

HA appeals for public understanding for surge in demand

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

Latest statistics indicated that demand for public hospital services is still on the high side amid the current winter surge in public hospitals. The spokesperson for Hospital Authority (HA) today (19 March) appealed to members of the public for their understanding on the longer waiting time at the Accident and Emergency (A&E) Departments and the crowdedness in wards, and to co-operate with the hospitals for transfer or discharge arrangements.

The HA Chief Manager (Cluster Performance), Dr Ian Cheung said that although the seasonal influenza activity has steadily decreased according to the latest surveillance data by the Centre of Health Protection, the A&E attendances suddenly surged in the past two days. "The A&E attendances surged to 7 038 on Monday, a record high of this winter, alongside over 1 100 admissions to medical wards."

"As the occupancies of medical wards have already been saturated in various hospitals, some patients may need to wait in the A&E Departments for some time before admission. I appeal for patients and their family members' understanding while awaiting admission and being monitored by A&E staff. Meanwhile, the healthcare staff in the A&E Departments have to accord priority to treat patients with severe conditions and monitor patients waiting for admission. This has led to longer waiting time for semi-urgent and non-urgent patients. Non-urgent patients are advised to consider seeking consultation at general out-patient clinics or private doctors."

In addition, over 1,800 beds have already been added to cope with the demand surge and the medical wards in various hospitals are very crowded. Dr Cheung appealed for patients' co-operation with healthcare staff in transfer and discharge arrangements according to their clinical conditions, so that the wards can vacate the hospital beds for other patients in need.

Lastly, Dr Cheung would like to express his gratitude once again to all frontline staff for their commitment and dedication in taking care of the patients.

HA continues to release the key service statistics of the A&E Departments and the occupancy rate in public hospitals. Details are in the appended table.

Transcript of remarks by CE at media session before ExCo meeting (with video)

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, at a media session before the Executive Council meeting this morning (March 19):

Reporter: Previously you said you hope our new MTR leaders can restore public confidence in the company, but public confidence was again shaken yesterday. Are you very disappointed about it, and is there anything the Government can do about the situation? And many business leaders have raised concern about the proposed changes to the extradition laws. Are you worried that Hong Kong's business environment will be undermined by it?

Chief Executive: First of all, on the performance of the Mass Transit Railway corporation (MTRC), I think to be fair, we have to acknowledge that the Mass Transit Railway corporation has been providing reliable and efficient service to Hong Kong people for almost four decades, and this is now a very huge railway network that will require a lot of attention and continuous monitoring and evaluation to ensure its continued safety and efficient operation. Earlier on, as a result of the platform problem in the Hung Hom Station Extension of the Shatin-Central Link, I have already appointed an independent Commission of Inquiry (CoI), and as you remember I received an interim report from the Chairman of the CoI, and I hope to be able to release this interim report. Of course, the interim report does flag up issues of concern in project management. We will have to deal with this in a very robust manner in order to restore public confidence in the way that we build Hong Kong's railways, especially railways which are very sought-after by the Hong Kong community.

The incident that has happened yesterday, we have not had the results of the investigation, but apparently it was related to the testing. Fortunately, it was still the testing of the new signal system which has yet to be put in place. So, if problems did arise in the testing, then we still have this opportunity and time to rectify it before putting it in service. I have to say, and I want to reiterate, that public safety is of primary concern, so we will not rush to open the Shatin-Central Link or to put in place this new signal system until we are assured of the safety.

As far as how MTRC under its new leadership, i.e. the new Chairman and the new Chief Executive Officer, will do to restore public confidence and address the problems flagged up by the CoI as well as this investigation on the new signal system, the Government will perform its role in monitoring, regulating, but in a way also trying to work with them in concert, so that we can together help to sustain the good performance of the MTRC that has been serving the community so well over the past 40 years.

Second question about the proposed amendments to the Fugitive Offenders Ordinance and the Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Ordinance, the amendments are intended to pursue judicial justice in criminal cases and also to protect public, because if there are serious criminal crime offenders who have absconded and come to Hong Kong, they are a threat to public safety. So we have reviewed the existing legislation and acknowledged that there is a loophole, and the intention of these amendments is to plug the loophole. But you will ask me, with over 21 years after reunification, why now? It's because, one is – I have said this many times – we have been confronted with many problems since reunification and it is my governance style that we should try to find a solution to these problems. Sometimes the solution may be well received, sometimes it may create some anxiety and concerns, and that's why it is our job to explain why we are doing this. The second factor in the timing is because we have a case right in front of us which has caused a lot of public anxiety, a lot of anger, especially amongst the parents of the deceased. So we need to do this expeditiously in order to have the legal framework and the authority to deal with that particular case.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the transcript.)

Illegal worker jailed

A Pakistani illegal worker holding a recognisance form was jailed by Shatin Magistrates' Courts yesterday (March 18).

