

Fatal traffic accident in Tsuen Wan

Police are investigating a fatal traffic accident in Tsuen Wan in the small hours today (May 13) in which a 38-year-old man died.

At 3.58am, a medium goods vehicle (MGV) driven by the 38-year-old man was travelling along Cheung Pei Shan Road towards Tsuen Wan. When approaching Tsuen Kam Interchange, it reportedly lost control, rammed into crash cushions and then side-turned.

The MGV driver was trapped inside the compartment and was rescued by firemen. Sustaining multiple injuries, he was certified dead at scene.

Investigation by the Special Investigation Team of Traffic, New Territories South is underway.

Anyone who witnessed the accident or has any information to offer is urged to contact the investigating officers on 3661 1300 or 3661 1346.

Labour Department investigates fatal work accident in MTR Hong Kong Station

The Labour Department (LD) is investigating a fatal work accident in MTR Hong Kong Station this morning (May 13) in which a man died.

The LD immediately deployed staff to the scene upon receiving a report of the accident, and is now conducting an investigation to look into its cause.

First tranche of wage subsidy under the Employment Support Scheme to receive application from May 25 (with video)

The Government announced earlier the launch of the Employment Support

Scheme (ESS) of \$81 billion to provide time-limited financial support to employers to retain their employees, hence maintaining the strength for Hong Kong. The Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, announced today (May 12) the first tranche of the ESS will receive application from May 25.

"In the past month, we have carried out intensive research, discussed with stakeholders, and listened to the views of different sectors. We have largely finalised the details of the ESS. The first tranche of the ESS will provide wage subsidies for three months from June to August 2020. The application will commence on May 25 and last for three weeks," said Mrs Lam.

Mrs Lam at the same time announced four improvement measures in respect of the ESS:

1. Extending the coverage of the ESS to employees aged 65 or above under the Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF) schemes. At present, around 60 000 employees aged 65 or above are having MPF accounts. If employers have made voluntary MPF contribution for these employees, they may apply for wage subsidies for them;
2. Extending the coverage of the ESS to two MPF Industry Schemes (tailor-made for the construction industry and catering industry) which were previously excluded. Employers may apply for wage subsidies for "regular employees" (i.e. employees who are 18 – 64 years of age and have been employed for a continuous period of 60 days or more) if employers have made MPF contributions for them;
3. Relaxing the eligibility of self-employed persons (SEPs) that they should have made MPF contributions between January 1, 2019 and March 31, 2020. After the relaxation, SEPs who have set up an MPF account on or before March 31, 2020 and with that account remaining opened as of the same date may apply for a one-off subsidy of \$7,500; and
4. The amount of wage subsidies provided by the Government will be calculated based on 50 per cent of the actual wages paid to each employee in the "specified month" at the choice of the employers based on the situation of the enterprises, with a wage cap at \$18,000 per month. After listening to the views of some of the sectors hard hit by the epidemic, the Government decided to allow the employers to choose December 2019 as the "specified month". In other words, the "specified month" for the purpose of applying for the first tranche of wage subsidy can be any one month between December 2019 and March 2020, instead of between January and March 2020 as previously proposed.

The measures under the Anti-epidemic Fund should fulfill the following five principles: first, simple to understand; second, easy to access; third, quick to disburse funds; fourth, sufficiently broad-based benefitting large numbers of individuals and businesses; and fifth, paving the way for economic recovery.

"The ESS, after refinements and revisions, will better fulfill these five principles," Mrs Lam said.

Generally speaking, with the exception of ineligible employers (mainly organisations whose employees' salaries are not affected by the epidemic, for example, the HKSAR Government, statutory bodies, subvented organisations with employees' salaries subsidised by the Government), all employers who have been making MPF contributions for employees (including Master Trust Schemes and Industry Schemes) or who have set up MPF-exempted Occupational Retirement Schemes Ordinance (ORSO) schemes, may apply for ESS.

To further clarify eligibility and to prevent people from applying for wage subsidy by establishing a new company and opening MPF accounts, the MPF accounts of the relevant employers and employees applying for the wage subsidy should have been set up on or before March 31, 2020 (i.e. cannot be backdated to that date or any earlier dates). In other words, employers with the MPF accounts set up on or after April 1, 2020 will not be eligible for the first tranche of wage subsidy.

Employers participating in the ESS must provide an undertaking not to make redundancies during the subsidy period, and to spend all the wage subsidies on paying wages to the employees. If an employer fails to comply with the undertaking, the Government will claw back the unspent balance of the wage subsidy or/and impose other penalty. Details will be announced early next week.

Application for the first tranche of wage subsidy under the ESS can be made starting from May 25. Eligible employers and SEPs may submit online application from May 25 to June 14. The wage subsidy is expected to be disbursed to the majority of employers in three to four weeks after submitting application.

