

LCQ5: Revitalising tourism industry

Following is a question by the Hon Yiu Si-wing and a reply by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau, in the Legislative Council today (July 8):

Question:

As the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) epidemic has subsided recently, the authorities of Macao and Zhuhai have, since May this year, implemented a system for mutual recognition of health codes to facilitate residents' commuting between the two places. Meanwhile, the governments of some Southeast Asian countries, such as Thailand, have relaxed or planned to gradually relax the compulsory quarantine measures imposed on arrivals. On revitalising the tourism industry, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has studied the ways to relax the entry restrictions imposed on Mainland and overseas residents, so as to permit the entry of residents from regions adjacent to Hong Kong where the epidemic has been brought under control; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) of the Government's latest strategies to revitalise inbound and outbound tourism, and the timetable for the relevant work; and

(3) given that the current fees payable by residents of Macao, Zhuhai and Shenzhen for undertaking the nucleic acid tests on COVID-19 are only \$180, \$75 and \$160 (in local currencies), of the Government's measures to lower the test fees in Hong Kong which are over \$1,000, so as to avoid the high fees impeding the re-activation of Hong Kong's inbound and outbound tourism?

Reply:

President,

The local social incidents last year and the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak this year have taken an unprecedented heavy toll on the tourism sector of Hong Kong and the number of visitor arrivals of Hong Kong plummeted. In May 2020,

the number of visitor arrivals plunged by 99.9 per cent year-on-year, with an average daily arrivals of only about 260.

In the past six months, through the concerted effort of the Government and the community, the epidemic situation in Hong Kong is relatively stable. Nonetheless, as stated by the Secretary for Food and Health yesterday at the media session, with new local cases reported in Hong Kong in the past few days, we should not let down our guard in facing the epidemic. Hence, in exploring and implementing the relaxation of quarantine arrangement, the Government must strike a balance between the considerations for enhanced disease prevention and control and the considerations for economic recovery; and be guided by science and objective evidence in maintaining various anti-epidemic measures on the one hand while allowing room and be prepared for gradual resumption of normal operation and activities in society when the situation permits on the other hand.

Having consulted the Food and Health Bureau and the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau, my reply to the question raised by the Hon Yiu Si-wing is as follows:

(1) In view of the close connection among Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao and the development of the epidemic situation, we are adopting the "suppress and lift" strategy in controlling the epidemic. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) Government is in active discussion with the governments of Guangdong Province and Macao SAR under the framework of joint prevention and control, to explore arrangement of exempting cross-boundary travellers from compulsory quarantine within certain limits, subject to specific conditions on a pilot scheme basis so as to facilitate people who need to travel between Guangdong and Hong Kong or between Hong Kong and Macao. The preparatory work has been ongoing and has reached its final stage and subject to the epidemic situation, we will implement and announce the details in due course.

For overseas, we are now exploring with places which have stabilised their epidemic situation on how to resume cross-border travel in a gradual manner and establish the mutual arrangement as soon as possible. We have already had some initial discussion with various governments, among them, the government of Thailand is going to commence discussion with Hong Kong on the ways of relaxing border control. An inter-departmental team established and led by the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau will follow up with the Government of Thailand.

(2) In reviving Hong Kong's tourism sector, we will start with local tourism with the aim of energising the local community in order to send a positive message worldwide and enhance visitors' confidence in visiting Hong Kong. The two theme parks in Hong Kong have reopened in June and provided a range of concessionary packages which received positive response from the community. As mentioned in my reply to the Question four, the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) has launched the Holiday at Home campaign to encourage Hong Kong people to take initiatives and be tourists in our own city. With the support of the tourism, retail, catering and other industries, the campaign provides different offers to boost the economy. Moreover, once individual source markets have the conditions for resuming travelling to Hong Kong, the HKTB will also team up with the Government and different partners to create a travel platform to welcome back visitors with enticing offers and exciting experiences.

Furthermore, the Government enhanced in June the Green Lifestyle Local Tour Incentive Scheme, which was announced late last year, increasing the incentive for travel agent in organising local tours, and benefiting sectors such as food and beverage and transport.

(3) To dovetail the pilot scheme among Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao, the Hong Kong SAR Government has been encouraging and helping local private laboratories to enhance their testing capabilities for COVID-19. At present, there are already 15 private laboratories in Hong Kong which can provide the relevant service and the cost has been dropping gradually. We believe as demand surges and with market competition, the quality and the cost of testing would also improve.

Thank you, President.

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