

Immigration Department Review 2024 (with photos)

The Director of Immigration, Mr Kwok Joon-fung, held a press conference today (January 27) to review the work of the Immigration Department (ImmD) over the past year and look ahead to the future. The following is a summary of the department's major activities in 2024 and its outlook:

Staying committed to its mission and safeguarding national security

The Safeguarding National Security Ordinance took effect upon gazettal in 2024. Together with the Hong Kong National Security Law, a comprehensive legal system and enforcement mechanism for safeguarding national security have been established in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR). With a crucial role to play in safeguarding national security, the department has been guarding the country's southern gateway rigorously with patriotism, and acts in accordance with all applicable laws and prevailing immigration policies to protect Hong Kong's national sovereignty, security and development interests. Staying principled and innovative, the Government actively seeks reforms so that Hong Kong can advance from stability to prosperity and better integrate into the national development. It also strives to consolidate and enhance Hong Kong's status as an international financial, shipping and trade centre. The ImmD continues to render full support to the HKSAR Government in its policy directions and measures, with a view to contributing to the prosperity and stability of Hong Kong.

Enhancing efficiency and facilitating connections and integration

(A) Passenger traffic at control points

In 2024, a total of around 298 million passengers passed through Hong Kong's control points, representing an increase of about 41 per cent over 2023 and a return to the 300 million level in 2019. The total number of visitor arrivals was around 44.5 million, representing an increase of about 31 per cent as compared with that of 2023, of which Mainland visitor arrivals were around 34.04 million, representing an increase of about 27 per cent when compared with that of 2023. Meanwhile, the number of arrivals of other visitors in 2024 was around 10.46 million, representing an increase of about 44 per cent over 2023. Among the visitor arrivals in 2024, around 9.86 million visitors travelled through the Airport Control Point, while around 32.81 million visitors and around 1.84 million visitors passed through land control points and sea control points respectively.

(B) Enabling people movement

(1) Enhancing handling capacity of control points

The ImmD has been taking various measures, including flexible deployment

of manpower, optimisation of workflow and effective use of information technology, etc, to continuously enhance the handling capacity and efficiency of control points. Among them, the Heung Yuen Wai Boundary Control Point has seen a continuous increase in users since its passenger clearance services commenced operation in February 2023. To further enhance the clearance capacity, the ImmD set up 10 additional mobile counters in the arrival hall of the Heung Yuen Wai Boundary Control Point and completed the enhancement works in early June 2024 to replace some of the conventional counters with e-Channels, thereby increasing the number of e-Channels in the arrival hall from the existing 14 to 18. Furthermore, to enhance the handling capacity and efficiency of the Express Rail Link West Kowloon Control Point, in addition to the existing 22 e-Channels, 19 extra e-Channels were installed in phases in the arrival hall, which were then put into service progressively starting from June 26, 2024.

(2) Extension of e-Channel service

The ImmD launched the Contactless e-Channel service in 2021 to allow registered Hong Kong residents to undergo self-service immigration clearance using an encrypted QR code generated by the "Contactless e-Channel" mobile application and facial recognition technology. As at the end of 2024, around 5 million Hong Kong residents had registered for the service and the number of passengers who used the service reached around 150 million, accounting for nearly 75 per cent of the daily number of Hong Kong residents using the e-Channels. On July 19, 2024, the ImmD launched the Mutual Use of QR Code between HKSAR and Macao SAR Clearance Service in collaboration with the relevant authorities of Macao. Eligible Hong Kong residents who have registered for using the Macao Automated Passenger Clearance Service may use the encrypted QR code generated by the "Contactless e-Channel" mobile application for self-service immigration clearance in Macao. Similarly, eligible Macao permanent residents may also use the encrypted QR code generated by the "Macao One Account" mobile application for self-service immigration clearance through the e-Channels in Hong Kong. As at the end of 2024, the numbers of Hong Kong residents and Macao residents who used the service were around 400 000 and 210 000 respectively.

(3) Cancelling the requirement for visitors to furnish arrival or departure cards

To further streamline immigration procedures, the ImmD has cancelled the requirement for visitors to furnish an arrival or departure card with effect from October 16, 2024. All passengers are no longer required to complete and furnish an arrival or departure card, thereby facilitating a faster and more convenient immigration clearance process.