In order to disburse the wage subsidy to employers as early as possible and hence prevent employers making redundancies, the Government will ensure the application procedures under the ESS are simple and easy to understand. Employers and SEPs applying for the ESS are required to authorise the ESS processing agent (appointed by the Government) to receive MPF record certificates directly from the MPF trustees, in order to confirm the information related to MPF contributions. Employers are not required to submit such information at the time of application, and MPF trustees will not charge employers and SEPs any fees on the issue of the certificates.

The Government will announce next week other detailed arrangements about the ESS including the online application procedures, monitoring mechanism and calculation of penalty. A dedicated website on the ESS will commence operation by then.

For enquiries, please email to enquiry@employmentsupport.hk or call our hotline at 183 6122 starting from 9am tomorrow (May 13). The service hours of the hotline is from 9am to 6pm, Monday to Friday (closed on Saturday, Sunday and public holidays), and the service hours will be from 9am to 6pm, Monday to Sunday during the application period (i.e. May 25 to June 14).

More information about the ESS is attached.

Disbursement of Subsidies under Club-house Subsidy Scheme under Anti-epidemic Fund begins

The disbursement of subsidies under the Club-house Subsidy Scheme set up under the Anti-epidemic Fund has started.

The Scheme provides a one-off subsidy of \$100,000 to club-house operators with valid Certificates of Compliance (CoC) issued under the Clubs (Safety of Premises) Ordinance (Cap. 376). It aims to provide immediate financial relief to CoC holders whose businesses have been hard-hit by the epidemics and social distancing measures imposed by the Government.

The application period for the Scheme started on April 18. There are currently about 580 club-houses operating with valid CoCs in Hong Kong. As at today (May 12), 495 applications were received, of which 470 applications have been approved. The Office of the Licensing Authority (OLA) under the Home Affairs Department has started to disburse subsidies to the successful applicants, who will be informed of the disbursement of subsidies through letters or emails.

The application deadline is May 18. Eligible CoC holders are reminded to submit their applications as soon as possible. The application form and guidelines can be downloaded from the website of the OLA (www.hadla.gov.hk) or obtained from the office of the OLA (Address: 10th Floor, 14 Taikoo Wan Road, Taikoo Shing, Hong Kong). For details, please contact the OLA at 3107 3021 or visit the website of the OLA.

Government issues notice to LegCo Secretariat indicating intention to resume Second Reading debate on National Anthem Bill

In response to media enquiries, a spokesman for the Constitutional and

Mainland Affairs Bureau said today (May 12) that the Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs, Mr Erick Tsang Kwok-wai, issued a notice to the Legislative Council (LegCo) Secretariat today indicating the Government's intention to resume the Second Reading debate of the National Anthem Bill (the Bill) at the LegCo meeting on May 27.

The spokesman said, "The national anthem is the symbol and sign of the country. The Standing Committee of the 12th National People's Congress adopted the decision to add the Law of the People's Republic of China on National Anthem (National Anthem Law) to Annex III to the Basic Law on November 4, 2017. In accordance with Article 18 of the Basic Law, the national laws listed in Annex III to the Basic Law shall be applied locally by way of promulgation or legislation by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR). It is thus the constitutional responsibility of the HKSAR Government to implement the National Anthem Law locally.

"Having regard to Hong Kong's common law system and the actual circumstances in Hong Kong, the HKSAR Government decided to implement the National Anthem Law in Hong Kong by local legislation. This approach fully reflects the spirit of 'one country, two systems'.

"The legislative principle of the National Anthem Bill is clear, that is to fully reflect the legislative purpose and intent of the National Anthem Law, a national law, which is to preserve the dignity of the national anthem and promote respect for the national anthem, and at the same time to give due regard to Hong Kong's common law system as well as the actual circumstances in Hong Kong."

The spokesman stressed that the spirit of the National Anthem Bill was "respect", adding that a person would only commit an offence if the person expressed his views by publicly and intentionally insulting the national anthem. He said it was completely untrue for some people to claim that the law was "suppressing the freedom of speech" and was 'draconian'."

"In the course of drafting the Bill, we had consulted the LegCo Panel on Constitutional Affairs and attended two special panel meetings lasting for a total of about 15 hours, during which we have listened to the views from 190 members of the public and representatives of various organisations. We have also met with different political parties, professional groups, representatives from the legal sector and the academia to listen to and take in their views," the spokesman said.

"The Bill was introduced to the LegCo in January 2019 for First Reading and Second Reading. The relevant Bills Committee has subsequently convened 17 meetings and used over 50 hours to scrutinise the Bill clause-by-clause. Also, members of the public were invited to express their views at one of the meetings. In the process, the Government has listened attentively to the views of members of the Bills Committee and the public."

"We hope that the LegCo can pass the Bill as soon as possible," the spokesman added.