kong with opportunities to learn and draw reference from it. Hong Kong should advocate the establishment of a regional cooperation and exchange platform for the two places to share the latest technology achievements in relation to government services as well as management experience, so as to jointly promote the wisdom of regional governance.

To overcome the bottleneck of constructing a smart government in Hong Kong, we should not focus on how to apply technology. It is more important to adopt new concepts of governance. The SAR Government should establish a set of governance principles that centre around the needs of the public. The purpose of service provision should shift from “what services the Government can provide” to “what services the users (i.e. the public) need”. In this regard, the Government should proactively learn from commercial organizations and adopt the concept of “putting the customer first”. For instance, at present, the application procedures for the direct issuance of Hong Kong full driving licence still have to be gone through in person over the counter. Moreover, the appointment quota and the number of same-day queue tickets cannot meet the actual demand of applicants at all. Many people have to spend a long time queuing up every day. If the Government can replace the over-the-counter procedures by including the said applications into “iAM Smart”, it should be a good example of people-centred governance.

Deputy President, smart government is not only about technological advancement, but also about how to integrate technology with the needs of the public.

I so submit, thank you.

PROF WILLIAM WONG (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President. Deputy President, I would like to thank Mr Dennis LEUNG for proposing a Member's motion on "Accelerating the development of a smart government to better assist the public in integrating into the life in the Greater Bay Area". Recently, the concert of the British band Coldplay to be held in Hong Kong has aroused controversy due to printing errors in the tickets. Many members of the public are dissatisfied that they are required to go to designated locations in person to exchange their tickets. In the Mainland, e-tickets have long been in use. Spectators use QR codes on their mobile phones for admission in a convenient and efficient manner. On the contrary, the largest online ticketing platform in Hong Kong—the Urban Ticketing System—is still selling physical tickets, which is really lagging far behind.

In recent years, the SAR Government has indeed made some progress in promoting smart services. For example, the "iAM Smart" platform has consolidated a number of public services, allowing the public to book clinic appointments, pay taxes or check the registration information of vehicles through a single account. The "HKeMobility" application provides real-time traffic information for the public to plan their routes. These measures demonstrate the Government's determination to take forward digital transformation, which deserves to be recognized.

However, the digitalization of government services is still not free from the silo effect. Individual departments work in their own ways with little communication among them. For example, they develop their own applications, and the public has to install countless applications in order to use the services of different government departments. The functions of certain applications are even duplicated, resulting in a waste of resources. In the Mainland, the use of WeChat Mini Programme allows Mainlanders to access hundreds of government services through a single platform, making it very convenient.

In addition, the SAR Government needs to make use of cutting-edge technologies such as artificial intelligence (“AI”) to inject new impetus into the construction of a smart city. Recently, the Legislative Council has granted funding approval of \$200 million to replace traffic signal controllers. The \$200 million is merely used to update the existing system. However, nowadays smart traffic management should concern how to make use of big data, cloud computing, Twin technology and AI for management. Places like Shenzhen and Hangzhou have used AI a long time ago to optimize traffic management. They conducted AI-assisted analyses of real-time traffic flow data to flexibly adjust traffic light signals, thereby reducing traffic congestion.

In addition, for example, we are still talking about reducing the civil service establishment, but Futian District, Shenzhen has already introduced 70 AI civil servants through DeepSeek, alleviating the burden on frontline staff as well as freeing up manpower for working on policy planning and innovative services.

These technologies are not far-fetched. The crucial factor is whether the Government dares to think out of the box to invest more resources and collaborate with local innovation and technology enterprises to develop solutions that cater to the actual situation of Hong Kong.

The country is pushing ahead in full steam with the development of a unified domestic market. In January this year, the National Development and Reform Commission has also formulated the “Guidelines for Building a Unified National Large Market (for Trial Implementation)”, with a view to removing the obstacles in the economic cycle. In the global trade game, Hong Kong cannot stay intact. How to integrate into the unified national market under the premise of “one country, two systems” is our most pressing task. I believe that the interconnection among smart governments and smart cities is an important opportunity. The Hong Kong Government should strengthen its connection with the digital government (G2G), the business sector (G2B) and the citizens (G2C) of the Mainland, so as to achieve full digitalization and intelligentization. The removal of administrative barriers formed by geographical factors with highly efficient digital services will facilitate genuine integration with the institutions and systems of the Mainland, thereby enabling the public to enjoy the convenience of seamless interface in cross-boundary life, employment, entrepreneurship and commercial activities.

With these remarks, I support the original motion and the amendments proposed by the two Honourable Members.

MR LAM CHUN-SING (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President. First of all, I would like to thank Mr Dennis LEUNG for proposing this motion. With the active promotion of the construction of the Greater Bay Area (“GBA”) by the Mainland and Hong Kong Governments, the “one-hour living circle” of GBA has taken shape. According to the latest survey conducted by the Census and Statistics Department, by the end of 2023, at least more than 310 000 Hong Kong permanent residents aged 18 or above ordinarily resided in Guangdong Province.

Regarding the promotion of the “Digital Bay Area”, the SAR Government has also strengthened the connection between the digital infrastructure of Hong Kong and that of Guangdong in recent years. For example, since November in the year before the last, people in Hong Kong can make use of “iAM Smart” to authenticate their identity and link their accounts to the authentication platform of Guangdong Province, so that they can access local government services without having to cross the boundary. This measure provides an additional channel for members of the public to access the government services of the Mainland. Last year, I met with representatives of Hong Kong people’s organizations in the Mainland and the Digital Policy Office to exchange views. It seems that not many people use this service. Only about 20 000 people have linked their “iAM Smart” accounts to the Mainland authentication platform since the launch of the service about a year ago. Therefore, the SAR Government should step up publicity and promotion in this regard to enable more people in need to understand and benefit from the “Cross-boundary Public Services” measure under “iAM Smart” as well as to continue to increase the types of services that they can use on the Guangdong authentication platform.

In addition, the SAR Government has already set up self-service kiosks at the government service centers in six Mainland cities in GBA (including Guangzhou and Qianhai in Shenzhen). Hong Kong people in the Mainland can use the kiosks to file tax returns, register companies, and so on. This is a more convenient way to handle such matters. I hope that the authorities will continue to expand the coverage of the self-service kiosks to all Mainland cities in GBA. At the same time, the types of government services provided should be increased to cover more services relating to travelling and healthcare, so as to cater to the needs of Hong Kong residents and enterprises in GBA in a more comprehensive manner. In addition, the soon to be launched “Digital Corporate Identity” Platform, which is the corporate version of “iAM Smart”, will facilitate corporations to carry out online transactions and e-services. Can corporations be also allowed to connect to the corporate services of some of the cities in GBA?

As for healthcare and general care for the elderly, new functions of “Cross-boundary Health Record” and “Personal Folder” have been added to the “eHealth” mobile application last year in the hope that it can be expanded to cover more healthcare organizations under the Elderly Health Care Voucher Greater Bay Area Pilot Scheme, so as to facilitate Hong Kong citizens to securely use electronic health records across the boundary, and to facilitate inspection by doctors of the two places in order to provide more appropriate treatments. In the future, we should also continue to explore the feasibility of remote medical consultation at the two places, cross-boundary ambulance services, etc. to provide greater convenience to the elderly. Moreover, Hong Kong residents in the Mainland should be provided with the option of joining the Mainland’s public and private health insurance schemes.

Lastly, many Hong Kong people in the Mainland have relayed in the past their wish for a more convenient means to vote in Hong Kong elections so as to fulfil their civic responsibility. In fact, I am glad to see that the SAR Government has done a lot of work in this regard, including the setting up of polling stations near the boundary to facilitate Hong Kong people living in the Mainland to return to Hong Kong to vote. In the long run, I hope that the Government will proactively explore the use of “iAM Smart” to assist in voting. For example, after Hong Kong people in the Mainland have their identities verified through “iAM Smart”, they will then be allowed to vote on specific electronic platforms. I hope that the SAR Government will study these proposals in the long run.

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

MR ROBERT LEE (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President. In view of the increasing digitalization of the financial services industry and the significant growth in cross-boundary trade, I agree with the original motion that the SAR Government needs to accelerate its digitalization to assist the public in integrating into the life in the Greater Bay Area (“GBA”). In the following part of my speech, I would like to suggest that the Government should further implement reforms in its digitalization to meet the demand of Hong Kong and Mainland residents for cross-boundary financial services.

The National 14th Five-Year Plan supports Hong Kong in enhancing and strengthening its status as an international financial centre as well as the collaborative development of the financial markets between Hong Kong and the

Mainland. I believe that Hong Kong's regulatory authorities can conduct studies with Mainland's regulatory departments to foster financial data connection between the two places through the development of financial technology, so as to enhance the development of businesses in the two places, such as cross-boundary wealth management, money and risk management; satisfy the demand of Hong Kong and Mainland residents for cross-boundary financial services; and tie in with the country's policy of enhancing inclusive financial services.

Taking the enhancement of the Cross-boundary Wealth Management Connect Scheme ("WMC") as an example, the eligible products currently included in the Southbound Scheme are mainly those wealth management products assessed by the banks in Hong Kong as having "low" to "medium-high" risk. Considering that Mainland investors participating in the Southbound Scheme are subject to certain capital requirements, such as holding monthly net financial assets of not less than RMB1 million, the industry has reflected that the existing financial products available for investment under the Southbound Scheme may not be able to satisfy the needs of this group of high net worth investors. Therefore, I suggest that the Government should discuss with the Mainland to further expand the types of products such as funds and fixed income products, including the provision of investment products other than those having low to medium risk, alternative investment products or private equity funds. I would like to emphasize that allowing investors to purchase products having different levels of risk will enable better arrangements for asset allocation and investment portfolio. In fact, the introduction of more financial technology and the collection of different data will be conducive to the analysis of investors' tolerance of risk and the provision of more appropriate financial advice.

At present, there are still a lot of restrictions on the sale of products through the WMC Scheme. For example, Hong Kong financial institutions are not allowed to promote and publicize products under the Southbound Scheme directly in the Mainland. Similarly, Mainland financial institutions are not allowed to publicize products under the Northbound Scheme directly in Hong Kong. Therefore, the promotion of the WMC Scheme is hindered. In this connection, the Government may discuss with the Mainland authorities how to enable practitioners in the two places to truly start business interactions on a full scale, so as to facilitate the further development of the WMC Scheme.

I also support the amendment which proposes to strengthen the interconnection and mutual recognition of digital infrastructure between Hong Kong and the Mainland. At present, Mainland residents can verify their identity online using Hong Kong and Guangdong mutual recognition certificates. Hong Kong citizens can also verify their identity using the mutual recognition certificates issued by the Hongkong Post. To provide a more convenient channel for corporations in the two places to use cross-boundary financial services, I propose that the authorities should expedite the establishment of the Digital Corporate Identity Platform, i.e. the corporate version of the “iAM Smart” platform, to promote the sharing of data, the authentication of corporate identities and the verification of corporate signatures among government departments and business institutions, thereby facilitating corporations to apply for licence renewal and open bank accounts in the two places, which will save manpower expenditure and enhance efficiency.

In conclusion, I believe that the Government may continue to strengthen cooperation with the Mainland to enhance financial mutual access between the two places through the application of technology, so as to meet the needs of residents for cross-boundary financial services as well as assist the public and corporations in integrating into the life and operation in GBA.

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

DR NGAN MAN-YU (in Cantonese): Deputy President, according to the statistics of the Census and Statistics Department, over 530 000 Hong Kong residents ordinarily resided in the Mainland cities in the Greater Bay Area (“GBA”) in 2023, representing an increase of more than 40% compared with the corresponding figure in 2018. Enhancement of population mobility is conducive to the construction of a smart government. The development of “Smart City” not only raises the quality of life of the public and facilitate their use of e-services, but also provides a foundation for the coordinated development of GBA.

In recent years, Hong Kong’s “iAM Smart” platform has been continuously upgraded to provide the public with a number of efficient e-Government services which greatly facilitates the lives of Hong Kong people, such as making appointments, paying taxes and having access to personal data. However, the development of “iAM Smart” still faces a number of challenges. Firstly, the services of different government departments have not yet been fully consolidated.

Members of the public still need to log into various systems when using the platform, which is quite cumbersome as services are not provided through a single portal. For example, to apply for public housing and to receive medical services, one has to log into different platforms, resulting in longer operation time. Secondly, many elderly people or those who are not familiar with digital technology also find it difficult to use “iAM Smart”, thus limiting the penetration rate of the platform.

In order to further enhance the efficacy of “iAM Smart”, I suggest that the Government should optimize it in three areas. Firstly, interdepartmental services should be consolidated to establish a genuine one-stop platform that allows the public to access all government services without the need to switch among different systems. Secondly, an artificial intelligence customer service system should be introduced to provide instant guidance to members of the public who are not familiar with the operation of digital tools, such as simplifying the operation process with speech or image recognition technology. Thirdly, the platform should be opened to non-governmental organizations or private organizations to allow them to provide services such as handling enquiries on public activities and making medical appointments, so as to expand the uses of the platform. In addition, to address the issue of digital divide, a simplified interface can be introduced. Moreover, support stations can be set up in some government departments (e.g. community centres, Home Affairs Enquiry Centres, the Social Welfare Department and the Labour Department), where designated officers will help members of the public learn how to use the platform and, at the same time, enhance the popularity of digital education.

To foster the deep integration between Hong Kong and various GBA cities, the “Cross-boundary Public Services” platform has been introduced. The platform provides one-stop public services for cross-boundary talents, which cover a wide range of areas, such as social security, taxation, education and healthcare, thus obviating the need for people to travel across cities. Nevertheless, there are still two major obstacles. Firstly, the system standards are inconsistent. Some organizations do not recognize the identity verification process completed online by Hong Kong residents. Members of the public are still required to go in person to the relevant organizations in the Mainland to go through the procedures for receiving certain services. Secondly, the service scope has not yet fully covered all GBA cities as the public services of some cities have not been included in the platform. As a result, members of the public need to travel among different cities several times to deal with their business, which is a waste of time and energy.

In view of the aforesaid issues, it is suggested that the governments of GBA cities should cooperate to establish a unified data platform for cross-city data sharing and the expansion of the service scope of “Cross-boundary Public Services”. At present, self-service kiosks are only available at seven locations. In the future, they can be set up in more GBA cities and equipped with additional functions such as making cross-boundary medical appointments and the sharing of education resources.

Besides, Hong Kong and the Mainland should discuss and formulate a set of unified identity verification standards, such as promoting the compatibility of the Home Return Permit with the Mainland system, and encouraging more organizations to recognize the online identity verification of Hong Kong people, so as to reduce the need for Hong Kong people to apply for services in person. Lastly, I suggest that the Government should study the establishment of a “GBA data flow security sandbox” to try out scenarios such as cross-boundary sharing of medical records and mutual recognition of academic qualifications under the premise of protecting personal privacy, so as to promote the development of “Smart City”.

Deputy President, the core of a smart government is putting people first. I believe that through the consolidation of resources, innovation and technology, and deepening of cooperation, we can remove geographical and systemic constraints and achieve data interchange and sharing of services in GBA, so that the public can truly feel the convenience and advantages of smart living.

Deputy President, I so submit.

MS CHAN YUET-MING (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President. I speak in support of Mr Dennis LEUNG’s motion and other Honourable colleagues’ amendments.

On 7 November 2023, the Guangdong Provincial Government published the “Three-Year Action Plan of Digital Greater Bay Area Construction” to proactively expedite the development of full digitalization in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (“GBA”). As stated in the motion, Hong Kong must accelerate its integration into the overall construction of smart cities in GBA. However, the crucial prerequisite is that the Government should play a steering and

guiding role in optimizing the construction of a digital government with sufficient new digital infrastructure. Only by doing so can the coordinated development of GBA be gradually realized.

I would like to make two points on accelerating the development of a smart government.

Firstly, the digital coordination and collaboration among various government departments should be accelerated. Currently, there are some coordination and alignment problems in individual government departments. Each department has its own duties, powers, independent annual budgets and tasks. As a result, some of their functions are overlapped. Previously, I was concerned about the installation of smart lampposts by the Government. The lampposts were designed with the best intentions of collecting various types of real-time data and serving as 5G base stations to support urban development. However, the actual situation is that the lampposts are expensive. Under the relevant pilot scheme, too many lampposts were installed too close to one another, which limited the effectiveness of the whole scheme.

In addition, I find that various departments have a demand for cameras. At present, the Transport Department has installed more than 1 000 sets of detectors to monitor road conditions. Earlier on, in reply to a question, the Police Force also mentioned that since 2024, it had been installing closed-circuit television cameras throughout the territory. Last year, 615 sets of cameras were installed, and another 1 385 sets will be installed this year to assist in the detection of cases. Furthermore, the Environmental Protection Department will also install cameras to monitor fly-tipping. All departments have invested a lot of money. With so many cameras around, will there be any duplication of installation spots among them? Can various departments carry out coordination with each other? I suggest that the Digital Policy Office should coordinate, consolidate and implement the in-depth sharing of data among different departments and reduce related expenses.

Another example is the applications operated by various government departments. Actually, “iAM Smart” should be the leading application. Although “1823” is already available, the Health Bureau, the Immigration Department, the Hong Kong Observatory, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, and so on, still have their own mobile applications. Meanwhile, some of the existing functions of “iAM Smart” merely serve a transferral purpose,

such as opening the e-Channel application for users when they go through customs clearance procedures, which is still far away from serving as single portal for online government services. This also reflects the problems in the coordination and collaboration among different government departments in the digitalization process.

Secondly, the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area offshore data centre can be located in Sha Ling. The construction of a smart government is conducive to the integration of government services among Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao. I believe that the key task in the future is to promote unified identity verification and the mutual recognition of electronic signatures among the three places, so as to achieve “cross-boundary handling” of high-frequency matters for enterprises and residents. One of the major difficulties in the sharing of data among Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao is how to ensure the safe and orderly flow of data across the boundary.

I notice that the “Three-Year Action Plan of Digital Greater Bay Area Construction” specifically mentions “exploring the establishment of a ‘Hong Kong-Macao special data zone’” to examine the possibility of establishing an offshore data centre in a specific zone to provide cross-boundary data services for Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao. During this year’s “two sessions”, First Vice-Premier DING Xuexiang met with Hong Kong deputies to the National People’s Congress and emphasized that the cross-boundary data flow policies of the Mainland and Hong Kong should be made more operable within the same country. At present, Sha Ling has been rezoned for innovation and technology use and is positioned as a data centre. In fact, consideration can be given to placing this GBA offshore data centre in Sha Ling to support the future development of integrated government services of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao.