Attracting talent by building Hong Kong into an international hub for talent

In support of the Government's initiatives to attract and retain talent, as well as building Hong Kong into an international hub for talent, the ImmD continued to implement the various enhanced talent admission schemes and

deployed additional manpower and streamlined the system to speed up the processing of relevant applications. Meanwhile, technology was also utilised to enhance electronic services, making the submission of visa applications more convenient and efficient. (For details of the numbers of applications for visas/entry permits/extensions of stay received and approved under various admission schemes/policies, please refer to the Annex.)

(A) Enhancing talent admission schemes

(1) Enhancing the assessment criteria and arrangements for the General Points Test under the Quality Migrant Admission Scheme

With effect from November 1, 2024, the General Points Test (GPT) under the Quality Migrant Admission Scheme (QMAS) has been enhanced by adopting clearer and more objective scoring criteria, as well as streamlining the application and selection process. The enhanced GPT replaced the original item-by-item scoring system with an assessment questionnaire comprising 12 assessment criteria across six major aspects, namely age, academic qualifications, language proficiency, work experience, income and business ownership. Applicants may submit applications if they meet a minimum of six assessment criteria. The ImmD will pass the eligible applications to an assessment panel chaired by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare. The assessment panel will then provide advice to the Director of Immigration according to the selection results. There is no annual quota under the enhanced GPT.

(2) Expanding the list of eligible universities under the Top Talent Pass Scheme and extending the validity period of the first visa for Category A applications

To further expand the network for attracting talent, starting from November 1, 2024, 13 top Mainland and overseas universities/institutions have been added to the list of eligible universities under the Top Talent Pass Scheme (TTPS). The aggregate list currently covers a total of 199 eligible institutions after the annual update. In addition, with effect from October 16, 2024, the validity period of the first visa of applicants approved under Category A of the TTPS has also been extended from two years to three years to facilitate their advance planning for relocation to Hong Kong with their families. The new measure also applies to Category A applicants whose applications were approved before the aforementioned date.

(3) Extending the immigration arrangements for graduates from the Greater Bay Area campuses of Hong Kong universities

In late 2022, the Immigration Arrangements for Non-local Graduates was expanded to include graduates from the Greater Bay Area (GBA) campuses of Hong Kong universities on a pilot basis for two years. The HKSAR Government announced in October 2024 that the arrangements would be extended for two years to the end of 2026.

(B) Temporarily exempting full-time non-local undergraduate students from

restrictions on taking up part-time jobs

Starting from November 1, 2024, full-time non-local undergraduate students have been temporarily exempted from the restrictions on taking up part-time jobs to enhance their personal experience of working in Hong Kong, thereby increasing their incentive to stay in Hong Kong for development after graduation. Eligible full-time non-local undergraduate students are allowed to take up part-time employment within the duration of their studies, with no restrictions on the number of working hours and location.

(C) Implementation of New Capital Investment Entrant Scheme

The New Capital Investment Entrant Scheme was launched on March 1, 2024, with the aim to further enrich the talent pool and attract more new capital to Hong Kong. An eligible applicant must invest a minimum of HK\$30 million in the permissible investment assets. Invest Hong Kong is responsible for assessing whether the applications fulfil the financial requirements, and the ImmD is responsible for assessing the applications for visa and entry permits and extensions of stay, etc.

(D) Relaxation of visa arrangements for nationals of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam

To foster closer ties with countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), following the relaxation of criteria for Vietnamese nationals applying for multiple-entry visas for travel or business in 2023, the relaxation measure has been extended to include nationals of Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar starting from October 16, 2024. Meanwhile, the validity period of multiple-entry visas for nationals of these four ASEAN countries has also been extended from two years to three years. The ImmD has put in place a fast-track arrangement for group visitors from ASEAN countries who submit their visa applications via local travel agents, so that the processing time of the visa applications can be significantly shortened.