During a joint operation conducted by the Immigration Department (ImmD) and the Hong Kong Police Force codenamed "Champion" on November 27, 2018, enforcement officers raided a car park of an industrial building at Kwai Chung. A male Pakistani illegal worker, aged 32, was arrested. When intercepted he was working as an odd-job worker. Upon identity checking, he produced for inspection a recognisance form issued by the ImmD, which prohibits him from taking employment. Further investigation revealed that he was a non-refoulement claimant. An employer suspected of employing the illegal worker was also arrested and the investigation is ongoing.

The illegal worker was charged at Shatin Magistrates' Courts yesterday with taking employment after landing in Hong Kong unlawfully and remaining in Hong Kong without the authority of the Director of Immigration or while being a person in respect of whom a removal order or deportation order was in force. After trial, he was sentenced to 22 months and 14 days' imprisonment.

The ImmD spokesman warned that, as stipulated in section 38AA of the Immigration Ordinance, illegal immigrants or people who are the subject of a removal order or a deportation order are prohibited from taking any employment, whether paid or unpaid, or establishing or joining in any

business. Offenders are liable upon conviction to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and up to three years' imprisonment. The Court of Appeal has issued a guideline ruling that a sentence of 15 months' imprisonment should be applied in such cases.

The spokesman reiterated that it is a serious offence to employ people who are not lawfully employable. The maximum penalty is imprisonment for three years and a fine of \$350,000. The High Court has laid down sentencing guidelines that the employer of an illegal worker should be given an immediate custodial sentence. According to the court sentencing, employers must take all practicable steps to determine whether a person is lawfully employable prior to employment. Apart from inspecting a prospective employee's identity card, the employer has the explicit duty to make enquiries regarding the person and ensure that the answers would not cast any reasonable doubt concerning the lawful employability of the person. The court will not accept failure to do so as a defence in proceedings. It is also an offence if an employer fails to inspect the job seeker's valid travel document if the job seeker does not have a Hong Kong permanent identity card. The maximum penalty for failing to inspect such a document is imprisonment for one year and a fine of \$150,000.

Under the existing mechanism, the ImmD will, as a standard procedure, conduct initial screening on vulnerable persons, including illegal workers, illegal immigrants, sex workers and foreign domestic helpers, who are arrested during any operation, with a view to ascertaining whether they are trafficking in persons (TIP) victims. When any TIP indicator is revealed in the initial screening, the officers will conduct a full debriefing and identification by using a standardised checklist to ascertain the presence of TIP elements, such as threat and coercion in the recruitment phase and the nature of exploitation. Identified TIP victims will be provided with various forms of support and assistance, including urgent interference, medical services, counselling, shelter, temporary accommodation and other supporting services. The ImmD calls on TIP victims to report crimes to the relevant departments.

[Suspected red tide sighted at Stanley Main Beach](#)

Attention TV/radio announcers:

Please broadcast the following as soon as possible:

Here is an item of interest to swimmers.

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department announced today (March 19)

that due to a suspected red tide sighting, the red flag has been hoisted at Stanley Main Beach in Southern District, Hong Kong Island. Beach-goers are advised not to swim at the beach until further notice.

Labour Department to launch online occupational safety complaint platform

The Labour Department (LD) today (March 19) launched an online occupational safety and health (OSH) complaint platform so that employees and members of the public can report to the department unsafe operations and environments at workplaces by using online forms accessible to mobile electronic devices or computers.

"The new online platform launched today enables employees and members of the public to lodge complaints against OSH malpractices more expeditiously and conveniently, so that the LD can take prompt action to prevent accidents. The interface of the new online platform is simple and easy to use.

Complainants can lodge complaints by filling out an online form on the LD's website (www.labour.gov.hk) and uploading photos, videos or voice records through the use of mobile devices like smart phones and tablets," a spokesman for the LD said.

Upon the receipt of complaints, the LD will, having regard to their nature and content, arrange inspections of the workplaces concerned as soon as practicable for targeted investigations and follow-up actions. The LD has arranged to deploy the necessary manpower to meet the needs of the investigation and follow-up work.

In addition to this new online platform, members of the public can still lodge complaints through existing channels including email (enquiry@labour.gov.hk), the LD's OSH complaint hotline (2542 2172) or 1823.

"Enhancement of OSH at the workplace calls for concerted efforts of both employers and employees. The LD reminds workers to follow and comply with the safety requirements set out by their employers. Employees are also urged to stay vigilant to their surroundings while at work, and report any unsafe operations and work environment immediately to the LD. As employees are most familiar with the potential hazards in their daily workplace, the information they provide is crucial to the improvement of workplace safety. It not only protects their own safety and that of other workers, but also puts the minds of their family members at ease," the spokesman added.

All complaints will be treated in the strictest confidence. "Except in conditions prescribed by the law, the LD will not disclose the complainants' identity nor the fact that a workplace inspection is complaint-related," the LD spokesman emphasised.

To further promote the new online complaint platform, the LD has produced a new Announcement in the Public Interest (API) for broadcast on TV and radio stations. The department will continue to conduct surprise inspections and special enforcement operations to stem work safety malpractices.