I so submit. Thank you, Deputy President.

MR TANG FEI (in Cantonese): Deputy President, I rise to speak in support of Mr Dennis LEUNG’s motion. In fact, the focus of this motion is not on the issue of digital technology, nor is it on how to break down the data barriers among various departments of the SAR Government, so as to make “iAM Smart” compatible with the public services of more government departments. The real focus should lie in the issue of data flow among Guangdong, Hong Kong and

Macao; to be more precise, in how to expedite the breaking down of legal barriers among Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao, thereby facilitating data interchange related to the well-being of the people and public services. Once these legal barriers are resolved, the remaining technological issues are actually not a problem at all.

Deputy President, there are marked differences in such aspects as the legal systems, data governance models and concepts, as well as regulatory standards in Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao. It is not just a simple matter that the Mainland adopts a civil law system, Macao adopts the Portuguese civil law system, while Hong Kong adopts a common law system, but the regulatory requirements on cross-boundary data flow differ significantly among the three places. Hong Kong's Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance has imposed more stringent restrictions on cross-boundary data transfer with a more prudent attitude. Macao's Personal Data Protection Act requires special assessment before data are transferred outside its territory. The Mainland's Data Security Law has established a categorized and hierarchical data management system. Such differences have made it difficult to realize data interchange in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area ("GBA").

Furthermore, there are also discrepancies in the three places' understanding of key issues such as the protection of personal privacy and the recognition of data sovereignty—although the term "sovereignty" may not necessarily be correct. For example, Hong Kong adopts the principle of "express consent" in the handling of personal health data, but the other two places may not adopt the same approach.

Therefore, in order to break down these legal barriers, it is the most important for GBA to explore the establishment of a multi-level coordination mechanism on legal affairs. Regarding the top-level design, I suggest that a mechanism similar to "Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao data rule of law coordination committee" should be set up, thereby allowing the legislatures and government departments of the three places to jointly participate in the formulation of a set of common guidelines on data flow in GBA. This would establish the basic principles of ensuring data security and facilitating data flow at the top level.

On the front of specific adaptation of rules, the experiences of many advanced countries and regions can serve as our reference. For example, the European Union has adopted a white-list recognition mechanism for cross-border data flow. In the United States, which is a federal country, given that interstate data flow and regulations are different among its states, there is a non-mandatory

legal text model known as “model law” at the federal and interstate level. We can draw reference from these advanced experiences and gather the legal experts of the three places to formulate a model law on data flow in GBA, which is not mandatory but purely a professional standard for legislative reference. This approach would accord respect to the different legislative powers of the three places, while we can gradually move towards a unified set of rules at the same time.

On the enforcement side, in case of disputes, an arbitration mechanism for data disputes in GBA can be set up to conduct the relevant arbitration. At present, a mechanism similar to the regulatory sandbox is being implemented on a trial basis in places such as Qianhai and Hengqin. It is the most important to make breakthroughs. While it would be relatively difficult to open up all at once, breakthroughs can be made in a few areas.

Firstly, the sharing of health data is our top priority. I suggest that a set of standards on cross-boundary sharing of health data in GBA should be formulated, with the University of Hong Kong-Shenzhen Hospital as a pilot, and then gradually extend to other cities in GBA.

In addition, with respect to the interconnection of social security services, mechanisms such as a mutual recognition platform for records of social security benefits can be established, and WeChat mini-programmes such as “GBA Shebao Tong” can be developed to enable Hong Kong and Macao residents—I am mainly talking about Hong Kong residents—to check and manage their digital records related to social security in the Mainland through mobile phones.

Lastly, in respect of commercial interchange, the SAR Government has already started a lot of work to facilitate commercial data flow. Although it has started a bit late and is overly cautious, it should still make steady progress in establishing a unified set of data standards and a database for product traceability.

Deputy President, in conclusion, the development of a smart government in GBA—not only in Hong Kong—is a large-scale system project. The SAR Government should, if possible, take the initiative to draw up a timetable in collaboration with the Guangdong Provincial Government and the Macao SAR Government. It is because we cannot delay indefinitely, but should ascertain the roadmap and breakthrough points for the next three or five years. These are tasks that can be commenced as expeditiously as possible.

Thank you, Deputy President.

MR YANG WING-KIT (in Cantonese): Both e-Government and e-Government services are important elements in the development of smart cities, and governments in many places around the world have been striving to develop a smart government. It is a pity that in Hong Kong nowadays, members of the public are still required to handle the procedures for many government services in person, such as the application for direct issue of Hong Kong full driving licence, thus enabling the “queuing gangs” to take advantage of this opportunity to make profits and earn \$90,000 a month. Another example is the application for replacement of HKSAR passports, for which members of the public can apply online but they still need to collect the new passports in person. I raised a written question two years ago suggesting that the provision of passport delivery service should be introduced to enable members of the public to acknowledge receipt of their passports through “iAM Smart” upon receipt of them. Back then, the Government indicated in its reply that it would actively study the issue, but we have yet to hear any good news so far.

The lack of coordination within a department and among departments has resulted in a lack of data and information interconnectivity, which has become a major obstacle to the development of a smart government. The fact that the Housing Authority has only been authorized in recent years to conduct investigations on assets for combating abuses is exactly one of the examples. Another more concrete example is the launch of apps by various departments in an unbridled manner, which add up to more than 100 of them. While the Transport Department has integrated “Hong Kong eTransport”, “HKeRouting” and “eTraffic News” into “HKeMobility”, it has developed many new apps later, including “HKeMeter” and “HKeToll”. In fact, the number of downloads and utilization of government apps varies significantly, with some of them having only a few thousand to ten thousand downloads. Only those commonly-used apps such as “MyObservatory”, “eHealth” and “HA Go” have over a million downloads. I have repeatedly suggested that “HA Go” and “BookHA” should be incorporated into “eHealth”, but the Bureau has indicated that it would not consider the suggestion. Developing so many government apps would only waste public money and take up the capacity of people’s mobile phones. Does Hong Kong’s smart government intend to win by quantity?

On the contrary, various provinces and municipalities in the Mainland have done a very good job in respect of smart government by making the handling of affairs as convenient as online shopping, such as Shenzhen’s unified government service app “iShenzhen”. In recent years, the Guangdong Provincial Government

has also strengthened the application of the “Yue series” government service platforms to provide one-stop services for enterprises and the general public. Among them, “Yue Sheng Shi” and “Yue Shang Tong” are hugely popular among the public due to their convenience. Even Macao has launched the “Macao One Account” app and its web version in recent years, enabling members of the public to access various e-services through a unified web platform or the app. They can also receive real-time civil defence information from the Government through the app, as well as check class suspension arrangements and information about boundary control points, which are extremely useful.

Governments in different places have adopted the strategy of “Internet plus government services” to develop towards the direction of a smart government. In the future, it is necessary for the SAR Government to integrate the apps of different departments to achieve the goal of “one app for all”, so as to reduce the development cost and optimize the use of existing resources. Or, can “iAM Smart” draw reference from “Yue Sheng Shi” to set up windows for various public services from within the app, instead of adopting the current approach of requiring the public to download the apps of various government departments and then get redirected to another app through “iAM Smart”?

On the other hand, it is the Government’s goal to fully adopt “iAM Smart” to provide one-stop digital services this year and implement “single portal for online government services”. After achieving this goal, should the Government explore the connection and mutual recognition with other government platforms of the governments of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao at the next stage? At present, “iAM Smart” can already be bound with “Yue Sheng Shi”. Can it be further bound with other government platforms, such as Macao’s “Macao One Account” and Shenzhen’s “iShenzhen”, in the future? We should extend the data openness between Hong Kong and the Bay Area, and enhance the connectivity of government services between the two places, so as to enable residents of the Bay Area to handle the procedures for cross-boundary services easily, thereby stimulating more financial activities in the Bay Area, as well as facilitating the flow of talents and capital.

The development of a smart government entails a clear top-level design, long-term visions, interim goals and an implementation pathway, as in the case of Singapore’s “Smart Nation 2025 initiative”. I suggest that the Government should set achievable goals and timetables for the Smart City Development Blueprint, and formulate KPIs (key performance indicators) to monitor the

implementation progress of the digitalization work. At the same time, it should step up efforts in taking forward the development of a data base system, and in steering the consolidation and sharing of data resources as well as their development and utilization, so as to realize the full implementation of turning all government services online. In particular, it should foster the connectivity of data and services among various government departments, and promote the data interchange of government services in the Bay Area. This would break the geographical and time constraints by making good use of data, thereby bringing convenience to people's lives on various fronts.

With these remarks, Deputy President, I support Mr Dennis LEUNG's motion and all the amendments.

IR DR LO WAI-KWOK (in Cantonese): Deputy President, first of all, I would like to thank Mr Dennis LEUNG for moving the original motion and the other two Members for proposing the amendments.

Deputy President, the country has been actively developing the digital economy and e-Government services in recent years. The 14th Five-Year Plan has highlighted the need to accelerate the development of a digital economy, a digital society, and a digital government. It has also stressed the need to effect a complete transformation toward smart government operation modes, procedures and services, and further develop the "Internet plus government services" model. Various places have introduced different supporting policies and measures accordingly. The Guangdong Provincial Government promulgated the "Three-Year Action Plan of Digital Greater Bay Area Construction" in November 2023, pointing out the need to fully promote the integration of government services in Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao, as well as to make the development of the "Digital Bay Area" a new economic growth point of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area ("GBA").

In Hong Kong, despite the promulgation of the Smart City Blueprint for Hong Kong 2.0 by the SAR Government in December 2020, the promotion of the development of digitalization and e-Government services is far from meeting the needs of various trades and industries and the demand of the public. In particular, during the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic, civil servants had to work from home, but many of the vetting and approval procedures for works projects, including paper drawings, Certificate of Exemption and occupation permits, were

still being processed with very traditional methods. This has highlighted the backwardness of our e-Government services, making my friends in the engineering sector and me lament repeatedly that it is only when we are using e-services that we find the inadequacies of such services.

In his first Policy Address, Chief Executive John LEE has emphasized the need to build a smart government and strive to realize “single portal for online government services”. Subsequently, the authorities have established the Digital Policy Office (“DPO”) by merging the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer and the Efficiency Office. Led by the Commissioner for Digital Policy, DPO is tasked to formulate policies related to digital government and data governance, reflecting the determination and commitment of the current-term Government in this regard.

Deputy President, with the rapid advancement in technology, the development of a smart government nowadays is no longer confined to simply promoting paperless operation. Instead, it requires the integrated use of novel technologies such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, cloud computing and big data analytics. Therefore, I strongly agree with the main theme of this motion that the SAR Government should proactively seize the opportunities brought by scientific and technological innovation, expeditiously implement the full digitalization of public services, and accelerate the integration into the development of smart cities in GBA. The SAR Government can take forward the aforesaid from three aspects.

To start with, the authorities should expeditiously promulgate an updated version of the Smart City Blueprint for Hong Kong 3.0 to improve the top-level design. They should also conduct a comprehensive review of the existing establishment, which includes considering enhancing the functions and status of DPO to strengthen interdepartmental steering and coordination, thereby facilitating the data interchange among government departments, as well as setting up a centralized personal records management system, building an electronic brain of the city, developing a one-stop and multi-functional e-Government services platform, and incorporating all services of the Government and statutory bodies into the “iAM Smart” platform, drawing up a clear timetable, and striving to foster the internal and external connectivity of data flow, so as to enhance the overall efficiency of social operation.

Secondly, with the mutual engagement and increasingly frequent exchanges among residents in GBA, fostering the internal and external connectivity of data flow carries another implication, that is, facilitating cross-boundary data flow and cross-boundary government services. The SAR Government should actively promote the establishment of a big data sharing platform among the three places, and facilitate the interconnection of systems such as electronic identity authentication and electronic payment, so that residents of the three places can use cross-boundary e-services and make online transactions more conveniently, thereby accelerating the integrated development of the “Digital Bay Area”.

In addition, with the capacity expansion of software and hardware of digital infrastructures, the importance of privacy protection and cybersecurity is ever-growing. Recently, some government departments and public organizations in Hong Kong have suffered from hacker intrusion or ransomware attack, having sounded an alarm for us. The SAR Government should, on the one hand, strengthen the governance and security of the network systems of various government departments and related public organizations, formulate comprehensive contingency plans, and conduct cybersecurity drills regularly. At the same time, it should promote the establishment of a notification, warning, coordination and interaction mechanism in respect of cybersecurity in GBA, so as to jointly enhance the comprehensive protection capability of cybersecurity in GBA, which will be an indispensable part for safeguarding the security of the city and the country.

Deputy President, I so submit.

MR DUNCAN CHIU (in Cantonese): Deputy President, as a representative of the technology and innovation sector in the legislature, I have been working with the innovation and technology sector to fully support the Government’s development of a smart city and a smart government. While the current-term Government has invested a lot of resources in the development of a smart city and a smart government, and carried out considerable work in this regard, there are still a lot of difficulties and challenges which we need to overcome and break through. For example, issues of common concern such as data security, how to realize effective data flow, the shortage of technology talents, laws and regulations lagging behind, public acceptance of smart city and smart government, as well as how to bridge the digital divide, are work that the Government needs to promote vigorously. Therefore, I speak in support of the motion on “Accelerating the development of a

smart government to better assist the public in integrating into the life in the Greater Bay Area” proposed by Mr Dennis LEUNG, which enables us to have more in-depth discussions on this subject.

In order to develop a smart city or a smart government effectively, we must be well-prepared for a two-pronged approach. Firstly, we must have complete and comprehensive data; secondly, we must take follow-up actions in respect of regulation. The Legislative Council has recently passed the Protection of Critical Infrastructures (Computer Systems) Bill, which provides for a number of standards on data security, so that various sectors, especially enterprises possessing big data, will know how to maintain and ensure data security.

Another issue is the establishment of a comprehensive database. I have heard a number of Honourable colleagues mention “single portal for online government services”. But then, does “single portal for online government services” imply that we have to maintain all the data at a centralized location? I hope Honourable colleagues would get this straight. At present, the Digital Policy Office plays a coordinating role for the Government Cloud and cybersecurity, but we may need to set up multiple clusters for data in the future. I believe the Government is now working towards this direction regarding how the data clusters should be divided. For example, the Government has placed certain data in a cluster through the relevant government functions in “iAM Smart”. On the healthcare front, since the authorities will introduce legislative amendments to eHealth later, eHealth can form another cluster of the public’s big data in medical and health issues. With respect to spatial data, we have recently discussed the Land Information System of the Lands Department in the legislature, and the updates will be integrated with the Common Spatial Data Infrastructure and the Geospatial Lab to form another cluster of the Government’s spatial data. Of course, insofar as commercial data is concerned, the Commercial Data Interchange to be launched later will also form a number of data clusters.

We can obtain comprehensive real-time data through the relevant data clusters, which is extremely important for the future application of artificial intelligence (“AI”) to enhance the management and governance efficiency of society and the Government. Therefore, how we can obtain comprehensive data at this stage is indeed of the utmost importance. The authorities will introduce proposed legislative amendments to eHealth at a later time, and the legislature will also commence discussion on the matter. Healthcare data in the public and private sectors will be available by then. Departments such as the Lands

Department will gain access to comprehensive data in their respective ambit as well. We will then be able to realize AI application and data mining in the future, so as to enhance the effectiveness and functionality of policy implementation. Such work is now in progress.

As regards cross-boundary data, there are already many different pilot schemes at present. Take credit referencing as an example, to my understanding, Qianhai has established pilot points for credit data connectivity with certain relevant financial institutions, and the work is underway. In respect of healthcare data, the Hospital Authority has also cooperated with “Grade 3A” hospitals in the Mainland on data interchange. In addition, cross-boundary government services, such as “Yue Sheng Shi” and Hong Kong’s “iAM Smart”, have also been implemented on a pilot basis. As such, there are a number of pilot schemes involving cross-boundary cooperation. I hope the Government will draw up a clear timetable and, upon completion of the relevant pilot schemes, review when it is appropriate to launch data flow on a larger scale of cooperation. Through data flow in the pilot schemes, we will be able to resolve many problems of cross-boundary public services, while at the same time, better promoting Hong Kong’s smart government and smart city initiatives, as well as providing cross-boundary support solutions.

Lastly, in respect of data clustering, I hope the Government can expeditiously consider the various directions mentioned just now, so as to gather all the data from the public and private sectors in society. This can effectively promote the establishment of data clusters for better facilitating the future development of AI in Hong Kong, as well as assisting the Government in policy implementation more effectively.

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

MR CHAN YUNG (in Cantonese): Thank you, Deputy President, and I would also like to thank the Under Secretary. I am very grateful to Mr Dennis LEUNG for proposing the original motion, as well as Ir CHAN Siu-hung and Mr Steven HO for proposing the amendments. I wish to add a few words to revise it to “‘Enhancing speed and efficiency’ in the development of a smart government to better assist the public in integrating into the life in the Greater Bay Area”.

As we all know, the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (“GBA”) is in fact personally devised, planned and driven by President XI, and it is a national strategy at the highest level. Besides, during this year’s “two sessions”, Premier LI Qiang has again emphasized the strategic importance of GBA in his work report. These present opportunities for our future development as well as bright prospects for the revitalization of Hong Kong’s economy.

(THE PRESIDENT resumed the Chair)

In this regard, how can we accelerate (i.e. with “enhanced speed and efficiency”) the development of a smart government? I believe all of us would agree that Hong Kong has done better in respect of some measures, which are commendable. For example, the Immigration Department has continued to enhance its services over the years. I believe we all have this experience when going through immigration clearance, including the use of mobile phones for undergoing immigration clearance in a digital and contactless manner. In addition, the Security Bureau has successfully adopted facial recognition technology for immigration clearance at Sha Tau Kok. Next, let us look at the boundary crossings of the two places. Whether they are between Shenzhen and Hong Kong or between Shenzhen and Zhuhai, the ultimate goal of the land boundary crossings between GBA and Hong Kong has already become technically feasible, with contactless clearance being extremely convenient. This has also facilitated the flow of people as well as the economic and commercial activities between the two places, and the realization of the “one-hour living circle” can hopefully be further expedited. Of course, there are some details that can be further improved, such as the “joint inspection of passengers and vehicles”. If this can be achieved, passengers would not need to get off when the vehicles from Hong Kong and the nine Mainland cities in GBA cross the border. This will not only help to promote the “one-hour living circle”, but can also avoid the possibility of having to spend half an hour to get off the vehicles and queue up for inspection during the clearance process. All these are good measures that are commendable, and the Innovation, Technology and Industry Bureau (“ITIB”) has played an important role in this regard, which is praiseworthy.