Be people-oriented and improve their livelihood in pursuit of happiness

(A) Commissioning of the new Immigration Headquarters

Located at the Tseung Kwan O town centre, the new Immigration Headquarters officially commenced operation on June 11, 2024, marking a new milestone in the development of the department. Not only is the new headquarters equipped with better facilities and infrastructure, it also houses the Tseung Kwan O Marriage Registry and Tseung Kwan O Births Registry, delivering quality public services to citizens. The marriage hall of the Tseung Kwan O Marriage Registry features an innovative design with special wall panels, a lighting system that can be set to different colours, as well as various photo-taking spots. Since its opening on June 26, the hall has been popular among the public. As at the end of 2024, more than 1 300 weddings were held there.

(B) New submission and collection kiosks for personal documentation

The Registration of Persons (Amendment) Regulation 2024 came into effect on December 13, 2024. On the same day, the ImmD introduced self-application services for identity cards (ICs), expanding the service scope of the Personal Documentation Submission Kiosks to cover IC applications, in addition to HKSAR passport applications. The new services cover three types of replacement applications of IC holders who are aged 18 or above holding a locally issued smart IC, i.e. (i) replacement for an adult IC for persons reaching the age of 18; (ii) replacement for a permanent IC for persons having their eligibility for a permanent IC verified; and (iii) replacement for a new smart identity card for persons holding a valid old form of smart identity IC. Eligible applicants may apply for an IC replacement in a self-service manner and submit their HKSAR passport applications in one go. For collection of documents, members of the public may also collect their ICs and HKSAR passports in a self-service manner through the Personal Documentation Collection Kiosks. A total of 54 new personal documentation kiosks are provided in the new headquarters. The service hours of some of the kiosks have been further extended until 10pm to enable eligible applicants' access to the services beyond office hours. In addition, starting from December 13, 2024, the processing time for new smart ICs has been shortened from the current seven working days to five working days. Members of the public may collect their new ICs on the next working day upon completion of application processing by the ImmD.

(C) Conclusion of Territory-wide Identity Card Replacement Exercise

Following the conclusion of the Territory-wide Identity Card Replacement Exercise on March 3, 2023, the Smart Identity Card Replacement Centres ceased operation. Residents who have yet to replace their smart identity cards can visit the four designated Registration of Persons (ROP) Offices during the extended service hours or the ROP – Kwun Tong (Temporary) Office for identity card replacement. As at the end of 2024, a total of some 7.32 million identity card holders had replaced their smart identity cards, representing a replacement rate of about 91 per cent. The Secretary for Security has made the Registration of Persons (Invalidation of Identity Cards) Order 2024 under section 7C of the Registration of Persons Ordinance (Cap. 177), declaring that the old form of smart identity cards issued before November 26, 2018, will be invalidated in two phases in 2025. Moreover, the On-site Identity Card Replacement Service (On-site Service), which had been temporarily suspended for over two years due to the pandemic, resumed in November 2022 to provide on-site identity card replacement service to eligible residents of residential care homes (RCHs). As at the end of 2024, the outreach teams had visited around 1 100 RCHs to complete the replacement procedures for over 45 200 residents. It is anticipated that the On-site Service will conclude in the first quarter of 2025.

(D) Granting of visa-free access for HKSAR passport holders

In 2024, the ImmD issued a total of more than 900 000 HKSAR passports. Since July 2024, the period of visa-free entry for HKSAR passport holders to Thailand has been extended from up to 30 days to 60 days. As at the end of

2024, 171 countries or territories had granted visa-free access or visa-on-arrival for HKSAR passport holders. The ImmD will continue to lobby more countries or territories to grant visa-free access or visa-on-arrival for HKSAR passport holders to provide travel convenience.

