

Speech by FS at "In Style·Hong Kong" Symposium in Ho Chi Minh City (English only)

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Following is the speech by the Financial Secretary, Mr Paul Chan, at the "In Style • Hong Kong" Symposium in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, today (September 20):

Deputy Minister Le (Deputy Minister, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Vietnam, Mr Lê Hoài Trung), Vice Chairman Le (Vice Chairman of the People's Committee of Ho Chi Minh City, Mr Le Thanh Liem), Consul-General Wu (Chinese Consul-General in Ho Chi Minh City, Mr Wu Jun), Vincent (Chairman, Hong Kong Trade Development Council, Mr Vincent Lo), distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning.

And welcome to "In Style • Hong Kong", the largest Hong Kong promotion event ever to take place in Vietnam.

It's a great pleasure to be here, in Vietnam, and for the second time in less than a year. Last October, I took part in the APEC Finance Ministers' Meeting in Hoi An, with its magnificent ancient town, a UNESCO World Heritage site.

I'm pleased to be back, this time in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam's largest city and one of the world's most dynamic urban centres. For Vietnamese businesses and consumers, the good news is that I've brought with me a big slice of Hong Kong – from the business symposium that begins in just a few moments, to the two-day B2B exhibition "In Style • Hong Kong" Expo.

The Expo features more than 130 Hong Kong companies and their high-style brands. They range from designer goods and fine jewellery to fashion, smart living and gourmet delicacies. And there's more, including a fabulous, citywide showcase of Hong Kong lifestyle, in products, fashion and fine food as well. And all of it on offer to Vietnamese consumers throughout Ho Chi Minh City.

We're here, ladies and gentlemen, because we're confident that, working together, Hong Kong and Vietnam have much to gain, this week and indeed long down the road.

The numbers certainly underline that. Over the past five years, merchandise trade between Hong Kong and Vietnam has grown, on average, almost 10 per cent a year.

Last year, Vietnam was Hong Kong's 10th largest merchandise trading partner, with trade volume exceeding US\$18 billion.

There's also a strong Hong Kong business community in Vietnam, ranging from garment manufacturing to property development and investment banking.

And that business co-operation will surely grow, given the Free Trade Agreement and the related Investment Agreement signed, last November, between Hong Kong and the 10 member states of ASEAN.

Since then, both sides have been busy ratifying and making arrangements for the Agreements, which will formally take effect at the beginning of next year. I can tell you and assure you that Hong Kong will be ready to implement the Agreements on January 1, 2019, as planned. And, no doubt, Vietnam is working towards the same target timeline.

The two Agreements send a clear and compelling message to the world about our common aspiration – to expand trade and investment throughout the Asian region.

For Hong Kong, as for ASEAN – and that very much includes Vietnam – the Agreements will bring legal certainty and, of course, much better market access in trade and investment. And that can only boost business opportunities, enhancing trade and investment flow between our economies and the businesses that drive them.

The Hong Kong SAR Government currently has two Economic and Trade Offices in the ASEAN region, in Jakarta and Singapore. And we are planning a third ETO, this one in Bangkok, to strengthen our ties with ASEAN, to make it much easier to capitalise on the business and investment opportunities sure to follow, for all concerned.

Hong Kong, after all, boasts a well-established international trade network, world-class infrastructure and seamlessly connected communications and logistics networks. We are the world's leading financial centre in Asia, and we ranked number one in five of the past nine years in terms of funds raised through IPOs. We are also a platform for different high value-added services, supported by highly skilled professionals. We have unparalleled knowledge of the Mainland market, and deep economic connections with the Mainland and the rest of the world. With this high degree of connectivity, globally and with the Mainland, Hong Kong helps people and businesses achieve their goals, making our city ASEAN's, and Vietnam's, natural partner to connect and excel, and realise the promising business opportunities of the Mainland.

On top of that, the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area development adds more opportunities for Hong Kong – and the countries and companies that work with us.

Linking Hong Kong, Macao and nine cities in Guangdong Province, including Shenzhen, Guangzhou and Zhuhai, the Greater Bay Area counts a combined population of 69 million and a collective GDP worth US\$1.5 trillion, which is comparable to that of Korea. Working together, the synergies to be brought about by these cities are obvious and tremendous. The world-class financial services of Hong Kong, the vibrant tech sector in Shenzhen and the advanced manufacturing bases in the other cities in the area enable the Greater Bay Area to have the combined advantages of the New York bay area and the San Francisco Bay Area.

The Greater Bay Area will certainly have all it takes to become an international innovation and technology hub.

Coming Sunday and later this year, two major mega cross-border infrastructure projects, namely the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link and the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, will be operational, further enhancing Hong Kong's connectivity with the Greater Bay Area and beyond.

With the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, the travelling time from Hong Kong to Macao and Zhuhai will be cut down substantially to less than an hour. A one-hour living circle will be created. And most of the cities in the Pearl River Delta area are within three hours' drive. Cities in Indochina, such as Hanoi in Vietnam, can be reached in about one day. And with the Express Rail Link, the journey time between Guangzhou and Hong Kong will be reduced to 48 minutes only, and passengers from Hong Kong can easily access the over-20,000-kilometre national high-speed rail network connecting all major cities in the Mainland. That means a very sizeable and easily accessible market is waiting for us to tap. To Vietnamese businesses, I say join us. Partner with Hong Kong in building a rewarding future - in the Bay Area, in ASEAN. And right here, today and tomorrow, at "In Style • Hong Kong".

My sincere thanks to the Hong Kong Trade Development Council for organising "In Style • Hong Kong". And to all of you, for your enthusiastic support in taking bilateral relations between Hong Kong and Vietnam to a new level of promise and opportunity.

Ladies and gentlemen, I wish you all the best of business – and pleasure – at "In Style • Hong Kong".

Thank you.

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