In addition, I would like to discuss some other issues regarding smart government, smart spending and smart planning. The Government must get it straight that “good steel should be used on the knife’s edge”. For example, one

of our committees discussed the construction of the Hoi Ting Road Joint-user Complex a couple of days ago. We have expressed support for the general direction because the construction of such facilities as a maternal and child health centre will encourage fertility. That said, it has been mentioned in one part that the whole project would cost more than \$2.6 billion to complete. Can we save money wherever possible? Or can resources be allocated to more advanced and sophisticated high-tech application to promote the development of a smart government?

There is room for improving the subcontracting approach. For instance, an automated parking system will be provided at the Hoi Ting Road Joint-user Complex, which appears to be quite high-end, but not the entire system is high-tech. A costing exercise was done and it was found that the cost for each parking space could be as high as \$3.5 million for automated parking while the cost for traditional parking would range from \$500,000 to \$1 million. Such being the case, why do we not focus the resources on the replanning of the border area, which would bring more economic benefits? Otherwise, we are worried that under the subcontracting system, if automated parking cannot function in case of system breakdown and we need to rely on manual registration, the original purpose would be defeated and manual operation may be even slower. Moreover, we should now focus our valuable resources—because of the huge deficit—on the most critical areas. I hope the heads of departments concerned will consider this issue seriously to ensure that the Government spends money in a smarter way, and that resources are allocated to the most critical areas.

In addition, we must praise ITIB for collaborating with Guangdong to launch more than 100 cross-boundary public services. We can eventually proceed everything smoothly by relying on “Wanshitong”, which brings together the more mature—I stress that it is “mature”—innovative technologies for focused and prioritized use to achieve an interoperability effect. This is just like both places have aircrafts and high-speed rail, but we need to walk for 1 km between them, so the entire system cannot achieve the best effect. Therefore, we would prefer the Government to focus its resources on the most advanced and sophisticated high-tech areas, so that the entire system can be seamlessly connected, including the interconnection with the nine Mainland cities in GBA. Members of the public would then feel excited and can experience the good results when they use the system for the first time. We believe that in this way, more people will be willing to give their support.

Lastly, I would like to emphasize once again my hope that the Government can accelerate the enhancement of speed and efficiency in this respect. It is the most important to develop a smart government in an expeditious and effective manner, so as to better assist the public in integrating into GBA, and vigorously pursue economic growth, while supporting the country's development at the same time.

Thank you, President.

MR BENSON LUK (in Cantonese): President, I would like to thank Mr Dennis LEUNG for moving the Member's motion on "Accelerating the development of a smart government to better assist the public in integrating into the life in the Greater Bay Area", and I also wish to thank Ir CHAN Siu-hung and Mr Steven HO for proposing the amendments.

The Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area ("GBA") is an important national strategy. For Hong Kong to better integrate into GBA and the overall development of the country, developing a smart government and making use of technology to link up various life tools can enhance convenience. This is a means to remove the unnecessary barriers in GBA, and also a key way to facilitate the integrated development of residents in Hong Kong and GBA.

In recent years, the authorities have made considerable efforts in promoting various aspects such as the intelligent upgrading of government services and digitalization of life. We can see that the SAR Government promulgated the Hong Kong Innovation and Technology Development Blueprint in as early as December 2022, putting forward four broad development directions and eight major strategies. Among them, at least two strategies, including "to accelerate the development of digital economy and smart city to enhance citizens' quality of life", and "to deepen innovation and technology cooperation with the Mainland for better integration into the overall national development", are related to promoting a smart government and deepening the scope of data interchange.

But overall speaking, there is still certain room for improvement in the SAR Government's promotion of a smart government and the scope of data interchange. I have summarized the following three points of concern in the hope that the authorities would pay attention to and study them.

First of all, I suggest that the Digital Policy Office and dedicated higher-level leadership should spearhead a sound top-level design, including promoting government departments to make greater efforts in business process re-engineering, organization restructuring, performance measurement, etc. This would bring convenience and benefits to the people on a par with the Mainland's "one-stop handling" interdepartmental approach, with the hope of enhancing the efficiency and service performance of Hong Kong's public administration in dealing with members of the public and enterprises.

Secondly, we must embrace a reform mindset and change the fragmented approach of focusing on pilot and small-scale projects adopted previously. We should formulate a top-level design and strategy for a smart city which takes a holistic view of the overall situation to break down the complicated administrative procedures and structural barriers. At the same time, we should collaborate with industrial and business support organizations in Hong Kong, such as the Hong Kong Productivity Council, the Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks, the Cyberport, as well as various research and development centres, to focus on the development and promotion of several large-scale and iconic smart city projects, such as large-scale traffic control system. Moreover, people can do everything with a mobile phone in the Mainland. Therefore, in Hong Kong, can we be spared from the need to bring cash, identity card, driving licence, etc. in our wallet, so that we can go everywhere with a mobile phone? All these are concrete results that members of the public can see and feel.

Thirdly, we should continue to promote the establishment of a platform for sharing big data among Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao, and facilitate the interconnectivity of systems such as electronic identity authentication and digital payment, so as to enable the people of the three places to use cross-boundary electronic services and make online transactions more conveniently and reliably, thereby promoting the clustered development of smart cities in GBA. Besides, I also hope to encourage telecommunications service providers to gradually waive the roaming charges in the three places to realize interconnection of telecommunication networks among the three places, thereby further facilitating Hong Kong people to communicate with their Mainland friends coming to Hong Kong, as well as facilitating Hong Kong people to open accounts with Mainland banks and electronic consumption platforms. I hope we can promote electronic consumption platforms to provide the option of registering with a Home Return Permit number or Hong Kong mobile phone number, etc.

The use of digital technology to remove the unnecessary barriers in GBA will not only link up the life tools with technology, but also connect people's hearts and minds, with the goal of achieving closer people-to-people bonds.

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

MR LEUNG MAN-KWONG (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. The Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area ("GBA"), as an important national development strategy, has been actively developing the "Digital Bay Area" in recent years. Being one of the important cities, Hong Kong must accelerate the progress of digitalization in order to better integrate into the development and construction of the region. Smart government is the key to promoting smart city development, and "iAM Smart", which is a one-stop platform for digital services, has integrated a number of public services to replace the individual applications of various departments in the past. This would not only save operating costs, but is also more convenient for the public to use. Nevertheless, I think there is still room for improvement in the design and operation of "iAM Smart", which needs to be continuously improved to facilitate smart city development.

We often mention the experience of some smart applications in the Mainland, such as "Yue Sheng Shi" of Guangdong Province and "iShenzhen" of Shenzhen. These administrative applications have become indispensable tools in the lives of local residents, covering areas such as medical appointment, social security enquiry, payment of traffic fines and various public services, thereby truly realizing "single portal for online government services". In contrast, the functions of "iAM Smart" have yet to cover some complicated services or those which require identity verification, such as identity card replacement and first application for HKSAR passport, for which members of the public still need to go through the procedures at various departments in person. Moreover, some of the services on the platform still only redirect to websites that require official processing, thus failing to realize one-stop services. Besides, the Government should further expand the functions of "iAM Smart" to enable the public to handle more different matters on a single platform.

Secondly, some Mainland applications or mini-programmes of related messaging applications and software that we have just mentioned offer better user experience with simple interface and easy operation, whereas elderly version is also

available to facilitate their easy use. At present, “iAM Smart” must be operated on mobile phones with fingerprint verification function, and users need to take photographs of their identity cards from different angles during the authentication process, which may be relatively difficult for some elderly people. The Government can continue to improve the “iAM Smart” platform. I notice that some voice instructions have been introduced into the platform. For example, voice instructions are available during facial recognition and identity authentication. Given so, is it possible to add a voice instruction function to the entire application to meet the different needs of the public?

There are about 3.3 million registered users of “iAM Smart” currently. To continuously boost its utilization rate, it is necessary for the Government to continue to step up publicity, such as the setting up of “iAM Smart” service kiosks in the community earlier, where dedicated staff would teach members of the public and even elderly people how to use the platform, and assist them in authentication. At the same time, since “iAM Smart” involves a lot of personal data, the Government should also continue to strengthen cybersecurity, so as to enhance public trust in the platform, as well as attract more people to download and use it.

After improving the functions of the platform, the next step is to make use of “iAM Smart” to promote data interchange in GBA for realizing the “Digital Bay Area”. “iAM Smart” and “Yue Sheng Shi” have now realized preliminary interconnectivity technically, so that users can log in to the “Yue Sheng Shi” platform with their identity information in “iAM Smart”. Hong Kong and the Mainland have also introduced a dedicated service area for Cross-boundary Public Services to facilitate Hong Kong residents in the Mainland to access Hong Kong’s government services. With the interconnectivity of “iAM Smart” and “Yue Sheng Shi” that I have mentioned just now, users can use about 70 Mainland services. Despite so, data interchange has yet to be achieved between the two places, resulting in the need for duplicate authentication or difficulties when processing for various services. The Government has recently proposed to study the sharing of medical records with the Mainland via Hong Kong’s eHealth system, which I think is a very important milestone and progress. The sharing of healthcare data will not only enhance the efficiency of healthcare services, but also facilitate the sharing and collaboration of healthcare resources in GBA. In the future, the Government should continue to promote the data interchange between “iAM Smart” and the administrative applications in the Mainland, thereby sharing more data and breaking data silos.

President, improving “iAM Smart” will not only enhance the standard of local public services, but is also an important step in promoting connectivity in GBA. We must put the people’s needs at the centre of our endeavours for technology to truly serve our lives, so that all members of the public can enjoy the convenience brought about by a smart city.

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

MR YIM KONG (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. I would like to thank Mr Dennis LEUNG for proposing today’s motion, so that we can have an in-depth exchange of views on this important issue regarding how Hong Kong should further develop a smart government to facilitate the “Digital Bay Area”.

Guangdong Province promulgated the “Three-Year Action Plan of Digital Greater Bay Area Construction” in 2022. This year marks the conclusion of the Plan, and the task of building a “Digital Bay Area” will be basically completed in 2025, with quite a lot of breakthroughs being achieved in such aspects as alignment of digital rules and highly efficient connectivity of new types of infrastructure. The Chief Executive has also proposed in the Policy Address a number of policy initiatives to promote the development of a smart government and smart city in Hong Kong.

The progress of e-Government in the Mainland and Macao is worthy of Hong Kong’s reference. The Macao SAR has continued to explore the reform and innovation of e-Government services, and has made progress in the areas of laws and regulations, infrastructure, external services, etc. These include working with the Alibaba Cloud team to promote smart government services, completing the construction of a pilot cloud computing centre, and developing the “Business and Associations Platform” to provide services for commercial enterprises and associations with the “one-stop handling” approach. Many provinces and municipalities in the Mainland have introduced “AI civil servants” powered by DeepSeek to handle various types of work, such as official documents, livelihood services, emergency management, and attracting enterprises and investment, which can enhance work efficiency significantly and control the error rate at within 5%.

The development of an intelligent and digitalized government service system in Hong Kong still has room for further improvement. First of all, there are a large number of government-led applications with overlapping content, which

should be integrated as expeditiously as possible. For example, the Government currently has various platforms such as “HKeMobility”, “HKP e-Licence”, “Check-in Smart (HKDSE)” of the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, and “1823” managed by the Digital Policy Office. Although “iAM Smart” provides an interface for “HKeToll”, “eTAX”, “HA Go” of the Hospital Authority, etc., it would merely redirect to the relevant applications for the time being, failing to realize the large platform mode similar to Guangdong’s “Yue Sheng Shi” which provides about 2 500 services. I suggest that we should follow the example of government platforms in the Mainland and continue to improve “iAM Smart” by integrating different functions, while at the same time, making it easier for the public to use it through commonly-used local applications in the form of “mini-programmes”, so as to make “iAM Smart” truly convenient.

At the same time, we can also optimize the administration workflows through e-Government services, in particular, to improve and enhance the online processing capability of various initiatives for the public to integrate into GBA. These include extending the coverage of Hong Kong’s “cross-boundary public services” initiative to the accreditation of talents and professional qualifications, cross-boundary notary and accreditation services, cross-boundary healthcare collaboration, etc., as well as expanding Hong Kong’s Cross-boundary Public Services self-service kiosks to cover more cities, thereby facilitating residents and enterprises in the Bay Area to enjoy cross-boundary connectivity services more easily.

Secondly, we should create favourable conditions conducive to cross-boundary data flow, improve the relevant systems and rules, and jointly build data centres in GBA. I am pleased to see that the GBA Standard Contract was extended to all sectors last year, promoting more cross-boundary services to benefit the public and businesses while facilitating data flow throughout GBA. In the future, we should take advantage of the facilitative measures of data “crossing the river” to continue to expand cross-boundary data flow, and strive for realizing the orderly data flow among higher education institutions, research institutes, healthcare institutions and enterprises in GBA through dedicated networks, so as to realize the connectivity of government services, businesses and data in GBA under the premise of safeguarding national security and personal privacy.

President, I believe Hong Kong can have breakthrough thinking on various fronts, remove barriers and restrictions and make good use of the advantages of “one country, two systems”, thereby accelerating smart city development, and helping to realize the bright vision of building the “Digital Bay Area”.

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

MR JEFFREY LAM (in Cantonese): Thank you, President. President, as a core city of the Greater Bay Area (“GBA”), Hong Kong must capitalize on smart government as the engine to promote the digital transformation of the city.

The Legislative Council has arranged a number of duty visits to Yangtze River Delta Region for Members to witness the smart transport and data interchange in places such as Shanghai and Hangzhou. For example, the intelligent holographic intersection in Jiading District, Shanghai utilizes artificial intelligence for real-time control of traffic flow; whereas Hangzhou’s “city brain” has integrated more than 2 000 sets of city data for improving public services. These are good examples that Hong Kong needs to catch up with.

Next, I would like to focus my speech on two issues. Firstly, the problem of “data silos” is serious. Although the Hong Kong Government has promulgated the Smart City Blueprint for Hong Kong 2.0, data interchange among departments is still completely at odds. Take the logistics industry as an example, the import and export of goods requires repeated submission of documents to many departments, such as the Customs and Excise Department, the Transport Department and the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, which is time-consuming and laborious. In contrast, Shenzhen has integrated the data of 53 government departments through the “Yue Sheng Shi” platform. Enterprises can access cross-border customs declaration, taxation and logistics information with authorization for once, which Hong Kong has failed to achieve so far.

I am glad that the Government is aware of this problem, as the Financial Secretary has indicated in the latest Budget that a “Digital Corporate Identity” Platform will be set up. I hope this platform can be integrated with “iAM Smart” to realize cross-boundary data authorization for enterprises, so that Hong Kong businessmen can set up companies and file tax returns in GBA in just one click.

With reference to Hangzhou’s “city brain”, which is a collaboration with Alibaba Cloud, Hong Kong can collaborate with Guangdong Province to conduct trials on data “crossing the river” and establishing cross-boundary data exchange standards after some time. By then, priority can be given to opening up data in the logistics, retail and financial sectors. These measures will not only reduce the

administrative costs of small and medium enterprises (“SMEs”), but also effectively attract multinational enterprises to establish their presence and take root in Hong Kong.

Secondly, the digital transformation of SMEs is “half-baked”. We cannot remain stuck in a rut when doing business, but as far as I know, some SMEs are still relying on the traditional operation mode. I am not talking about issues such as whether they receive cash only, but the degree of digitalization of the enterprises’ internal systems.

According to a survey conducted by the Innovation and Technology Commission in 2024, only 28% of SMEs have introduced a fully integrated Enterprise Resource Planning (“ERP”) or CRM (Customer Management) system, while only 15% of companies in the retail sector have connected their online and offline data to enable real-time inventory management. In the final analysis, it is because they do not have money and manpower, and they are reluctant to take the trouble. A basic ERP system would cost at least \$100,000, and the cost can even be as high as \$1 million for large companies.

As SMEs have limited resources, coupled with the scarcity of IT (information technology) professionals in the market, they are worried about being ripped off if outsourcing is adopted. Can the Government consider providing subsidies for enterprises on part of the system development costs? These subsidized enterprises are not just receiving money for nothing, but they have to actively dovetail with the Government’s policy on innovation and technology. For example, if the Innovation, Technology and Industry Bureau intends to promote cross-boundary data flow in GBA in the long run, it can require the subsidized enterprises to adopt the Open API standards after upgrading their systems, so as to facilitate alignment with platforms in GBA in the future. The Government can play a role in connecting the various links for enterprises, thereby gradually building up the digitalization of the Hong Kong Brand.

I would like to mention in particular that, by drawing reference from the Government’s past experience in providing “technology vouchers”, there were cases in the market in which intermediary companies conspired with applicants to “double-cross” and share the public money. These “black sheep” would stifle the desire of SMEs to undergo transformation, and also arouse doubts among the public about the effectiveness of the policy. When the Government launches similar

funding schemes in the future, it is necessary to tighten supervision and streamline the application process, as well as conduct random inspection of the results on a regular basis to examine whether there are any suspicious cases.

President, Hong Kong must think out of the box in order to catch up expeditiously. Smart government is not a slogan. We must make the best use of our resources to enable the public and enterprises to truly integrate into the “one-hour living circle”, and to make the Pearl of the Orient shine again.

Thank you, President. I so submit.

MR LAM SAN-KEUNG (in Cantonese): President, I strongly agree with the development of a smart government to dovetail with the “Digital Bay Area”. That said, being a representative of the legal profession, I must point out that we must expeditiously review and improve the existing “Notes about Your Personal Data” of various government departments and the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance (“PDPO”).

The first and foremost task in developing a smart government is to facilitate the flow of personal data among government departments and organizations. Mr Jeffrey LAM has also mentioned this issue just now, and it is of great concern to Members. As mentioned in the motion, there is no data flow among government departments at present, i.e. the problem of “data silos” mentioned by Mr Jeffrey LAM a moment ago. One of the main reasons for this is that the “Notes about Your Personal Data” vary among government departments.