(E) Services and support for Hong Kong residents in distress outside Hong Kong

(1) Assistance to Hong Kong residents in distress outside Hong Kong

The ImmD's Assistance to Hong Kong Residents Unit (AHU) has been making every effort to provide practical assistance to Hong Kong residents in distress outside Hong Kong. The AHU maintains close ties with the Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the HKSAR (OCMFA), Chinese diplomatic and consular missions overseas and other relevant HKSAR government departments to provide all practicable help and support to assistance seekers. To step up its services and support for Hong Kong residents in distress outside Hong Kong, the ImmD introduced the 1868 WeChat assistance hotline and 1868 Chatbot on March 18, 2024. Along with the existing options, Hong Kong residents may contact the AHU through a total of six different channels for assistance. In 2024, the AHU handled 3 302 requests for assistance in total, most of which involved loss of travel documents, hospitalisation, casualties, etc outside Hong Kong. Among the requests received, there were cases of Hong Kong residents suspected of having been lured to Southeast Asian countries and detained to engage in illegal work. The ImmD has provided appropriate advice and practicable assistance to the persons concerned or their families according to their wishes. In the light of the situation in Lebanon and Israel, the ImmD has also maintained close contact with the OCMFA and relevant Chinese Embassies to follow up as appropriate. With the assistance of the Embassy, three Hong Kong residents were safely evacuated from Lebanon by vessel and flight under the national arrangements.

(2) Publicity on consular protection and outbound travel safety

In June 2024, the ImmD and the OCMFA co-organised the Consular Protection Month to widely disseminate information on consular protection and outbound travel safety through a series of activities, including holding the launching ceremony of the Consular Protection Month at Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA), organising roving exhibitions on consular protection across the territory, setting up booths at the International Travel Expo and conducting joint seminars with the OCMFA. Meanwhile, the "Consular Protection and Outbound Travel Safety" online exhibition was launched to enable members of the public to learn more about consular protection and outbound travel safety through various activities.

(F) Mainland Travel Permits for Hong Kong and Macao Residents (Non-Chinese Citizens)

The Exit and Entry Administration of the People's Republic of China started to issue Mainland Travel Permits for Hong Kong and Macao Residents

(Non-Chinese Citizens) (Permits) from July 10, 2024, onwards. To apply for the Permit, applicants are required to apply for a Notice of Application for Access to Information (Notice) from the ImmD. The Notice will normally be made available within 10 days upon receipt of the request. As at the end of 2024, a total of about 87 000 applications in relation to the Notice had been received, among which 99 per cent had been processed.

Stringent law enforcement and securing social stability

(A) Law enforcement

The ImmD is dedicated to combating immigration-related crimes. Its Cybercrime and Forensics Investigation Group has been actively conducting targeted cyber patrols and taking enforcement actions against those who organise, arrange or incite the public to commit serious crimes such as employing illegal workers through social media or instant messaging software, with a view to tackling illegal employment and protecting the job opportunities of local workers.

(1) Combating illegal employment

In 2024, the ImmD conducted a total of 17 906 operations against illegal employment and arrested 4 172 illegal workers and 513 local employers altogether. In particular, a total of 444 non-ethnic Chinese illegal workers and 146 local employers who employed them were arrested during the enforcement operations against non-ethnic Chinese illegal workers. Employing illegal workers is a serious offence. A dishwashing service company licensee was convicted for employing illegal workers and sentenced to 19 months' imprisonment in February 2024. In July and August 2024, under the co-ordination of the Exit and Entry Administration of the People's Republic of China, the ImmD mounted a cross-boundary joint operation with the Exit and Entry Administration Offices of the public security authorities of Guangxi and Guangdong and the Shenzhen Frontier Inspection Station, cracking down on a cross-boundary forgery syndicate that specialised in soliciting Mainlanders to take up illegal employment in Hong Kong, resulting in the arrest of a total of 201 persons and the seizure of a large quantity of forgery equipment and forged documents. In regards to the Hong Kong side, the ImmD mounted an operation codenamed "Vanguard" and arrested a total of 97 persons, including a syndicate mastermind and several core members, as well as a number of suspected illegal workers and employers suspected of employing them.