According to Schedule 1 to PDPO, Data Protection Principle 1 stipulates that the data subject should be explicitly informed of the purpose of data collection, whereas Data Protection Principle 3 stipulates that personal data shall not, without the consent of the data subject, be used for any other purpose. Members may read the government forms carefully and find that there are always “Notes about Your Personal Data” at the end of each form, but the “notes” on each form are different.

Take the vehicle registration form “TD22” of the Transport Department (“TD”) as an example, it is stated therein that the purposes of personal data collection are to process applications as well as activities relating to traffic and transport matters, etc. Other government departments may only access the personal data in “TD22” for transport matters. As regards the Application Form

for Public Rental Housing (“PRH”) of the Hong Kong Housing Authority (“HA”), it is mentioned that HA has the right to provide the data collected to other organizations, such as government departments and companies, for the purpose of verifying the information, or other government departments can provide information to HA for verification. If HA intends to check whether a PRH applicant owns a car or even a limousine and is abusing PRH, HA will have to make enquiry with TD proactively. Yet, since “TD22” stipulates that personal data will only be used for transport purposes and PRH has nothing to do with transport, TD has the right to refuse and it cannot take the initiative to provide personal data to HA for verification as well.

Therefore, if the Government hopes to eliminate the “data silos” among various departments, it should review and amend the “Notes about Your Personal Data” on the departments’ forms as expeditiously as possible. If the Department of Justice does not have sufficient manpower, the Government is welcome to brief out the work to outside legal experts to solve the problem for the Government.

The legal problems with the “Digital Bay Area” are even more serious. I have been told by lawyers specializing in cross-boundary data that the provisions of the existing PDPO are so unclear that large-scale enterprises are often worried that they may breach the law inadvertently. The heading of section 33 of PDPO is “Prohibition against transfer of personal data to place outside Hong Kong except in specified circumstances”. Although this provision has not yet come into operation, enterprises cannot help but ask: “Is it lawful to handle data across the border?” If section 33 will come into operation next month, is it necessary for enterprises to have a backup plan? How should the “Notes about Your Personal Data” of enterprises be written so that they would not breach the law?

Enterprises currently adopt the practice of engaging lawyers to draw reference from case laws in places around the world to understand the standards in other places, and then draft their own privacy policy. This has led to the enterprises’ higher compliance costs, but they still continue to worry about whether they have breached the law. The best solution is to amend PDPO as early as possible to make the law on cross-boundary data privacy clearly written, so that everyone knows where the “red line” is, and there is no need to make guesses.

Therefore, in order to develop a smart government to dovetail with the “Digital Bay Area”, I propose that the Government should first conduct a comprehensive review of PDPO to identify any ambiguities and imperfections, and

make amendments. I suggest that the Government should draw reference from the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation ("GDPR"), which has set out specific regulations on the protection of individuals and privacy. GDPR has also been implemented in the United Kingdom, so it is applicable to both civil law and common law. I believe that drawing reference from GDPR will be very helpful for the development of Hong Kong.

President, I so submit.

SUSPENSION OF MEETING

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now suspend the meeting until 9:00 am tomorrow.

Suspended accordingly at 6:04 pm.

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 7

(Written Reply)

Asked by
Hon Jeffrey LAM

Date of meeting : 26 March 2025

Replied by : Secretary for Innovation,
Technology and Industry

Reply

President,

In respect of the question raised by the Hon Jeffrey LAM, having consolidated the information provided by the Security Bureau and the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau, my reply is as follows:

- (1) According to the Government Information Technology Security Policy and Guidelines, when an information technology (IT) security incident occurs, the concerned bureaux and departments (B/Ds) must report it to the Government Information Security Incident Response Office under the Digital Policy Office (DPO), and notify the Office of the Privacy Commissioner for Personal Data (PCPD) and/or the Police depending on the nature of the incident.

In 2022, 2023 and 2024, the DPO received 5, 3 and 2 incident reports respectively that involved ransomware attack of government IT systems. None of these incidents resulted in any data leakage. In view of the nature of the incidents, the sensitivity of the information and security considerations, the departments concerned considered it inappropriate to publish relevant details in order not to increase the risk of malicious intrusion into government systems. Upon receipt of the incident reports, the DPO had promptly assisted relevant departments in handling the incidents and provided technical advice to enhance their information security.

As for public bodies, neither the DPO nor the Hong Kong Computer Emergency Response Team Coordination Centre has received any

notification of information security incidents from public bodies relating to ransomware attack in the past three years. However, we note that individual public bodies have taken the initiative to make public announcement on relevant incidents having regard to the nature and specific circumstances of the case. To enhance the information security of public bodies and strengthen the incident handling mechanism, the Government has since August 2024 required public bodies to notify the relevant B/Ds of incidents relating to their designated IT systems. As at mid-March this year, the Government has not received any relevant report.

Depending on the circumstances of the case, there is a possibility that a ransomware attack may constitute a breach of “criminal intimidation” (section 24 of the Crimes Ordinance), “criminal damage” (section 60 of the Crimes Ordinance), “access to computers with criminal or dishonest intent” (section 161 of the Crimes Ordinance), or other related offences. The Police does not maintain breakdown statistics on the number of arrests for ransomware attacks.

- (2) On February 22 this year, Invest Hong Kong (InvestHK) identified an information security incident which involved a malicious ransomware attack to part of InvestHK’s computer systems. Upon identification of the incident, the Department took immediate measures to tighten security of its IT systems to prevent further ransomware attacks. In line with the established procedures, it has on the same day also reported the case to the Police, the DPO, the PCPD and the Security Bureau respectively. According to InvestHK’s investigation findings, there was no evidence indicating leakage of personal information. No further suspicious activities have been identified since then. As at mid-March this year, the Department has not received any public complaints or enquiries related to this information security incident. After the incident, InvestHK promptly issued press releases to clearly explain the situation to the public and its clients. It is believed that the incident has not affected investors’ confidence. InvestHK has all along been observing the Government’s procedures in its information and cybersecurity work. It will continue to cooperate with the DPO and

adopt experts' recommendations in tightening its IT security systems, so as to prevent similar incidents from happening again.

(3) To enhance the IT security of B/Ds and public bodies, the Government has implemented several enhancement measures which require B/Ds and public bodies under their purview to strengthen the project governance and security of IT systems, including key initiatives such as:

- (i) Strengthen oversight responsibility: all B/Ds must appoint a senior directorate officer or the head/ deputy head of the management team of relevant organisation to oversee information security work, and immediately assess and strengthen their existing cybersecurity measures, in order to guard against cyberattacks.
- (ii) Regular tests, assessments and audits: all B/Ds and public bodies must arrange additional stress tests and security tests by an independent third party before rollout of their IT systems, and perform security risk assessments for their IT systems at least once every two years. Security risk assessments shall identify and determine the level of IT security risks of an IT system based on risk sources (e.g. vulnerabilities, threats), events (e.g. incident scenarios), and risk impact and likelihood, so as to help prioritise the identified risks for risk management and updating of response measures.
- (iii) System health check, penetration test and compliance audit: the DPO introduced a centralised cybersecurity health check platform to conduct regular and continuous health checks and penetration testing on the government's public-facing IT systems to enhance B/Ds' ability to identify potential security vulnerabilities, thereby strengthening the prevention of information and cybersecurity incidents. The DPO also launched a new round of government-wide information security compliance audit in 2024, and will select eight

government IT systems for in-depth information security compliance audit in 2025.

- (iv) Real-life cybersecurity attack and defence drills: starting from 2024, the DPO will organise annual real-life cybersecurity attack and defence drill, and invite different B/Ds and public bodies to participate. The drills will simulate real-life cyberattacks to test the response and resilience of IT systems in the event of cyberattacks, with a view to enhancing the technique, experience and overall defence capabilities of B/Ds and public bodies through the drills and fortifying the defence line.
- (v) Step up staff training: the DPO and the Civil Service College jointly organise thematic seminars under the Innovation and Technology leadership series for the senior management of all B/Ds, and provide latest cybersecurity trends and preventive measures to enhance their information security knowledge.

- End -

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 8
(Written Reply)

Asked by Hon Tommy CHEUNG

Date of meeting : 26 March 2025

Replied by : Secretary for Commerce
and Economic Development

Reply

President,

The United States (US)' imposition of additional tariffs on products of Hong Kong undermines the rule-based multilateral trading system, is grossly inconsistent with the relevant World Trade Organization (WTO) rules and ignores Hong Kong's status as a separate customs territory as stipulated in Article 116 of the Basic Law and recognised by the WTO. As announced earlier, the SAR Government will file a complaint against the US' measure in accordance with the WTO Dispute Settlement Mechanism. We are now mapping out the strategy and taking forward the relevant work progressively. Generally speaking, the time required for individual WTO dispute cases would depend on different factors such as the complexity of the case, the progress and outcome of the consultations between the disputing parties involved, etc. With reference to previous cases, the time required is generally measured in years, and there is no specific time limit.

The US' additional 20% tariffs on Hong Kong products would inevitably affect export of Hong Kong products to the US, particularly in the short term. That said, the domestic exports value of Hong Kong products to the US is relatively small in terms of Hong Kong's total trade value. In 2024, the domestic exports value of relevant products to the US was about HK\$5.9 billion, accounting for about 0.1% of Hong Kong's total exports value and about 0.06% of Hong Kong's total trade value. Given the foregoing, it is estimated that the US' tariff measures on Hong Kong products would have a limited impact on Hong Kong's overall merchandise trade. On the other hand, Hong Kong enterprises have responded to market changes through various arrangements, such as reintegrating supply chains, and exploring different emerging markets as well as different means including e-commerce in recent years. It is expected that the above measures would offset, to a certain extent, the possible impact brought about by the US tariffs.

As the founding member of the WTO, Hong Kong has been a staunch supporter of rule-based multilateral trading system, and commended by WTO Members on various occasions for our continued adoption of free and open trade policies. We are one of the most open economies welcoming trade and investments and have never imposed any tariffs on imported goods. Notwithstanding this, to tackle unfair trade practices targeting Hong Kong and in light of the evolving international trade landscape, the SAR Government has been actively expanding the economic and trade network and exploring development opportunities in markets with potential, especially emerging markets. At the same time, in order to help the trade cope with the various challenges (including the impact of the US' tariffs), the SAR Government has been providing assistance to the trade, including keeping them abreast of the latest developments through disseminating relevant trade information to the trade via different channels and implementing various funding schemes to assist the trade in enhancing their competitiveness and exploring diversified markets.

The SAR Government will continue with the relevant work. In the meantime, we will closely monitor the situation with a view to considering further follow-up.

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 9

(Written Reply)

Asked by: Hon Holden CHOW

Date of meeting: 26 March 2025

Replied by: Secretary for Financial
Services and the Treasury

Reply

President,

The New Capital Investment Entrant Scheme (New CIES) opened for application from March 2024, with the aim to further enrich the talent pool and attract new capital to Hong Kong. In consultation with Invest Hong Kong (InvestHK) and the Immigration Department (ImmD), the reply to various parts of the question is as follows.

Since the launch of the New CIES to end-February 2025, the New CIES has received 918 applications, approved 868 applications for Net Asset Assessment and 386 applications for Assessment on Investment Requirements. The ImmD granted “approval-in-principle” for 756 applications, enabling the applicants to enter Hong Kong as visitors to make the committed investment, and granted “formal approval” for 341 applications. If all applications received are approved, it is estimated that they will bring more than HK\$27 billion to Hong Kong.

Under the New CIES, applicants must invest a minimum of HK\$30 million in the permissible investment assets, including investing a minimum of HK\$27 million in the permissible financial assets and/or real estate (subject to a cap of HK\$10 million), and placing HK\$3 million into a new Capital Investment Entrant Scheme Investment Portfolio (CIES Investment Portfolio). Among the 386 approved applications for Assessment on Investment Requirements as of end-February 2025, no applicant has made investment in residential real estate under the New CIES. Excluding the sum for investing in the CIES Investment Portfolio, the approved investment distribution is as follows –

	Investment amount (HK\$ Million)
Eligible collective investment schemes	5,171

	Investment amount (HK\$ Million)
Equities	3,570
Debt securities	1,773
Non-residential real estate	18
Certificates of deposits	9
Ownership interest in limited partnership funds	7
Total	10,548

Except for the applicants' investment in Hong Kong under the New CIES, the Government does not maintain the data on the investments made by applicants in Hong Kong (including residential real estate) outside the New CIES. Furthermore, before the enhancement measures took effect, it was not required for the applicant and his/her dependents to declare family office setups in Hong Kong, hence the Government does not maintain data on family offices established in Hong Kong by the applicant or his/her dependents.

To enhance the attractiveness of the New CIES and developmental strengths of Hong Kong's asset and wealth management industry, with effect from 16 October 2024, applicants under the New CIES are allowed to invest in residential properties, provided that the transaction price of a single property is HK\$50 million or above. The total investment amount in real estate (the aggregate of all residential and non-residential properties) which is counted toward fulfilling the minimum investment threshold is subject to an aggregate cap of HK\$10 million. The Government also announced a series of enhancement measures to the New CIES in January 2025. Effective on 1 March 2025, the measures include –

- (a) **relaxing the requirements on the fulfillment of net asset requirement (NAR):** An applicant under the New CIES is only required to demonstrate that he/she has net assets or net equity to which he/she is absolutely beneficially entitled with a market value of not less than HK\$30 million net throughout six months (two years before the enhancement) preceding the application. Net assets or net equity jointly owned with the applicant's family member(s) can also be taken into consideration for the calculation of the NAR for the respective portion which is absolutely beneficially entitled to the applicant; and
- (b) **allowing the holding of permissible investment assets through a family-owned investment holding vehicle (FIHV) or a family-owned special purpose entity (FSPE) under an FIHV:** Investments made through an eligible private company wholly owned by an applicant can be counted towards the applicant's eligible investment in the New CIES. An eligible

private company refers to a holding company incorporated or registered in Hong Kong which is wholly owned by an applicant in the form of an FIHV or an FSPE under an FIHV managed by an eligible single family office as defined in Section 2 of Schedule 16E to the Inland Revenue Ordinance (Cap. 112). The enhancement will create synergy between the New CIES and establishment of family offices in Hong Kong.

The Government will continuously review the operation of the New CIES and suitably evaluate its effectiveness.

-End-

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 10

(Written Reply)

Asked by Hon TANG Ka-piu

Date of meeting : 26 March 2025

Replied by : Secretary for Health

Reply

President,

The Government released the Primary Healthcare Blueprint (Blueprint) in December 2022, setting out a series of reform initiatives to strengthen primary healthcare services in Hong Kong. One of the recommendations in the Blueprint is to develop a district-based family-centric community healthcare system based on the District Health Centre (DHC) model. To this end, the Government set up DHCs and interim DHC Expresses (DHCEs) of a smaller scale (hereafter collectively referred to as DHCs) in all 18 districts across the city by the end of 2022. As a primary healthcare services and resource hub, DHCs provide services including chronic disease screening and management, family doctor pairing, health promotion, health risk factors assessment and community rehabilitation, etc.

In consultation with the Primary Healthcare Commission (PHCC) and the Department of Health (DH), the replies to the respective parts of the question raised by the Hon TANG Ka-piu are as follows:

(1) to (3)

The PHCC was established in July 2024 to oversee primary healthcare service delivery, standard setting and quality assurance, etc. under one roof. Regarding the services of DHCs, the PHCC appoints non-governmental organisations as operators through open tender. The relevant operation service contracts have specified the facilities and service requirements, including the qualifications and relevant experience of key staff, the districts and number of ancillary centres/service points to be set up, the staffing establishment of the centres, etc. Regarding the operation period, the initial operation period of the DHC operation service contracts is three years from the date of operation with an option for extension of up to further three years, whereas the initial operation period of the DHCE operation service contract is three years with option for multiple contract extensions. The PHCC will, in accordance with the terms of the contract and subject to the performance of the operator, arrange for contract renewal or

conduct an open tender exercise to identify an operator before the expiry of the initial operation period. The DHCs' service commencement dates are set out in **Annex I**.

The PHCC continuously reviews the services of DHCs so as to strengthen their role as the co-ordinators of community primary healthcare services and case managers. As such, the PHCC has adjusted the terms of the operating service contracts, including adjusting the categorisation of service targets to tie in with the enhancement of DHC services, such as the pairing of family doctors with citizens and the provision of nurse clinic services. Also, operators are required to achieve or exceed the predetermined service targets within the contract period to be eligible for contract gratuities and incentive payment, so as to encourage the operators to actively enhance their service standards. The contract also states that the Government shall have the right to terminate the contract if an operator fails to comply with the contract requirements.

The PHCC is preparing to upgrade the three DHCEs in Central and Western District, Yau Tsim Mong District and Eastern District into DHCs within this year. The construction works of the DHCs in Wan Chai, Kwun Tong, Sai Kung and North District are in progress, and they will be upgraded to DHCs upon completion in the next few years. Tenders will be invited to identify operators in due course. Depending on the progress of the construction works of the DHCs or the expiry date of the operation service contracts, the PHCC will enter into new or renewed operation service contracts with the operators and include new assessment indicators, including those relating to the participation of new members in the Chronic Disease Co-Care Pilot Scheme (CDCC). At present, the operators of the Central and Western DHC and Sham Shui Po DHC have signed new service contracts. Tenders are being conducted for the service contracts of the Eastern, Yau Tsim Mong and Kwai Tsing DHCs, and the contracts of the DHCs in other districts are being renewed. The PHCC will incorporate the assessment indicators as appropriate.

The PHCC uploaded the DHC performance indicators, including "DHC new members received information and knowledge on life course preventive care (LCPC) together with individualised LCPC health advice" and "Seasonal flu vaccination rate", onto the DHC website for public access in December 2024. In addition, the PHCC is progressively enhancing the performance monitoring mechanism of the DHCs by regularly reviewing a number of quantitative and qualitatively related aspects, including service volume, operational effectiveness and health-related outcomes, etc., to assess the performance of the DHCs, and to make timely recommendations to the operators for improvement. The PHCC will take into account the relevant assessment results when renewing the operating service contracts.

(4)

Integration of woman and elderly health services under the DH into the district health network of the PHCC aims to utilise resources more effectively and expand the multidisciplinary primary healthcare service network. The overview of persons who

have registered for services at Woman Health Centres (WHCs) and designated Maternal and Child Health Centres (MCHCs), as well as those who are members of Elderly Health Centres (EHCs) under the DH, is at **Annex II**.

The PHCC will begin the integration of women's health services within this year in an orderly manner, whereby a non-governmental organisation appointed through open tender will provide women's primary healthcare services through three service points named Women Wellness Satellites (WWS). The three WWSs located in Chai Wan, Lam Tin, and Tuen Mun are expected to commence operation within this year to replace the WHCs of DH. The Chai Wan WWS will commence operation in the second quarter, while the other two in Lam Tin, and Tuen Mun will commence operation in the third quarter.

The three WHCs (namely the Chai Wan WHC, Lam Tin WHC, and Tuen Mun WHC) and four designated MCHCs (namely the Ap Lei Chau MCHC, Yaumatei MCHC, Fanling MCHC, and Ma On Shan MCHC) under the DH have ceased accepting new appointments for women's health services since 24 January 2025. During the transition period of service integration, those who have already made appointments or have paid their annual fee and are still within the service period will continue to receive relevant services from the DH.

Regarding EHCs, the PHCC plans to start preparing for the integration of the relevant services into the district health network in phases from 2025-26, with a view to enhancing service synergy and minimising service duplication. The details, including the transitional arrangements, will be announced in due course.

(5)

According to the Pharmacy and Poisons Ordinance (Cap. 138), only "Authorised Sellers of Poisons" (ASP) (commonly referred to as "pharmacies") are allowed to conduct the relevant retail business of selling poisons including poisons listed in Part 1 and Part 2 of the Poisons List at Schedule 10 to the Pharmacy and Poisons Regulation (Cap. 138A). As at 31 December 2024, there are a total of 643 ASP, with 131, 226 and 286 of them located on Hong Kong Island, in Kowloon and in New Territories respectively.

The Government intends to launch the community pharmacy programme (CPP) by phases starting from the fourth quarter of 2026 to help the public to obtain affordable primary healthcare drugs more conveniently and therefore reduce their over-reliance on the public healthcare system. The services of the CPP will cover all 18 districts of Hong Kong, with at least 4 to 5 community pharmacies expected to operate in each district. The Government will, through a competitive process, select service providers that meet the set requirements and cost-effectiveness standard to join the CPP.

Commencement Date of District Health Centres/ District Health Centre Expresses

District Health Centres/ District Health Centre Expresses	Service commencement date
District Health Centres	
Kwai Tsing District Health Centre	24 September 2019
Sham Shui Po District Health Centre	30 June 2021
Tuen Mun District Health Centre	31 May 2022
Wong Tai Sin District Health Centre	30 June 2022
Southern District Health Centre	17 October 2022
Yuen Long District Health Centre	24 October 2022
Tsuen Wan District Health Centre	30 December 2022
District Health Centre Expresses	
Sai Kung District Health Centre Express	1 September 2021
Kowloon City District Health Centre Express	1 October 2021
Yau Tsim Mong District Health Centre Express	1 October 2021
Wan Chai District Health Centre Express	4 October 2021
North District Health Centre Express	18 October 2021
Islands District Health Centre Express	18 October 2021
Kwun Tong District Health Centre Express	21 October 2021
Tai Po District Health Centre Express	22 October 2021
Sha Tin District Health Centre Express	30 October 2021
Central and Western District Health Centre Express	30 October 2021
Eastern District Health Centre Express	30 October 2021

**Overview of persons who have registered for services at
Woman Health Centres and designated Maternal and Child Health Centres and
members of Elderly Health Centres under the Department of Health**

The number of registrants in Woman Health Centres and designated Maternal and Child Health Centres by age group in 2024 is as follows:

	2024									
	Age 20-24	Age 25-29	Age 30-34	Age 35-39	Age 40-44	Age 45-49	Age 50-54	Age 55-59	Age 60-64	Total
Female	8	128	265	472	871	1 308	1 739	1 703	2 128	8 622

The number of members in Elderly Health Centres by age group and sex in 2024 is as follows:

	2024*					
	Age 65-69	Age 70-74	Age 75-79	Age 80-84	Age 85 or over	Total
Male	1 586	4 445	3 354	1 345	1 393	12 123
Female	2 858	7 466	5 296	2 080	2 068	19 768
Total	4 444	11 911	8 650	3 425	3 461	31 891

*Provisional figures

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 11
(Written Reply)

Asked by : Dr Hon CHAN Han-pan

Date of meeting : 26 March 2025

Replied by : Secretary for Development

Reply

President,

Our reply to the various parts of Dr Hon CHAN's question is as follows,

- (1) Currently, short-term tenancies (STTs) are granted by the Lands Department (LandsD) via open tender or direct grant. In relation to direct grant STTs for community, institutional or non-profit making uses, LandsD will proceed to grant the tenancy if the applications receive policy support and are confirmed to comply with statutory or administrative requirements upon consultation with relevant departments. The processing time required for each case varies as the nature of each application may differ.

In the past three years (2022 to 2024), the average processing time (from receipt of a valid application to completion of processing) for direct grant STTs for community, institutional or non-profit making uses is tabulated below -

Direct grant STTs for community, institutional or non-profit making uses			
Year	2022	2023	2024
Average processing time	12.2 months	12.7 months	13.9 months

As for lease modification and land exchange applications involving private land, if applicants accept the provisional basic terms offer (PBTO) issued by LandsD, LandsD will proceed to premium assessment and issue a premium offer. If applicants are not satisfied with the premium offer made by LandsD, they may lodge an appeal and provide supplementary information. The time needed for premium negotiation for each case will vary depending on the complexity of the case, and may be affected by the applicants' business considerations and market outlook.

In the past three years (2022 to 2024), the average time needed for premium negotiation in respect of the approved and executed lease modification and land exchange applications in each year is tabulated below –

Year	2022	2023	2024
Average time needed for premium negotiation for lease modification and land exchange applications	8.5 months	5.8 months	7.8 months

- (2) The vacant government sites currently available for rental applications by non-government organisations have been publicised online. It is noted that most of these sites may not have commercial values, a number of which may be secluded or even without vehicular access or other basic facilities. That said, if any outside organisations are interested in simultaneously renting multiple sites for socially beneficial uses under the “package” arrangement as mentioned by Dr Hon Chan, we are happy to explore further with the relevant organisations.
- (3) In recent years, the Government continuously introduced a number of measures to streamline statutory and administrative procedures with a view to further expediting approval process and removing barriers for development. In terms of premium negotiation procedures, LandsD will maintain close communications with applicants and endeavour to minimise the differences between both parties, such as allowing applicants to provide supplementary information during appeal, having face-to-face exchanges with applicants on various assessment parameters before processing the appeal, etc. There is also a fast-track procedure for applicant’s second or third appeal. If the appeal applications meet the requirements for the relevant fast-track procedures, LandsD will issue premium offer again within 24 working days after receiving the appeal, which will shorten the process of premium negotiation.

Also, to expedite the processing of specific types of lease modification applications, the Government introduced a standard rate approach for charging premium in the past few years, which provides applicants with an alternative option in addition to the conventional assessment mechanism, through promulgating in advance a set of standard rates for providing certainty. For example, apart from the standard rates applicable to the land exchange applications in new development areas (NDAs) under the “Enhanced Conventional New Town Approach” as mentioned, the Government introduced the standard rates for exemption of gross floor area

arising from the adoption of Modular Integrated Construction in end-2022; regularised the standard rates applicable to the redevelopment of aged industrial buildings (IBs) across Hong Kong in end-2023 to provide continued incentive for redevelopment of aged IBs and thereby expedite urban renewal; and rolled out the standard rates arrangement for lease modifications involving development of agricultural land in the New Territories (NT) outside NDAs to unlock the development potentials of agricultural land in NT. The Development Bureau will continue to keep the implementation of standard rates under review, and will further study whether to expand the standard rate approach for charging premium approach in light of implementation experience and relevant policy considerations.

To adopt a facilitating and collaborative mindset as a “facilitator”, LandsD has implemented measures to further expedite the processing of lease modification and land exchange cases. In terms of the approval process, LandsD has already streamlined the local consultation process. For cases where local consultation had already been conducted at the stage of planning application, LandsD will avoid repeated consultation as far as practicable when handling the leases. In addition, prior to consulting relevant bureaux/departments regarding the development projects, LandsD will hold partnership meetings in advance with the applicants on a need basis so as to clarify the key elements of the applications and discuss other potential issues that may need to be tackled with the applicants early, thereby expediting approval process. Also, LandsD will accept requests for advance processing of lease modification and land exchange applications in association with rezoning applications approved by the Town Planning Board under section 12A of the Town Planning Ordinance with a set of development parameters clearly defined/firmed up. This means that there is no need to wait until the whole statutory rezoning procedure is completed before the processing could commence.

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 12

(Written Reply)

Asked by: Hon CHAN Kin-por

Date of meeting: 26 March 2025

Replied by: Secretary for Labour
and Welfare

Reply

President,

As part of Hong Kong's social security system, the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme provides a safety net of last resort for people who cannot support themselves financially due to old age, ill health, disability, single parenthood, unemployment, low earnings or for other reasons to help them meet their basic needs. There are stringent means tests under the CSSA Scheme to ensure that finite public resources are targeted at catering for needy persons.

The CSSA Scheme not only provides cash assistance to needy persons, but also encourages able-bodied recipients with work ability to overcome employment barriers to achieve self-reliance. In April 2020, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) launched the enhanced Employment Support Services (EmSS) by commissioning non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to provide intensive counselling services to recipients, and enhancing the efficacy of NGOs in delivering the relevant services by leveraging the resources of the Labour Department (LD) and the Employees Retraining Board (ERB).

In general, unemployed able-bodied CSSA recipients aged 15 to 59 are required to receive EmSS unless they have justifiable reasons for not being able to work (such as pursuing studies, or having to look after young children, sick or disabled family members at home). EmSS recipients need to comply with a number of obligations, mainly in terms of meeting NGO case managers and seeking employment continuously, failing which will result in CSSA stoppage

for the relevant recipient and his/her household. Unemployed able-bodied CSSA recipients aged 60 to 64 may receive EmSS on a voluntary basis.

I reply to the four parts of the question raised by Member as follows:

- (1) The number of unemployed CSSA recipients and their average duration of receiving CSSA in 2023-24 and 2024-25 are set out in **Table 1** at **Annex**. The number of low-earning CSSA recipients and their average duration of receiving CSSA in 2023-24 and 2024-25 are set out in **Table 2** at **Annex**.
- (2) The five-and-a-half year EmSS contract period will end in September 2025. During the contract period (i.e., from 1 April 2020
- (4) to 30 September 2025), NGOs are required to assist at least 25% of the unemployed able-bodied EmSS recipients to secure employment or return to mainstream education for at least one month, and at least 20% of these recipients to do the same for at least three months. As at 31 December 2024, these percentages stood at 23.1% and 18.2% respectively, which were close to meeting the performance requirements. SWD will continue to closely monitor the NGOs' service performance in the remainder of the contract period (i.e., January to September 2025).

Taking into account the past experience of EmSS, public views on EmSS as well as the labour market situation in recent years, SWD will replace EmSS with the Support Programme for the Unemployed (SPU) starting October 2025. The SPU will be operated on a pilot basis for two years by NGOs and/or other organisations. All unemployed able-bodied CSSA recipients aged 15 to 59 will be mandated to participate in the SPU and take up unpaid work on a weekly basis arranged by the SPU operators, until they have secured gainful employment or returned to mainstream education. Incompliance with the unpaid work requirement will result in CSSA stoppage for the participant and his/her household. SWD expects the SPU to be more effective in motivating the unemployed able-bodied CSSA recipients to connect with the community, develop a work habit and accumulate work experience to enhance employability, thereby reducing their reliance on CSSA in the long term. Meanwhile, SPU

participants will continue to have access to a range of free employment services and training resources as well as relevant training allowances provided by LD and ERB.

SPU operators are required to identify and arrange participants to take up unpaid work on a weekly basis in accordance with SWD's requirements. SWD is in the process of ironing out specific implementation details of the SPU, and organisations interested in operating the SPU will be invited to submit proposals in due course. SWD will collect data on participants' compliance and CSSA stoppage during the SPU implementation for assessing its operation and evaluating its effectiveness.

Table 1 Number of unemployed CSSA recipients ^{Note 1} and their average duration of receiving CSSA in 2023-24 and 2024-25

Year	Number of unemployed CSSA recipients	Average duration of receiving CSSA (year)
2023-24	17 295	8.0
2024-25 ^{Note 2}	16 492	8.3

Table 2 Number of low-earning CSSA recipients ^{Note 1} and their average duration of receiving CSSA in 2023-24 and 2024-25

Year	Number of low-earning CSSA recipients	Average duration of receiving CSSA (year)
2023-24	2 990	10.2
2024-25 ^{Note 2}	2 740	10.4

^{Note 1} Unemployed or low-earning CSSA recipients may have received CSSA previously for other reasons (such as ill health or single parenthood); not all of these recipients have been receiving CSSA due to unemployment or low earnings all along.

^{Note 2} As at end December 2024.

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 13

(Written Reply)

Asked by
Hon Martin LIAO

Date of meeting : 26 March 2025

Replied by : Secretary for Innovation,
Technology and Industry

Reply

President,

In respect of the question raised by the Hon Martin LIAO, my reply is as follows:

- (1) The Innovation, Technology and Industry Bureau and the Innovation and Technology Commission are currently preparing for setting up the \$10 billion Innovation and Technology Industry-Oriented Fund (ITIF) to channel more market capital to invest in emerging and future industries of strategic importance. According to our current plan, the ITIF will cover five thematic areas, and one or more sub-fund(s) will be set up under each thematic area. Each sub-fund will have a fund duration of up to 12 years, fully realising the characteristics of patient capital which focuses on long-term investments with a higher risk tolerance. This will contribute to the on-going support for the growth, expansion and maturity of the innovation & technology (I&T) industry.

The Government will participate as a Limited Partner of the sub-funds and make contributions to each. Fund managers selected through an open application will become General Partners of the sub-funds and shall be responsible for setting up the sub-funds in the form of a limited partnership fund. They shall also raise market capital for the sub-funds, manage the daily operation of the sub-funds, as well as invest in suitable projects in accordance with the investment framework.

Based on a market-oriented operation, we hope that fund managers will leverage their professional investment capabilities to identify I&T enterprises of high potential, conduct comprehensive evaluations, and make reasonable investment decisions in compliance with relevant investment requirements. This will provide appropriate financial support to I&T enterprises and promote the long-term development of the related industries.

- (2) The Digital Policy Office (DPO) is committed to driving various bureaux/departments (B/Ds) in the adoption of I&T to enhance operational efficiency and improve public services. The DPO also provides advice and consultancy services to various B/Ds in areas such as digital technology and innovative technology applications, data sharing, business process re-engineering, design thinking, change management, etc., with a view to accelerating the development of digital government, thereby continuously enhancing government efficiency and service quality.

In respect of promoting e-government services, all licences and government services involving application and approval (about 1 480 items in total) and forms (over 3 800) have been fully digitalised by mid-2024, i.e. enabling submission of application, payment and collection of documents by electronic means for relevant licences and services. If in-person submission or collection of documents is required by law or international practice, applicants will only need to visit relevant government offices no more than once.

In 2024-25, through the “Be the Smart Regulator” and “Streamlining of Government Services” programmes, the DPO worked with 47 B/Ds in proposing some 180 business facilitation and streamlining measures for about 400 licences and services, such as obviating the need for businesses and general public to submit information repeatedly for their licence and government service applications by leveraging cross-departmental data exchange, and shortening the time required for handling and approving applications by automating the verification processes, etc.

In addition, B/Ds are rolling out over a hundred of digital government and smart city initiatives progressively, including the application of artificial intelligence (AI) and chatbot technologies to improve government hotline services; application of data analytics, geospatial analysis and visualisation dashboard technologies to improve service management; and adoption of video analytics to enhance security surveillance at public cargo working areas.

- (3) High-quality data are essential for promoting the training of large language models (LLMs), research and development (R&D) of industry-specific vertical LLMs, and industry applications. The Government has all along been implementing the open data policy and actively encouraging public and private organisations to open up more data for innovative applications by the industries. Currently, the Open Data Portal has published over 5 500 datasets, covering various industries and sectors including finance, education, transportation, community and social welfare, law and security, etc. The Common Spatial Data Infrastructure has also published over 1 000 spatial datasets, covering different aspects such as planning, lands, buildings, transport. These two platforms help the industry develop more and better industry-specific vertical LLMs and innovative solutions by leveraging the datasets and integrating them with LLMs, industry data and technologies available in the market. Meanwhile, the facilitation measure on the “Standard Contract for the Cross-boundary Flow of Personal Information Within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (Mainland, Hong Kong)” has been extended to all industries to further promote more cross-boundary services to benefit the public and businesses, while facilitating data flow in the Greater Bay Area (GBA) and expediting the development of digital economy and smart city.

In addition, the Hong Kong Artificial Intelligence Research and Development Institute, to be established as announced by the 2025-26 Budget, will also spearhead and support Hong Kong’s innovative R&D and industrial application of AI, and facilitate upstream R&D, midstream and downstream transformation of R&D outcomes and application scenarios of AI.

- (4) The Government has been co-ordinating and promoting the development and application of information and communications technology, including AI, with Guangdong through the Hong Kong / Guangdong Expert Group on Co-operation in Informatisation (EGCI). The EGCI will strengthen the co-operation between Guangdong and Hong Kong in AI R&D, outcome transformation and application development, and implement co-operation initiatives to complement the development of the GBA into an international technology innovation centre.

Besides, the two I&T flagships in Hong Kong (viz. the Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation and Cyberport) have been actively expanding their partnership network in the GBA to assist enterprises in respective technology parks to expand their businesses in the GBA and attract enterprises in the region to set up operations in the parks. Taking Qianhai as an example, Cyberport signed a co-operation agreement with the Qianhai Authority in January 2021 and deepened the co-operation agreement in August 2024. So far, two enterprises from Qianhai have settled in Cyberport, including one focusing on AI animation production. In addition, about 10 Cyberport enterprises are exploring to set up businesses in Qianhai, and nearly half of them are related to AI including start-ups that apply AI in education technology, e-commerce and insurance technology. On the other hand, the Hong Kong Science Park Shenzhen Branch commenced operation in 2023 to enable institutes and enterprises interested in starting their business in the GBA to establish a presence there. As of December 2024, a total of 58 enterprises and R&D centres were admitted, with approximately 40 of them involved in AI-related businesses.