(2) Strengthening counter-terrorism preparedness, combating illegal transnational migration and document fraud

Officers of the ImmD intercepted suspicious persons at immigration control points in light of terrorist threat assessments and actual circumstances, and kept visitors in suspected association with terrorist activities under surveillance to prevent such persons from attempting to enter Hong Kong. In 2024, the ImmD conducted a total of 13 664 related inspection operations at various immigration control points, and intercepted 32 551 passengers in total for enquiries. To enhance its preparedness and

response capability for emergencies and terrorist attacks, the ImmD participated in a large-scale interdepartmental counter-terrorism exercise codenamed "Wisdomlight" at the Kai Tak Sports Park in December 2024. During the exercise, the ImmD showcased its recently commissioned mobile identification tactical unit, while the Emergency Response Team of the Castle Peak Bay Immigration Centre (CIC) demonstrated how to quell a disturbance. Moreover, the ImmD has been working with different law enforcement agencies to combat illegal transnational migration, with the focus on investigation into document fraud, in order to prevent anyone from entering Hong Kong or travelling to other countries or territories via Hong Kong with forged travel documents. The ImmD's Anti-Illegal Migration Agency conducted a total of 30 438 operations against forgery activities, including joint operations with overseas and local law enforcement agencies against illegal transnational migration. A total of 23 693 passengers were intercepted for enquiries.

(B) Handling non-refoulement claims

(1) Combating illegal entry of non-ethnic Chinese

The ImmD has commenced dedicated operations with Mainland and local law enforcement agencies since 2016 in order to take sustained enforcement action against illegal immigration activities of non-ethnic Chinese. While a sharp increase in the number of non-ethnic Chinese illegal immigrants intercepted in the second half of 2023 was once noted, the situation has improved significantly following the strengthened enforcement actions through concerted efforts of enforcement agencies. The number of interceptions plummeted by 84 per cent from the peak of 364 in October 2023 to a monthly average of 57 in 2024. The ImmD will continue to step up intelligence exchanges with enforcement agencies on the Mainland and in Macao to further combat illegal immigration precisely.

(2) Advance Passenger Information System

To meet the aviation security requirements of the Convention on International Civil Aviation and to align Hong Kong with other aviation hubs worldwide, as well as to enable the ImmD to further enhance its clearance and enforcement capabilities to prevent undesirables, including potential non-refoulement claimants, from boarding flights heading to Hong Kong, the ImmD implemented the Advance Passenger Information (API) System on September 3, 2024, requiring airlines to transmit advance information to the ImmD about flights and passengers heading to Hong Kong through the API System when checking in travellers, and act upon the direction given through the system to allow or not allow specific travellers to board the aircraft heading to Hong Kong. To allow sufficient time for over 100 airlines to connect to the API System and to ensure that the system will run in a smooth and orderly manner, the rollout will be carried out in phases. A transitional period of around 12 months will also be provided. The offences and defences, and the miscellaneous provisions relating to the API System under Cap. 115Q, Laws of Hong Kong will come into effect after the transitional period, namely starting from September 1, 2025.

(3) Stepping up the screening process

The ImmD continued to speed up the screening of non-refoulement claims with flexible staff deployment and optimised workflow. In 2024, the ImmD determined over 2 700 non-refoulement claims. As at the end of last year, there were about 850 claims pending screening by the ImmD. Under the unified screening mechanism, over 95 per cent of the claimants rejected by the ImmD lodged appeals against the decisions. As at the end of 2024, there were about 750 claimants who had lodged appeals pending decision by the Torture Claims Appeal Board/Non-refoulement Claims Petition Office.

(4) Better management of detainees

To enhance security and management efficiency, the CIC is pressing ahead with a number of enhancement projects, including overhauling the CCTV surveillance system; launching an RFID (radio frequency Identification) Equipment Management System; and installing a Contactless Vital Sign Monitoring System to remotely monitor the vital signs of detainees. The CIC has also deployed small unmanned aircraft to carry out patrol duties from time to time to eliminate potential security threats. In addition to the CIC, the HKSAR Government included the Tai Tam Gap Correctional Institution and the Nei Ku Correctional Institution (NKCI) as places of detention of the ImmD in 2021 and 2023 respectively, thereby increasing the number of detention places for detaining non-refoulement claimants to three. When the in-situ expansion of the NKCI is completed in 2025, the overall detention capacity of the three detention places will increase to 940.