The Hetao Shenzhen-Hong Kong Science and Technology Co-operation Zone is one of the major co-operation platforms in the GBA. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government promulgated the Development Outline for the Hong Kong Park of the Hetao Shenzhen-Hong Kong Science and Technology Innovation Co-operation Zone (the Development Outline) in November 2024, setting out the vision and mission, planning, development directions, strategies and targets of the Hong

Kong Park. As set out in the Development Outline, the Hong Kong Park will focus on the development of core frontier technological fields including AI; strengthen the supporting infrastructure required for the development of AI technologies; and establish a cross-boundary data flow management mechanism, so as to attract Mainland and overseas enterprises engaging in AI to Loop to set up and expand their businesses therein.

- End -

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 14

(Written Reply)

Asked by Hon Paul TSE

Date of meeting: 26 March 2025

Replied by: Secretary for Health

Reply:

President,

The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region is committed to complementing technological innovation with institutional innovation. Through a series of measures such as the setting up of the Hong Kong Centre for Medical Products Regulation for the purpose of implementing the “primary evaluation” and the establishment of the Greater Bay Area Clinical Trial Collaboration Platform, the Government has been enhancing Hong Kong’s drug and medical device approval and clinical trial capabilities on all fronts, facilitating the translation of biomedical research results into clinical applications, expediting patients’ access to advanced diagnostic and treatment services, and fostering new quality productive forces in biomedical technology, thereby promoting Hong Kong’s development into an international health and medical innovation hub.

However, innovative medical products must be scientifically proven, including via clinical trials, with the support of reliable data to ascertain their safety and efficacy, and also compared with known standards before they may be approved for registration or made available for clinical application by healthcare professionals like medical practitioners. Clinical trials should be distinguished from clinical services – the former should not be arbitrarily marketed as clinical services before reaching their primary endpoints with analysed results. Currently, Hong Kong has implemented the Medical Device Administrative Control System, and the use of medical devices is subject to the clinical decisions of healthcare professionals like medical practitioners. The Health Bureau is expediting the study on legislating for the statutory regulation of medical devices for approval and registration purposes. Citizens who need to seek medical services due to illnesses should consult professionals including medical practitioners, and should not be influenced by other online advertisements or publicity through endorsements.

Multiple effective treatment methods for liver cancer are now available, including surgical local liver resection, minimally invasive local treatment (such as radiofrequency ablation, microwave ablation, stereotactic body radiation therapy (SBRT in short)), interventional therapy, anti-cancer drugs (such as chemotherapy, targeted therapy, immunotherapy), or a combination of the above therapies, while some liver cancer patients may also need and are suitable for liver transplantation. All these therapies are available in the public healthcare system. Medical teams of the Hospital Authority (“HA”) will provide appropriate treatment options according to individual patients’ actual clinical conditions (such as cancer pathological classification and staging, tumour size and location, presence of extrahepatic metastasis, liver function grading, and the patient’s physical condition etc.).

As for the histotripsy medical device in question, it is a new technology in minimally invasive local treatment which is now undergoing clinical trials for local treatment of liver cancer. Its scope of application under research is limited to early primary small liver cancer (such as hepatocellular carcinoma, cholangiocarcinoma, neuroendocrine tumours) and locally treatable metastatic liver tumours. Not all liver cancer patients are suitable for this new therapy. Moreover, the US Food and Drug Administration’s approval for this device as a new option for liver-directed therapy was based on animal model experiments as well as clinical trial data with postoperative complications and short-term (30-day) tumour ablation rate as primary endpoints to support the safety and efficacy of this therapy. The clinical trials have neither provided data on long-term local tumour recurrence / metastasis rates and patient survival rates, nor compared the therapy with existing standard minimally invasive local treatments. In this connection, this new therapy can be regarded as another new technological option for liver-directed minimally invasive local treatment at this very stage, yet its comparability or even superiority requires further clinical evidence. Attending medical practitioners have the responsibility to provide patients with recommendations on various appropriate treatment options including their benefits and risks in view of the best interests of the patients, especially when other existing standard treatment options that have been scientifically proven to be safe and effective are suitable for the patients’ conditions. Inappropriate use of new technologies that have not yet been proven to be more effective may result in patients missing the opportunity for adopting existing standard treatment options.

The HA will be considering the safety and efficacy of the relevant device for the Asian population (especially for Hong Kong patients) subject to the evaluation of data to be obtained from clinical trials. The comparability and superiority of this new therapy in clinical use vis-à-vis existing standard treatment options still need to be ascertained through more clinical trials. Furthermore, the cost of consumables under this therapy is higher than that of existing standard minimally invasive local treatments (such as radiofrequency ablation). At this stage, there is no plan for the HA to introduce this therapy into its clinical service. The HA wishes to emphasise that this therapy is not the only option available to liver cancer patients, and thus there is no issue of public hospital patients “missing out treatment opportunities”. As for private hospitals which have introduced this device for research or services, the attending medical practitioners will need to make clinical decisions based on their professional judgment on whether or not to use this new technology as the most appropriate treatment for patients.

In response to the various parts of the question raised by the Honourable Paul TSE, our reply in consultation with the Department of Health (“DH”) and the HA is as follows –

(1) Based on the available data from the DH and the Hong Kong Cancer Registry of the HA, the number of new cases and registered deaths for liver cancer in the past three years are tabulated below –

Year	Number of New Cases	Number of Registered Deaths
2020	1 735	1 530
2021	1 771	1 447
2022	1 612	1 412

(2) and (3) Whether in public or private hospitals, clinical trials carry a certain degree of risk to the participants and should be conducted by registered healthcare professionals after informing the participants of the associated risks and obtaining their explicit informed consent. At present, even though there is no statutory provision prohibiting healthcare professionals from using new medical devices on patients, healthcare professionals have the professional responsibility to act in the best interests of patients when providing treatment, and ensure that all clinical trials are conducted with the explicit informed consent of patients.

At present, private hospitals must comply with a series of requirements including those under the Private Healthcare Facilities Ordinance (Cap. 633) (“the Ordinance”) and the Code of Practice for Private Hospitals (“the Code of Practice”) when conducting clinical research (including clinical trials).

Pursuant to the Ordinance, the licensee of a private hospital must appoint a chief medical executive to take charge of the day-to-day administration of the facility, as well as establish and keep in operation a Medical Advisory Committee (“MAC”); on the other hand, the Code of Practice stipulates that the MAC provides advice to the licensee on whether to permit the introduction of new clinical techniques. Apart from the latest medical evidence on the safety and efficacy of the clinical technique concerned, factors including the equipment required as well as training and clinical experience of healthcare and other supporting clinical staff must also be considered. Both the licensee and the chief medical executive of a private hospital have the responsibility to ensure that the advice of the MAC is properly implemented.

The Code of Practice also stipulates that equipment (including medical devices) used in private hospitals should be appropriately procured and properly installed, operated, maintained and calibrated in accordance with the manufacturer’s recommendations. Staff using the medical devices should receive training on the safe and proper use of the relevant devices. For conducting clinical research, private hospitals are required to establish relevant policies, set up ethics committees for monitoring, and comply with the requirements of the Code of Professional Conduct for the Guidance of Registered Medical Practitioners issued by the Medical Council of Hong Kong regarding clinical research and other applicable laws.

Compliance with the Ordinance and the Code of Practice is a condition for issuance and renewal of licence for private hospitals. Private hospitals that fail to comply with the relevant requirements may face regulatory actions.

(4) The HA has established robust mechanisms for evaluating and deciding on the introduction of new drugs, devices and other innovative treatments for public healthcare services. The safety of the treatment methods, whether there is sufficient evidence supporting their therapeutic effectiveness, the cost-effectiveness of such introduction, as well as comprehensive comparisons with

existing treatment services have to be considered. When making consideration according to these mechanisms, the HA must ensure fairness and objectivity as well as prudent use of public resources. Also, the consideration process will not and should not be influenced by whether the treatment method is provided or sponsored by individual pharmaceutical or device manufacturers.

The HA will closely monitor medical technology developments, with experts regularly studying and reviewing treatment options for patients and the latest developments in clinical and scientific evidence of related technologies, while considering healthcare professionals' opinions and overseas developments to plan for the introduction of medical technologies. Meanwhile, the availability of relevant expertise, manpower and facilities, as well as complementarity with government policy directions, will also be taken into account. The application in the public healthcare system of new drugs and medical devices, and methods for treatment that are still in the clinical trial phase without sufficient clinical data should be handled in a very careful and prudent manner.

- End -

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 15
(Written Reply)

Asked by : Dr Hon NGAN Man-yu

Date of meeting : 26 March 2025

Replied by : Secretary for Security

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the Labour Department (LD) and the Immigration Department (ImmD), my reply is as follows:

- (1) In accordance with the prevailing foreign domestic helper (FDH) policy of the Government, a FDH shall leave Hong Kong upon completion of employment contract or within two weeks from the date of contract termination, whichever is the earlier. The main purpose of this “two-week rule” is to allow sufficient time for FDHs to prepare for their departure, during which they are not allowed to take up any employment, whether paid or unpaid.

FDHs will only be allowed to extend their stay in Hong Kong as visitors in exceptional circumstances. Such exceptional circumstances include where a FDH has to attend a tribunal hearing because of labour or monetary disputes, and where a FDH has to remain in Hong Kong to assist in criminal investigations, etc. In this connection, the FDH is required to submit an application for extension of stay to ImmD. He/She must provide supporting documents (e.g. documents issued by LD or the Labour Tribunal to prove that his/her labour dispute case has been accepted or is being processed) before the application will be considered. The duration of extension of stay granted will be determined based on the relevant purpose of stay and individual circumstances. ImmD will continue to exercise stringent gate-keeping and thoroughly examine every application from FDHs for extension of stay in Hong Kong as visitors.

After leaving Hong Kong, these FDHs may re-enter Hong Kong as visitors, no different from other visitors.

Under the Immigration Ordinance (Cap. 115), any person (including FDH) who takes up any employment, whether paid or unpaid, in

contravention of the condition of stay during his/her stay in Hong Kong as a visitor shall be guilty of an offence. Upon conviction, he/she is liable to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and up to two years' imprisonment.

- (2) The statistics on the number of applications received by ImmD for extension of stay in Hong Kong as visitors in the past three years are tabulated below:

Year	2022	2023	2024
Number of applications (applications involving FDHs)	684 096 (7 673)	334 861 (5 506)	303 385 (7 625)
Number of approved applications (applications involving FDHs)	635 104 (4 710)	314 240 (3 898)	278 537 (6 153)
Number of rejected applications (applications involving FDHs)	9 216 (2 690)	4 339 (1 445)	2 808 (1 235)

Note 1: Applications processed in a year may not totally be those received in the same year.

Note 2: The figures only reflect the number of applications but not the actual number of applicants. An applicant may apply for extension of stay more than once.

ImmD does not maintain other statistical breakdowns mentioned in the question.

- (3) and (4) As mentioned above, under the prevailing policy, FDHs will be allowed to extend their stay in Hong Kong as visitors only under exceptional circumstances, and during the extended stay, they are not allowed to take up any employment. We will keep reviewing the relevant policy to ensure its continued effectiveness.

The Government has been adopting a multi-pronged strategy, including increase in penalty, strict law enforcement, and conducting publicity and education, so as to combat illegal employment (including FDHs taking up

illegal employment during their stay in Hong Kong as visitors). Details are as follows:

(i) Increase in penalty

It is a serious offence to engage in illegal employment. Illegal workers, employers as well as aiders and abettors of illegal employment will be liable to prosecution in accordance with the Immigration Ordinance. The Government amended the Immigration Ordinance in 2021 by increasing the penalty on employers of illegal workers so as to reflect the gravity of the offence. Under the amended Immigration Ordinance, the maximum penalty for an employer employing a person who is not lawfully employable, i.e. an illegal immigrant, a person who is the subject of a removal order or a deportation order, an overstayer, or a person who was refused permission to land, has been significantly increased from a fine of \$350,000 and three years' imprisonment to a fine of \$500,000 and ten years' imprisonment. The High Court has laid down sentencing guidelines that the employer of an illegal worker should be given an immediate custodial sentence.

(ii) Strict law enforcement

Various law enforcement agencies (LEAs) (including ImmD, Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF) and LD) have been proactively collecting intelligence and conducting joint operations to raid establishments suspected of having illegal employment activities in order to combat the employment of illegal workers.

To specifically tackle FDHs in breach of condition of stay and the relevant employers' violations, ImmD will timely conduct various special operations to raid the black spots of illegal employment according to intelligence. Apart from prosecuting FDHs in breach of condition of stay, ImmD will also take enforcement actions against intermediaries or agents that aid and abet these FDHs.

According to ImmD's record, the number of law enforcement operations against illegal workers (including joint operations with other departments including HKPF, etc.) in the past three years is tabulated below:

Year	Number of operations
2022	15 759
2023	17 248
2024	17 906
2025 (as at February)	2 863

Besides, when conducting regular workplace inspections to enforce labour laws, LD will check employees' proof of identity and records of employees kept by employers under the power conferred by Part IVB of the Immigration Ordinance to deter employers from employing illegal workers. Cases of suspected illegal employment detected will be referred to relevant LEAs for follow-up. The number of referrals by LD in the past three years is as follows:

Year	Number of suspected illegal employment cases referred to relevant LEAs
2022	99
2023	123
2024	137
2025 (as at end of February)	25

The numbers of FDHs arrested, prosecuted and convicted for illegal employment in the past three years are tabulated below:

Year	FDHs[^]		
	Arrested	Prosecuted	Convicted
2022	318	242	224
2023	415	343	318
2024	326	267	216
2025 (as at February)	47	35	23

[^] Refers to FDHs or overstaying former FDHs at the time of arrest
Note: Persons prosecuted/convicted may not be arrested/prosecuted in the same year.

(iii) Publicity and education

In addition to sparing no effort to take law enforcement actions, the Government has all along been and will continue to actively cooperate with the relevant Consulates-General in Hong Kong to step up publicity and education for newly arrived FDHs about the fact that illegal employment in Hong Kong is a serious offence liable to imprisonment. LD also promulgated the revised Code of Practice for Employment Agencies in May 2024, requiring employment agencies to thoroughly brief FDH job seekers on FDH-related immigration regulations.

ImmD does not maintain other statistical breakdowns mentioned in the question.

- End -

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 16

(Written Reply)

Asked by: Hon LAM Chun-sing

Date of meeting: 26 March 2025

Replied by: Secretary for Labour
and Welfare

Reply

President,

The Labour Department (LD) launched the “Pilot Rehabilitation Programme for Employees Injured at Work” (“Pilot Programme”) in September 2022. The Pilot Programme adopts a case management approach to provide timely and coordinated private out-patient rehabilitation treatment services for participating injured employees to facilitate their early recovery and return to work. Starting from 9 May 2024, the industry coverage of the Pilot Programme has been expanded to the “catering and hotel industry” and the “transportation and logistics industry” in addition to the original construction industry, with the aim of benefiting more injured employees.

My reply to the Hon LAM Chun-sing’s question is as follows:

- (1) As at February 2025, the Work Injury Rehabilitation Office (WIRO) set up by service contractor of the Pilot Programme comprises a total of 10 administrative and professional staff, 11 case managers and 3 clerical staff. They are responsible for arranging and co-ordinating the rehabilitation treatment services provided under the Pilot Programme, providing case management and return-to-work facilitation services to participants as well as monitoring and administering the day-to-day operation of the Pilot Programme.

Each Pilot Programme participant is assigned with a case manager who will follow up the case and provide support until the employee’s injury has reached maximum medical improvement (i.e. recovered) and the employee has returned to work, or until two months after the employee

has recovered, whichever is earlier. As at February 2025, a total of 1 803 admitted cases have been or are being followed up by the 11 case managers of WIRO, which means each case manager has managed about 160 cases on average.

- (2)&(3) According to the Employees' Compensation Ordinance (ECO), an employer must notify the Commissioner for Labour of any work accident within 14 days after the accident occurs or after it comes to his knowledge. LD and WIRO will, based on the reported work injury cases, preliminarily identify injured employees who are suitable for the Pilot Programme, proactively invite them to participate in the Pilot Programme and arrange interviews to ascertain their eligibility for and willingness to participate in the Pilot Programme. Thereafter, the case manager will schedule an appointment for the employee to meet with the case doctor. Once the case doctor ascertains after clinical assessment that the employee's injury is suitable for treatment under the Pilot Programme, the relevant rehabilitation treatment will begin immediately. The injuries of the participants mainly involve contusion / bruise, sprain / strain and fracture, etc., accounting for about 80% of all cases.

As at February 2025, a total of 1 803 injured employees participated in the Pilot Programme. The relevant admission rates (Table 1) and time required for first medical consultation (Table 2) are as follows:

Table 1

	2022	2023	2024			2025 (as at February)		
Industry [#]	(a)	(a)	(a)	(b)	(c)	(a)	(b)	(c)
(i) Reported work injury cases*	4 466	3 291	3 273	4 570	3 053	375	615	435
(ii) Cases preliminarily identified as suitable for participation in the Pilot Programme	697 [^]	2 498	1 717	586 [@]	656 [@]	148	121	102
(iii) Admitted cases and rate (iii/ii)	131 (19%)	524 (21%)	470 (27%)	250 (43%)	273 (42%)	52 (35%)	55 (45%)	48 (47%)

- # (a)-construction industry ; (b)-catering and hotel industry ; (c)-transportation and logistics industry
- * Numbers of non-fatal employees' compensation claims involving incapacitation of employees for more than 3 days as a result of work injuries reported under ECO and received by LD
- ^ The Pilot Programme was launched on 23 September 2022
- @ The Pilot Programme was expanded to the “catering and hotel industry” and the “transportation and logistics industry” on 9 May 2024

Table 2

Time from Preliminary Identification to First Medical Consultation	Construction Industry	Catering and Hotel Industry	Transportation and Logistics Industry	Number of Participants (Rate)
7 days or below	483	93	92	668 (37%)
Above 7 days to 14 days	502	135	147	784 (43%)
Above 14 days to 21 days	105	49	43	197 (11%)
Above 21 days	87	28	39	154 (9%)
Total	1 177	305	321	1 803

- (4) LD has conducted a preliminary evaluation on the first two years of operation of the Pilot Programme (i.e. from September 2022 to September 2024), and compared the data of the injured construction employees participating in the Pilot Programme against that of the injured construction employees who sustained similar work injuries but did not participate in the Programme. The findings show that the participants had a higher rate (75% vs 62%) of reaching maximum medical improvement (i.e. recovered) upon treatment during the evaluation period and the median time required for recovery was also shorter (123 days vs 192 days), which met the objective of the Pilot Programme. Besides, the majority of participants were satisfied with the case management and rehabilitation treatment services provided under the Pilot Programme. Since many cases in the “catering and hotel industry” and the

“transportation and logistics industry” are still being followed up, LD will analyse the participants from these two industries in the future evaluation.

- (5) Under the Pilot Programme, if participants have not returned to work within two months after recovery, the case manager will obtain updates on their return-to-work (RTW) status in the subsequent three months. As at February 2025, a total of 1 354 employees’ injuries have reached maximum medical improvement upon treatment (i.e. recovered). Their RTW status is as follows:

Return-to-work status		Construc- tion Industry	Catering and Hotel Industry	Transport- ation and Logistics Industry	Aggregate figures
Perform same type of work*	Number of Participants (Rate)	388 (43%)	107 (51%)	131 (57%)	626 (46%)
Perform other types of work*	Number of Participants (Rate)	78 (9%)	7 (3%)	17 (7%)	102 (8%)
RTW status still being followed up	Number of Participants (Rate)	106 (12%)	71 (34%)	59 (26%)	236 (17%)
Yet to RTW as at the end of follow-up	Number of Participants (Rate)	254 (28%)	14 (7%)	21 (9%)	289 (21%)
Unable to contact for RTW follow-up	Number of Participants (Rate)	86 (9%)	12 (6%)	3 (1%)	101 (7%)
Total		912	211	231	1 354

* Irrespective of employment with the original or a different employer

In cases where participants have not returned to work during the follow-up period, the majority cited personal reasons (such as considering themselves not yet suitable to resume work or preferring to take more rest), followed by medical considerations (such as undergoing treatment

for other injuries), while some were in search for a job or on work trial, etc.

- (6) As at February 2025, WIRO received 232 enquiries mainly seeking information on the Pilot Programme's content and eligibility for participation. There were also three complaints that mainly concerned the performance of individual rehabilitation professional or case manager.
- (7) LD has no plan to expand the Pilot Programme to more industries at present. LD will continue to closely monitor the operation of the Pilot Programme, collect relevant information and data for analysis and evaluation, draw conclusion from the experiences gained during the implementation of the Pilot Programme and its effectiveness, and consider the direction for future development based on the results.

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 17
(Written Reply)

Asked by Prof Hon William WONG

Date of meeting : 26 March 2025

Replied by : Secretary for Education

Reply

President,

The Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (HKDSE) is a widely recognised academic qualification in Hong Kong and abroad. Apart from using the HKDSE results for further studies or employment in Hong Kong, candidates can apply for direct admission to non-local universities or post-secondary institutions. Post-secondary institutions worldwide accept applications from students using their HKDSE results. More than 1 000 of them have published their entry requirements for HKDSE holders on the website of the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) and the number of overseas institutions doing so is steadily increasing. The reply to the question raised by Prof Hon William WONG is set out below:

(1) In the past three years, there were 11 (2023), 52 (2024) and 77 (2025) cases in which applications from persons outside Hong Kong for entry to the HKDSE as private candidates were rejected. It is because the applicants concerned failed to meet the requirements of the examination regulations of the HKDSE for private candidates.

As at 18 March 2025, there were a total of 199 cases for review of the application for the 2025 HKDSE by persons outside Hong Kong, of which 169 were successful, with the vast majority involving the submission of additional supplementary information. For the 2024 HKDSE, there was only one case for review of the application by a person outside Hong Kong, which was successful. There was no application for review for the 2023 HKDSE.

(2) In the past three years, the Education Bureau has not received any requests for assistance or complaints relating to training programmes for the HKDSE conducted outside Hong Kong.

(3) The entry qualifications for the HKDSE are categorised into school candidates and private candidates. School candidates should be bona fide Secondary 6 (or Secondary 6 equivalent) students of the HKDSE “Participating Schools” and studying at the registered address of the schools as per the record of the HKEAA. If a school for Hong Kong children / Hong Kong and Macao children in the Greater Bay Area in the Mainland

intends to become a HKDSE “Participating School”, for recommending its bona fide Secondary 6 students to sit for the HKDSE as school candidates, it has to obtain the approval of the relevant Mainland authorities and the consent of the HKEAA. In order to meet the requirements for the implementation of the Hong Kong curriculum, the schools concerned must make complementary efforts in terms of the quality of teaching and learning and the administration of the senior secondary schools. It should also be fully accredited by, among others, the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic & Vocational Qualifications on its curriculum and operation to demonstrate that it is comparable to a registered school in Hong Kong before it can apply to the HKEAA to become a “Participating School” in the HKDSE. Since there is already a well-established system for schools to become “Participating Schools” in the HKDSE, the Education Bureau does not consider it necessary to set up other accreditation system for the HKDSE programmes outside Hong Kong at this stage.

LEGCO QUESTION NO.18
(Written Reply)

Asked by : Dr Hon Starry LEE

Date of meeting : 26 March 2025

Replied by : Secretary for Culture,
Sports and Tourism

Reply

President,

The Kai Tak Development Area, spanning a total planning area of over 320 hectares, features a mix of community, housing, business, tourism and infrastructural uses. The Kai Tak Sports Park (KTSP), Kai Tak Cruise Terminal (KTCT) and “Youth Post” hostel are all situated in the area. KTSP is the largest sports infrastructure project in Hong Kong’s history, which boosts sports development and injects impetus into related industries such as recreation, entertainment and tourism, and mega-event economy. KTCT is an infrastructure built for berthing large cruise ships, bringing cruise passengers to Hong Kong from around the world. To expand spaces and network for youths, the 2024 Policy Address announced that the Home and Youth Affairs Bureau (HYAB) will convert the Kai Tak Community Isolation Facility into a youth development facility, which includes setting up a “Youth Post” hostel and creating spaces for youth cultural, arts and sports exchanges (“Youth Post” hostel), with a view to promoting mutual exchange among Mainland, overseas and local young people, and creating spaces to stimulate creativity.

In consultation with the Development Bureau (DEVB), HYAB and Transport and Logistics Bureau (TLB), the consolidated reply to the question raised by the Dr Hon Starry LEE is as follows:

(1) and (3)

In preparing the work plans for KTSP and KTCT, the Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau (CSTB) will consider how the two major infrastructures could complement each other, with a view to creating synergies by fully leveraging the respective facilities.

KTSP provides Hong Kong with diversified as well as the largest and state-of-the-art venues for hosting various sports and entertainment events and offers a one-stop sports, leisure, catering and shopping experience for citizens and tourists. With its official commissioning on 1 March, KTSP will become a new hub for hosting major sports and entertainment events, creating favourable conditions for further promoting the mega-event economy. KTSP will attract tourists to spend in Hong Kong by hosting various large-scale sports, culture or entertainment events, and provide cruise passengers with more options for onshore activities. Hotels in the vicinity of KTSP will also offer an additional choice of accommodation for travellers (including cruise passengers before or after their voyages). CSTB, in collaboration with the cruise industry through the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB), has also developed a new shore excursion itinerary in Kowloon East covering KTSP, the “Live out the Cinematic Charm of Hong Kong – Twilight of the Warriors: Walled In Exhibition” being held at AIRSIDE shopping mall in Kai Tak, Kowloon Walled City Park, Chi Lin Nunnery and Nan Lian Garden, offering tourists with a greater variety of shore excursions.

On the other hand, CSTB will further use KTCT for other commercial purposes, such as conventions, exhibitions and activities. In particular, we hope to utilise spaces within the terminal during non-peak season when fewer cruise ships are at berth, with a view to elevating the function of KTCT as a cruise terminal for all. Specifically and amongst others, through HKTB, the terminal has been selected as the venue of the prestigious global cocktail award ceremony “The World’s 50 Best Bars” scheduled to be held in October this year.

In respect of “Youth Post” hostel, HYAB issued a tender document on 20 December 2024 to select, through open tender, a suitable organisation for operating the youth facility under a short-term tenancy. HYAB is assessing the tenders received, including proposals from applicant organisations on how they will set up and operate the youth facility. HYAB expects that the assessment and award of tender will be completed in the first half of 2025, and the concerned facility will progressively begin its operation within 2025. HYAB has required the applicant organisations to submit, in their tenders, proposals on how to operate and utilise “Youth Post” hostel. Upon the award of tender, HYAB will further discuss with

the awarded tenderer on ways to better utilise “Youth Post” hostel and other relevant facilitation and publicity measures, including collaboration arrangements between the awarded tenderer and relevant government departments and/or organisations, with a view to promoting mutual exchange among Mainland, overseas and local young people as well as youth development. CSTB is also in close communication with HYAB regarding the collaboration between “Youth Post” hostel and KTCT. After the tender is awarded, we will further connect the awarded tenderer of “Youth Post” hostel with the respective operators of KTCT and KTSP fully commissioned recently to explore further opportunities.

In addition to KTSP, there are a few large retail facilities within the Kai Tak Development Area near Kai Tak MTR Station. A harbourfront promenade will also be constructed connecting KTSP and KTCT, not only providing a panoramic view of Victoria Harbour, but also clusters of retail and dining outlets. CSTB will channel operators of the concerned facilities to explore ways to provide greater convenience and enhanced experience to cruise visitors, boost business opportunities of KTCT, and attract citizens and tourists to the area. Seizing the opportunities brought by the gradual intake of nearby residential developments, CSTB will invite Expression of Interest for the whole ancillary commercial area and rooftop park of KTCT to revitalise the spaces in KTCT. Interested vendors and organisations are welcome to submit feasible proposals including but not limited to conventional retail business.

- (2) Currently, there are 4 franchised bus routes and 1 green minibus route servicing KTCT, connecting Kai Tak MTR Station, a number of MTR stations in the vicinity, the West Kowloon High Speed Rail Station, as well as the Yau Tsim Mong area. The franchised bus services concerned also connect KTCT with KTSP, facilitating intra-district travel by tourists and citizens. “Youth Post” hostel under planning is adjacent to KTCT. The Government will build a pedestrian crossing between the two facilities to facilitate the use of relevant public transport services by residents and visitors of “Youth Post” hostel.

The Transport Department has already planned to introduce two new franchised bus routes servicing KTCT, i.e. Citybus Route 20X and Route 22S, providing express services to Hung Hom and Tsim Sha Tsui direct and connecting services to and from the Kai Tak MTR Station respectively.

They will come into service at an appropriate juncture subject to the progress of development and population intake of the Kai Tak Runway Area. The Government will continue to closely monitor the development progress of various projects in the Kai Tak Development Area and plan appropriate public transport services to meet the travelling needs of the public and tourists.

Moreover, TLB is implementing the Smart and Green Mass Transit System in Kai Tak (the Project) in full swing for connecting the Kai Tak former runway area to the Kai Tak MTR Station, thereby strengthening connectivity of the residential and commercial developments, tourism, culture and recreation, sports and community facilities within the area, as well as the connection with the railway network. The Project proposes to have stations at KTCT (adjacent to “Youth Post” hostel), Kai Tak Sky Garden, the proposed Kai Tak Metro Park, KTSP and Kai Tak Station Square, etc., facilitating the citizens and tourists to access various parts and facilities along the Kai Tak former runway area. TLB targets to invite tender for the Project in the second half of 2025 for awarding the contract in 2026.

- (4) As one of the four strategies set out in the Development Blueprint for Hong Kong’s Tourism Industry 2.0, the Government will strengthen the promotion of smart tourism through the use of information technology, such as electronic platforms, big data and artificial intelligence (AI), to further enhance the smart level of tourism services. More smart elements will also be added to tourist attractions to provide tourists with a more convenient, efficient and user-friendly travel experience. On integration of tourism resources, HKTb will enhance the one-stop travel information platform, Discover Hong Kong, to provide tourists with more comprehensive, reliable, and up-to-date travel information, including attractions, dining, activities and merchant offers, etc. The aim is to offer tourists a seamless digital experience throughout their journey from itinerary planning, visiting Hong Kong to returning to their place of residence. HKTb will also develop a Live Travel Map on Discover Hong Kong. Tourists can access the website using a mobile device or desktop computer, and obtain real-time travel information and recommendations covering different parts of Hong Kong (including the vicinity of Kai Tak) by entering keywords or selecting the relevant categories of information.

In addition, HKTb will kick start preliminary development of the Smart Itinerary Planner. The first phase will include integration of travel information, development of a back-end system, and training of an AI model to verify the accuracy of its answers. In the long run, a customised itinerary planning tool based on age, interests and travel purposes will be developed to provide personalised itinerary suggestions.

On the other hand, the operator of KTSP will provide visitors with one-stop services through its mobile app, including promotion information on leisure and catering options as well as various events. CSTB will continue to work closely with the operator, relevant departments and HKTb, with a view to further enhancing visitors' experience.

- (5) DEVB has adopted a series of visual identity elements to represent the Kai Tak Development Area, effectively conveying the design concept of the entire development. These elements include the slogan, logo, typography, colour scheme, and barcode pattern associated with the "Current of Vitality" theme. They are applied to construction site hoardings and integrated into the architectural designs of various projects to establish a clear connection with the Kai Tak Development Plan.

These visual identity features have been implemented across various projects, such as the Kai Tak Fire Station at Cheung Yip Street, the sewage pumping station at Prince Edward Road East, as well as various public street facilities and recreational amenities, including rain shelters, roadside benches, trash bins, bicycle racks, and information poster stands.

DEVB has also established a set of design guidelines to ensure that relevant development projects can incorporate these elements into public facilities during the detailed design phase. This gradually brings the "Vibrancy Magnet" design concept to life across the Kai Tak Development Area, creating a unified connection throughout the area. The goal is for residents or visitors to immediately sense this visual connection and develop a sense of belonging as soon as they enter Kai Tak. This aims to make the Kai Tak Development Area and its surroundings a visually cohesive space that embodies a consistent brand identity.

-End-

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 19
(Written Reply)

Asked by Hon LAM San-keung Date of meeting : 26.3.2025

Replied by : Secretary for
Constitutional and Mainland Affairs

Reply

President,

President:

The reply to Hon LAM San-keung's question is as follows:

At the meeting celebrating the 25th anniversary of Hong Kong's return to the motherland in 2022, President Xi Jinping said that, "‘One Country, Two Systems’ has been tested repeatedly in practice. It serves the fundamental interests of not only Hong Kong, but also those of our country and the nation, so there is no reason for us to change such a good policy, and we must adhere to it in the long run." President Xi reiterated in his report to the 20th National Congress that "the policy of ‘One Country, Two Systems’ is a great innovation of socialism with Chinese characteristics. It has proven to be the best institutional arrangement for ensuring sustained prosperity and stability in Hong Kong after its return to the motherland. The policy must be adhered to over the long term." These fully demonstrate to the world the Central Authorities' firm commitment to the principle of "One Country, Two Systems", which will not be altered, nor shaken. Further, it is essential to ensure that "One Country, Two Systems" is fully and faithfully implemented in Hong Kong without being bent or distorted, and will always advance in the right direction. To make it clear to the world that it is our country's enduring policy to implement "One Country, Two Systems" resolutely, fully and faithfully, and to showcase the historic and significant achievements made under "One Country, Two Systems" since its implementation, the HKSAR Government will continue to spare no effort in external promotion and telling the good stories of "One Country, Two Systems" and Hong Kong. This includes widely promoting the successful implementation of "One Country, Two Systems" and Hong Kong's various strengths and

opportunities through overseas visits by senior officials in meeting with dignitaries, the business sector, the media and Chinese groups, and through different activities organised by the overseas Economic and Trade Offices, such as meetings with local governments and organisations, media interviews and seminars, etc. We will also actively encourage different organisations to host major international events in Hong Kong, bringing people from all over the world and all walks of life to witness the rapid development of Hong Kong and our remarkable achievements in the implementation of “One Country, Two Systems”.

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 20

(Written Reply)

Asked by Hon Kenneth FOK

Date of meeting : 26 March 2025

Replied by : Secretary for Health

Reply

President,

In accordance with the power conferred by the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance and with regard to the guidelines of the International Health Regulations, the Department of Health (DH) enforces various preventive measures at boundary control points (BCPs) to prevent the introduction or spreading of infectious diseases into or out of Hong Kong. The Port Health Division under the DH carries out health screening work at each BCP (including conducting regular body temperature screening for arrivals and setting up health stations). Taking into account the design of each BCP and its traveller and vehicle flow, the Port Health Division deploys appropriate manpower to conduct body temperature screening for all arrivals; and performs, in accordance to the mechanism, further health assessments for travellers with confirmed fever or in need (such as travellers who self-reported being unwell) to understand their symptoms, travel history, contact history, etc., in order to make appropriate referrals and follow-up, including compulsory referral of travellers with suspected infection of certain statutory notifiable infectious diseases to Hong Kong public hospitals for checking, suggesting other travellers with fever or in need to seek medical treatment at medical institutions with issuance of referral letters, and assisting travellers in need to call for ambulance service for further treatment at Accident and Emergency Department.

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government has been maintaining close co-operation with entry-exit health inspection and quarantine authorities of the Mainland to safeguard the well-being and safety of residents and visitors of the two places. The Health Bureau and the General Administration of Customs of the People's Republic of China (GACC) signed the Co-operation Arrangement for Entry-exit Health Inspection and Quarantine between the GACC and the Health Bureau of the HKSAR Government (Co-operation Arrangement) in 2023. Under the normalisation arrangements for epidemic prevention and control, the two parties agreed to focus on the health inspection and quarantine of

their respective inbound personnel travelling between the HKSAR and the Mainland BCPs.

The HKSAR Government will maintain close liaison with the relevant Mainland authorities and actively review the entry health inspection and quarantine arrangements (including temperature screening) from the public health perspective, taking into account factors such as cost-effectiveness and appropriateness, etc.

The reply, in consultation with the DH, to the question raised by Hon Kenneth FOK's questions is as follows –

(1), (4) and (5)

Ongoing health screening is an important element to safeguard public health and can help to identify potential infectious diseases to be imported into Hong Kong at an early stage. Currently, all BCPs between Hong Kong and the Mainland implement health screening measures for inbound travellers.