(5) Enhancing efficiency of removing unsubstantiated claimants

The ImmD has been committed to promptly removing unsubstantiated non-refoulement claimants from Hong Kong. In 2024, the ImmD removed 2 219 unsubstantiated claimants from Hong Kong, representing a rise of 24 per cent when compared with that in 2023. Under the updated removal policy effective from December 7, 2022, the ImmD may generally proceed with the removal of an unsubstantiated claimant whose judicial review case has been dismissed by the Court of First Instance of the High Court, thereby enhancing the efficiency of and efforts in removing unsubstantiated claimants. Since the implementation of the policy till the end of 2024, the ImmD removed a total of 4 070 unsubstantiated claimants from Hong Kong, including 314 claimants who were removed under the updated removal policy.

Nurturing young people and strengthening patriotic teams

(A) Hong Kong will prosper when its young people thrive

(1) Immigration Department Youth Leaders Corps

The ImmD formed the Immigration Department Youth Leaders Corps (IDYL) to provide systematic and regular disciplinary and leadership training for members by sending dedicated training officers to secondary schools with the aim of nurturing them to become pillars of society who love the country and

Hong Kong. There is also a post-secondary student team, IDYL Plus, members of which have already been admitted to post-secondary institutes. They will be the experienced leaders to pass the values of the IDYL and their personal experiences to younger members. To celebrate the 75th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, the IDYL organised a Shanghai summer exchange tour in July for 75 members to learn about the history of the motherland and have an in-depth exchange of ideas with local young people. As at the end of 2024, a total of over 950 students participated in the IDYL.

(2) Immigration Department Youth Ambassador Programme

The ImmD launched the Immigration Department Youth Ambassador Programme in November 2023 and used the Immigration Divisions of the Mainland Offices of the HKSAR Government (Mainland Offices) as bases to recruit young people from Hong Kong who are studying and living in various provinces on the Mainland as Youth Ambassadors. Since the launch of the Programme, the ImmD has appointed 32 Youth Ambassadors in Beijing, Guangzhou, Shanghai and Wuhan. The appointed Youth Ambassadors will have diverse learning opportunities provided by the ImmD during the one-year term and collaborate with the Mainland Offices in disseminating the latest information and in briefing the public on the business scope of the department. The ImmD expects that the Programme will broaden the Youth Ambassadors' horizons and lay solid groundwork for their different future positions in society.

(B) Staff training and continuous development

(1) Recruitment of service members

The ImmD launched a new round of in-service appointments and open recruitment of Immigration Officers in May 2024, while the open recruitment of Immigration Assistants continued to be all year round. During the recruitment exercises in 2024, the department recruited about 100 Immigration Officers and 210 Immigration Assistants.

(2) National studies

In 2024, a total of 366 members of the Immigration Service were arranged to attend training courses in various Mainland institutes, including the National Academy of Governance, the First Standing Force of the Exit and Entry Administration of the People's Republic of China, the China Foreign Affairs University, and the China People's Police University. Moreover, in order to reinforce the concept of national security among newly recruited Immigration Officers, deepen their understanding of the history and development of the motherland as well as enhance their knowledge of the country's immigration regime, with the staunch support of the Ministry of Public Security and the China People's Police University, the ImmD has arranged 200 Immigration Officer trainees to participate in the National Affairs and Immigration Control Training Course for Immigration Officer Trainees at the China People's Police University (Guangzhou) since October 2023. The ImmD will actively co-ordinate with relevant Mainland authorities so that newly recruited Immigration Assistants can also receive training in the Mainland.

Vision for 2025

Utilising technologies to enhance service standards

(A) New milestone of e-Channel service

Since the launch of the first e-Channel at the Lo Wu Control Point in December 2004, the total number of users of e-Channels has exceeded 2 billion. Over the past two decades, the ImmD has been striving for innovation in enhancing the clearance efficiency of e-Channels and expanding the service target group in order to provide immigration services of the highest quality to members of the public and visitors. To further enhance service quality, the ImmD has set two key directions for the future development of e-Channels, namely "simplicity" and "efficiency". While ensuring information security, the ImmD will introduce more innovative technologies for e-Channel users to perform immigration clearance in a more convenient and faster manner.

(1) Extension of applicable age of e-Channel service

At present, Hong Kong permanent residents aged 11 or above holding a smart identity card can use e-Channels for self-service immigration clearance. To enhance clearance efficiency, the ImmD will adjust the applicable age of the e-Channel service for Hong Kong permanent residents from the first quarter of 2025 onwards so that children aged 7 or above holding a valid HKSAR passport and a Hong Kong permanent identity card can undergo self-service immigration clearance with a smart identity card using facial recognition technology at e-Channels. The implementation date will be announced later.