The DH mainly deploys Infrared Thermal Imaging System at BCPs to detect the body temperatures of multiple travellers simultaneously in order to reduce the manpower required for related work. However, drivers and all passengers in a cross-boundary private car can remain in the vehicle while passing through the kiosks of the Immigration Department, the Customs and Excise Department, and the DH without the need to get off from the vehicle or go to the traveller's clearance hall. Due to site constraints, the Infrared Thermal Imaging System cannot be used to measure the forehead temperature of drivers and passengers passing through the vehicle lanes. Therefore, the DH staff uses hand-held infrared thermometers to measure the body temperature of inbound passengers on board the vehicles at the DH vehicle kiosks.

The DH reviews the health screening arrangements from time to time and deploys appropriate manpower at BCPs according to actual need to provide appropriate services for inbound travellers. For instance, the extra personnel deployed during the COVID-19 epidemic with regard to actual need have been reduced, and the manpower at relevant BCPs has basically returned to the pre-epidemic level. Meanwhile, the DH also keeps a close eye on technological development; actively explores the adoption of other innovative technology with the cooperation of other departments at BCPs to reduce the manpower need for health screening and optimise the use of human resources.

(2)

From 2020 to 2024, the average daily number of health screening shifts of the DH at BCPs (some health screening posts involve more than one shift according to the operation of BCPs) are as follows –

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Airport	270	244	226	125	122
Lo Wu	40	0	0	40	40
Lok Ma Chau Spur Line	30	0	0	30	30
Lok Ma Chau	90	90	111	94	94
Man Kam To	27	27	41	36	36
Sha Tau Kok	37	37	20	8	0
Shenzhen Bay Port	137	171	182	116	94
Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge	141	178	178	116	130
Heung Yuen Wai	28	28	28	68	58
West Kowloon Station of Express Rail Link	6	6	31	51	51
Hung Hom	18	18	18	0	0
Hong Kong-Macau Ferry Terminal	42	42	45	45	45
China Ferry Terminal	22	22	0	22	22
Total	888	863	880	751	722

The DH redeploys health screening posts according to operational need. For health screening posts in BCPs suspended operation would be redeployed to other BCPs.

Health screening service of Kai Tak Cruise Terminal and Ocean Terminal were not included as they were only provided during stopover of cruises.

(3)

The DH installed Infrared Thermal Imaging System at BCPs. The Electrical and Mechanical Services Department is responsible for the procurement and maintenance of the system. The recurrent expenditure incurred in the past five financial years is as follows –

2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
HK\$ million				
1.73	2.24	2.65	2.65	2.76

-End-

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 21

(Written Reply)

Asked by : Revd Canon Hon
Peter Douglas KOON

Date of meeting : 26 March 2025

Replied by : Secretary for Health

Reply

President,

eHealth is a territory-wide electronic health record sharing system launched by the Government in 2016 that enables citizens to authorise healthcare providers (HCPs) in the public and private sectors to view and share their electronic health records (eHRs) for healthcare purposes. Building on the strengths of the existing infrastructure of eHealth, the Chief Executive announced in the 2023 Policy Address the initiative to roll out a five-year development plan of eHealth+ to transform eHealth into a comprehensive healthcare information infrastructure that integrates multiple functions of data sharing, service delivery and care journey management. eHealth+ aims to facilitate care coordination, cross-sector collaboration, as well as active health management and surveillance, thereby better serving our citizens in obtaining optimal healthcare services, and supporting the healthcare reform and various healthcare policies more effectively, such as primary healthcare and cross-boundary healthcare services. The Government is taking forward the eHealth+ development in phases in accordance with the patient-centric principle and four strategic directions, namely, “One Health Record”, “One Care Journey”, “One Digital Front Door to Empowering Tool” and “One Health Data Repository”.

In consultation with the Hospital Authority (HA), the reply to the question raised by Revd Canon Hon Peter Douglas KOON is as follows:

(1) and (2)

As of end-February 2025, eHealth has covered over 80% of Hong Kong’s population and the majority of public and private HCPs. The number of HCPs registered with eHealth by the type of organisation is tabulated as follows:

Type of HCP	Number of HCPs Registered with eHealth (on an Organisational Basis)	Number of Healthcare Service Locations Registered with eHealth
Public hospitals (i.e. hospitals under the HA)	1	43
Public clinics (e.g. clinics under the HA and the Department of Health)	11	390
Other public HCPs (e.g. District Health Centres)	20	217
Private hospitals	13	43
Other private HCPs (e.g. clinics, residential care homes for the elderly, and social welfare organisations providing healthcare services)	3 681	6 018
Total	3 726	6 711

Besides, as of end-February 2025, about 58 800 healthcare professionals (HCProfs) have registered with eHealth. The number of registered HCProfs by profession is tabulated as follows:

Type of HCProf	Number of HCProfs Registered with eHealth	Percentage of Registered HCProfs
Doctor	13 190	82%
Dentist	1 731	60%
Chinese medicine practitioner	966	9%
Other HCProfs (e.g. nurse, pharmacist, and radiographer)	42 940	48%
Total	58 827	49%

(3) and (4)

Under the strategic development direction of “One Health Record”, we seek to consolidate the longitudinal eHRs of citizens spread across a multitude of healthcare processes into their personal eHealth accounts. A comprehensive and complete eHR profile enables the HCPs authorised by citizens to respond to their health needs more effectively, thus enhancing clinical outcomes and saving costs of the care process. Nevertheless, while private HCPs have been actively using eHealth in supporting clinical processes as evidenced by the fact that nearly 60% of eHR access by HCPs as of end-February 2025 were by private HCPs, more than 99% of some 4.5 billion eHRs shared on eHealth are from public HCPs.

The Government has been taking a multi-pronged approach to incentivise and facilitate the provision of citizens’ eHRs into eHealth by private HCPs, thereby assisting citizens in accessing, managing and using their own eHRs during the healthcare process more conveniently. Last year, the Government launched a platform enabling self-service data compliance testing to simplify the technical testing procedures, and provided dedicated technical support to healthcare institutions. The Government also rolled out the eHealth Adoption Sponsorship Pilot Scheme (the Pilot Scheme) by partnering with electronic medical record (eMR) solutions vendors and medical groups to co-fund system enhancements in achieving seamless eHR sharing between eHealth and eMR systems in the market. With the Government’s endeavours, the eHRs provided by private HCPs in a year increased from 2.19 million in 2023 to 3.67 million in 2024. From July 2023 to February 2025, about 80 private HCPs (involving around 480 private doctors and 200 service locations) connected to eHealth and provided more than 1.12 million eHRs under the Pilot Scheme.

The Government will continue to collaborate with the private healthcare sector to enhance the connectivity between eHealth and their eMR solutions. In particular, given the positive impacts of the Pilot Scheme, we have progressively expanded the scheme to include more eMR solution vendors, medical groups and other sectors, including Chinese medicine. We will also launch the eHealth+ accreditation scheme in 2025 to enable citizens to easily identify if an HCP has the capability to deposit health records into their personal eHealth accounts and the extent of data involved. Citizens can make reference to such information in choosing a suitable HCP, to ensure that their medical records will be deposited in their personal eHealth accounts.

Besides, the Government introduced the Electronic Health Record Sharing System (Amendment) Bill 2025 (the Amendment Bill) into the Legislative Council to provide a legal framework to assist citizens in building a comprehensive eHR profile. Among other things, the Amendment Bill will

streamline the consent mechanism such that once citizens agree to join eHealth, their HCPs will be able to deposit health data into their personal eHealth accounts. Meanwhile, citizens will continue to retain full control over their personal data and can grant individual HCPs access to their eHealth records at their own will. The Amendment Bill will also empower the Secretary for Health to require specified HCPs to provide specified important health data into the personal eHealth accounts of citizens registered with eHealth and with their consents, in order to facilitate citizens' easy access and control of their key health information.

The Government will continue to provide support and collaborate with the private healthcare sector to enable the majority of private HCPs to seamlessly connect with eHealth and consider providing additional assistance to healthcare institutions and HCProfs that are less prepared for digitalisation.

(5)

With the ever-tighter economic and social integration between Hong Kong and the Mainland, Hong Kong citizens making use of medical services in the Mainland, especially in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area ("GBA"), is becoming more common. To support citizens' cross-boundary healthcare needs, the Government has been working to enable citizens to self-carry their eHRs for cross-boundary uses via eHealth, to enhance the continuity of care across the boundary. Among other things, the Government in 2024 introduced the "Cross-boundary Health Record" (CBHR) and "Personal Folder" functions in the eHealth App at the University of Hong Kong-Shenzhen Hospital (HKU-SZH) and seven medical institutions under the Elderly Health Care Voucher (EHCV) Greater Bay Area Pilot Scheme. The CBHR function enables eligible Hong Kong elderly persons using EHCV at specified healthcare institutions in GBA to apply for a copy of their eHRs in eHealth over the past three years through the eHealth App in advance. HCProfs of the specified healthcare institutions can then access and browse the relevant eHRs by scanning the QR codes presented by the elderly person at the time of consultation to assist in diagnoses and treatment. The Personal Folder function enables citizens to provide eHRs obtained during consultations within and outside Hong Kong to their personal eHealth accounts to facilitate storage and use of eHRs, including access by Hong Kong HCPs authorised by citizens through the eHealth system during follow-up care.

The feedback on the cross-boundary functions has been positive. We will continue to streamline the workflow and improve the user experience, and extend the cross-boundary functions to more medical institutions under cross-boundary healthcare collaboration programmes, as well as enhance the role of eHealth as the core system for cross-boundary health data sharing. We note that citizens

carrying their own eHRs for cross-boundary use each time is not the most convenient, secure, and effective way for both citizens and HCPs. For example, given the more stringent technical requirements, it is difficult for citizens to self-upload high-resolution radiology images to their eHealth accounts. In accordance with the current legislation, HCPs outside Hong Kong are unable to register with eHealth. To support citizens' needs more effectively, we propose in the Amendment Bill to empower the Commissioner for the Electronic Health Record to recognise non-Hong Kong HCPs and public health record systems, subject to sufficient protection of data privacy and system security as well as due compliance with specified requirements and conditions. This will enable citizens to use their eHRs across the boundary in a more convenient and secure manner. If an individual citizen uses services at a recognised HCP outside Hong Kong, he/she can choose to authorise the HCP to securely access his/her eHealth records and deposit the health records of the services received into his/her personal eHealth account, with a view to enhancing the quality and safety of cross-boundary healthcare services. HCPs outside Hong Kong can only access and deposit citizens' eHealth records when a registered citizen provides explicit consent when using its services. Under no other circumstances will eHealth records be transmitted across the boundary.

- Ends -

LEGCO QUESTION NO. 22

(Written Reply)

Asked by: Hon LUK Chung-hung

Date of meeting: 26 March 2025

Replied by:

Secretary for Environment and Ecology

Reply:

President,

The Veterinary Surgeons Board of Hong Kong (VSB) is a statutory body established under the Veterinary Surgeons Registration Ordinance (Cap. 529) (the Ordinance), and is responsible for the regulation, registration and disciplinary control of veterinary surgeons, to ensure a high standard of veterinary services in Hong Kong. All veterinary surgeons must comply with the Ordinance and Code of Practice for the Guidance of Registered Veterinary Surgeons (the Code) promulgated by VSB. The Code provides veterinary surgeons with guidelines on various aspects of conduct, including professional ethics, clinic premises and equipment, advertising and other operational details, etc. If a veterinary surgeon breaches the Code, VSB may take disciplinary actions against the surgeon.

Having consulted the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau, the reply to the question from the Hon LUK Chung-hung is as follows:

- (1) The VSB currently publishes on its website Orders made by Inquiry Committee within one year with names, and the Findings of Disciplinary Inquiries within three years on an anonymous basis. Moreover, all Orders are published in the Gazette and in one English and one Chinese newspaper circulating in Hong Kong as required by law. In response to the Government's earlier suggestion on reviewing the existing arrangements with reference to the practices of other professional regulatory bodies, VSB is considering extending the time for publishing Orders and Findings on its website.
- (2) VSB handles the complaints received in accordance with the complaint mechanism and disciplinary procedures provided under the Ordinance and the Rules of the Veterinary Surgeons Board (Disciplinary Proceedings). To ensure fairness and transparency of the disciplinary procedures, lay persons who represents the interests of persons utilizing veterinary services (e.g. members of

animal welfare organisations or tertiary institutions) or medical and health professionals are involved in the handling of complaints by VSB's Preliminary Investigation Committee and Inquiry Committee, and the public can also observe the disciplinary hearings. The Inquiry Committee takes into account a number of factors in determining the judgment and penalty, including the seriousness of the case, the character, antecedents and disciplinary record of the veterinary surgeon involved (if any), and the reasons for mitigation (if any), etc., to make an appropriate disciplinary order. To further enhance the disciplinary mechanism, the VSB is considering the feasibility of drawing up guidelines on disciplinary sanctions.

- (3) According to Schedule 3 to the Trade Descriptions Ordinance (Cap. 362), a registered veterinary surgeon is an exempt person, which refers that the acts in the capacity of his or her profession are exempted from being regulated by the "fair trading sections" of the Trade Descriptions Ordinance. However, sections 4 and 5 of such Ordinance about the requirement of the provision of information in relation to goods, and section 7 about trade descriptions of goods applied in the course of any trade or business remain applicable.

For persons who are not registered veterinary surgeons (including veterinary assistants), if they are suspected of engaging in unfair trade practices in the course of selling pet nutritional supplements, food and other supplies at veterinary clinics or through online platforms, the Customs and Excise Department may take enforcement actions pursuant to the Trade Descriptions Ordinance. Offenders may be prosecuted, and are liable to a maximum penalty of imprisonment for five years and a fine of \$500,000.

Moreover, the Code stipulates that veterinary surgeons have the responsibility to supervise and ensure persons who are not registered veterinary surgeons engaged in merchandising are adequately trained to advise clients on directions for use of the products sold and to judge when the client should receive the personal attention of the veterinary surgeon; and the display and sale of goods are such as not to diminish the public's confidence in the scientific integrity and impartiality of the profession, or damage relationships between the profession and the public. If persons who are not registered veterinary surgeons fail to meet the standards expected of the profession, the registered veterinary surgeon responsible for supervision may be regarded as committing professional misconduct or neglect, and members of

the public may lodge a complaint with VSB in respect of such professional misconduct or neglect.

- (4) Under the “Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement” “Agreement on Trade in Services” (Agreement), eligible Hong Kong residents may apply in the Guangdong Province to take the qualification examination for veterinary practitioners in the whole Mainland, and a corresponding qualification certificate will be issued to those passing the examination. The Agreement also allows Hong Kong residents who have obtained the qualification as national practising Licensed Veterinarians to practise on the Mainland. The Government will continue to liaise with the trade to understand their demand for practising on the Mainland.

-End-

Courts (Remote Hearing) Bill

Committee Stage

Amendments moved by the Chief Secretary for Administration

<u>Clause</u>	<u>Amendment Proposed</u>
2	In the definition of <i>legal representative</i> , in paragraph (b), by deleting the semicolon and substituting “; and”.
2	In the definition of <i>legal representative</i> , in paragraph (c), by deleting “and”.
2	In the definition of <i>legal representative</i> , by deleting paragraph (d).
2	In the English text, in the definition of <i>participant</i> , in paragraph (a), by deleting “preceding” and substituting “proceeding”.
2	In the definition of <i>participant</i> , in paragraph (a), by deleting subparagraph (v) and substituting— “ (v) an individual who— (A) is appointed to advise, or is involved in advising, on any matter in relation to the proceeding; (B) is appointed to assist, or is involved in assisting, the JJO presiding at the proceeding; (C) is appointed to assist, or is involved in otherwise facilitating, the conduct of the proceeding; or (D) is entitled to participate in that proceeding under an Ordinance or a practice direction issued by the court; and”.
2	In the definition of <i>remote hearing order</i> , by adding “7(3) or” before “8(1)”.
6(4)	In the English text, by deleting “proceedings” and substituting “proceeding”.

- 8(1) By adding “, and may impose any condition that the court considers appropriate” after “the proceeding”.
- 8 By adding—
“(2A) The court must inform the parties to the proceeding of a decision under subsection (1).”.
- 10 By deleting “effects” and substituting “intents”.
- 15 By deleting “effects” and substituting “intents”.
- 19(2) By deleting “effects” and substituting “intents”.
- 21(2) By deleting “effects” and substituting “intents”.
- 23 In the heading, in the English text, by adding “**to open proceeding**” after “**access**”.
- 24(1) By deleting “cause” and substituting “direct”.
- 26(5) In the definition of *courtroom*, by deleting “building” and substituting “premises specified in Schedule 2”.
- 26(5) In the definition of *protected session*, in paragraph (a), by adding “on each day of the proceeding” after “periods”.
- 26(5) In the definition of *protected session*, in paragraph (b), by adding “on each day of the proceeding” after “periods”.
- 41 By deleting the clause.
- New In Part 8, in Division 3, in Subdivision 1, by adding—
“**41A. Section 83RA added**
After section 83R—
Add

“83RA. Determination of application for leave to appeal

- (1) The Court of Appeal may direct that an application for leave to appeal be determined with or without a hearing.
- (2) Subsection (1) applies to an application for leave to appeal that was made, but has not yet been listed for hearing, before the relevant date as if it were made after that date.
- (3) In this section—

relevant date (有關日期) means the day on which the Courts (Remote Hearing) Ordinance (of 2025) comes into operation.”.

41B. Section 83Y amended (powers of Court of Appeal under Part IV which are exercisable by single judge)

After section 83Y(2)(ba)—

Add

“(bb) to give a direction under section 83RA;”. ”.

42 By deleting the clause.

New In Part 8, in Division 3, in Subdivision 2, by adding—

“42A. Section 33 amended (application for leave to appeal)

- (1) After section 33(2)—

Add

“(2A) An application under this section may be determined by the Court, with or without a hearing.

- (2B) Subsection (2A) applies to an application for leave to appeal that was made, but has not yet been listed for hearing, before the relevant date as if it were made after that date.”.

- (2) After section 33(3)—

Add

“(4) In this section—

relevant date (有關日期) means the day on which the Courts (Remote Hearing) Ordinance (of 2025) comes into operation.”.”.

Schedule 2 By deleting “& 31]” and substituting “, 26 & 31]”.

**Hong Kong Export Credit Insurance Corporation
Ordinance**

Resolution

(Under section 13(2) of the Hong Kong Export Credit Insurance
Corporation Ordinance (Cap. 1115))

Resolved that the maximum percentage prescribed for section 13(2) of the Hong Kong Export Credit Insurance Corporation Ordinance (Cap. 1115) is 95%.