(2) Introduction of new e-Channel

The ImmD plans to introduce the new e-Channel at the Arrival Hall of HKIA in the third quarter of 2025, which will enable eligible Hong Kong residents to experience hassle-free self-service immigration clearance through verification of identity by facial recognition technology at the new e-Channel upon arrival without prior enrolment or presenting travel documents or QR codes.

(3) Innovative proposal for the application of technologies in handling immigration clearance for private cars

The ImmD and the Hong Kong Applied Science and Technology Research Institute (ASTRI) signed a Memorandum of Understanding in April 2024 to explore an innovative proposal for the application of technologies in four areas, i.e. Innovative Immigration Control Operation, Biometric Identification and Authentication, Artificial Intelligence Assisted Immigration Application and Collaborative Robotics Technology. Currently, the ImmD is making substantial efforts in a collaborative project relating to the Innovative Immigration Control Operation with ASTRI, actively researching whether a technology solution underpinned by facial recognition technology

can be used to handle immigration clearance of private car passengers, with a view to further enhancing passenger clearance experience.

(B) Upgrading infrastructure of boundary control points

(1) Redevelopment of Huanggang Port

To tie in with the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area development blueprint and enable smooth and efficient people and cargo flows within the area, the HKSAR Government has been forging ahead with a series of measures to further enhance the capacity of control points and the clearance efficiency, with the redevelopment of the Huanggang Port as one of the key projects. The new Huanggang Port will implement the "co-location arrangement" and adopt a new clearance mode of "collaborative inspection and joint clearance", making it the first boundary control point between Guangdong Province and the HKSAR adopting such a clearance mode. Currently, Hong Kong and Shenzhen are taking forward the construction works of the new Huanggang Port building and specific immigration clearance arrangements. The target is to strive for basic completion of the new Huanggang Port building by the end of 2025. The ImmD will continue to maintain close liaison with the authorities of both Hong Kong and the Mainland, and proactively implement all relevant preparatory work.

(2) Airport Terminal 2

With the full commissioning of the Three-Runway System (3RS) of HKIA in 2024, the capacity of HKIA will be substantially enhanced. Terminal 2 (T2) under the 3RS project is undergoing expansion. Upon completion, it will provide full-fledged terminal services with additional immigration facilities, which include a total of 137 immigration clearance counters and 60 e-Channels. T2 will be opened in phases based on passenger traffic demand. The ImmD will maintain close ties with the Airport Authority Hong Kong and other relevant HKSAR government departments to ensure the smooth commissioning and running of T2.

(C) Providing immigration facilitation to the 15th National Games

The ImmD fully supports the 15th National Games, and the 12th National Games for Persons with Disabilities and the 9th National Special Olympic Games to be held in 2025, whereby special immigration lanes will be provided in the closed areas of designated control points on Hong Kong side to provide faster and more convenient clearance services for athletes from the Mainland and Macao and their accompanying staff.

(D) Commencement of study of Fourth Information Systems Strategy (ISS-4)

To further work in tandem with the HKSAR Government's smart city initiative and proactively seize the opportunities of innovative technology and artificial intelligence technology, the ImmD has appointed a consultant in August 2024 to conduct a new round of reviews on information systems and formulate the ISS-4 as the department's long-term information technology

development blueprint. The research for the ISS-4 is expected to be completed in the second quarter of 2025.

(E) Enhancing various measures for attracting talent

The ImmD will continue to fully support the HKSAR Government's measures for attracting and retaining talent. A new channel will be introduced under the General Employment Policy and the Admission Scheme for Mainland Talents and Professionals in 2025 to allow young and experienced non-degree talent with relevant professional and technical qualifications to apply for entry into Hong Kong to join the skilled trades facing acute manpower shortage. There will be a quota under such an arrangement. Moreover, a new mechanism will be introduced under the QMAS in 2025 to proactively invite top-notch and leading talent to come to Hong Kong for development, promoting Hong Kong as the focal point of international high-calibre talent.

