

LCQ17: Expediting processing of applications for renewal of HKSAR passports

Following is a question by the Hon Yang Wing-kit and a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr Tang Ping-keung, in the Legislative Council today (June 28):

Question:

It is learnt that quite a number of members of the public, whose Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) passports have expired, have been unable to make appointments to renew their passports, thus affecting their travel and business trips outside Hong Kong. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the respective numbers of Hong Kong residents whose HKSAR passports have expired and will expire in the coming six months;
- (2) given that in reply to a question raised by a Member of this Council in respect of the Estimates of Expenditure 2023-2024, the Government indicated that the Immigration Department (ImmD) had employed additional manpower to expedite the processing of renewal of HKSAR passports, whether ImmD will consider further employing additional manpower to expedite the processing of the backlog of applications; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (3) whether it will extend the appointment bookable period for renewal of HKSAR passports from 24 working days to 90 working days counting from the following working day, so as to facilitate members of the public to renew their HKSAR passports; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (4) of the total number of members of the public assisted in applying for passports by the HKSAR Passport Mobile Application Stations (PMAS) during their operation; the reasons for suspending the operation of PMAS, and whether it will re-launch PMAS to travel around all 18 districts through Hong Kong to call on and assist members of the public to apply for passports online; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (5) whether it will set up additional Travel Document Submission Kiosks and Passport Collection Kiosks at MTR stations and government premises such as District Offices or Government Offices in various districts, so as to ease the influx of applications for passport renewals; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (6) whether it will study the provision of passport delivery service to enable members of the public to acknowledge receipt of their HKSAR passports

through the government mobile application "iAM Smart" upon receipt of them, so as to promote e-Government; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

With the reduction of outbound travel by Hong Kong residents during the pandemic, many residents' Hong Kong Special Administrative Region passports (HKSAR passports) have expired and yet been renewed. The Immigration Department (ImmD) has been reminding members of the public through various channels to check the validity of their HKSAR passports early, arrange for renewal of their expired or expiring passports as soon as possible, and allow sufficient time for submitting applications and collection of their new passports, so as to avoid any delay in their upcoming outbound travel. With the full resumption of normal travel between Hong Kong and the Mainland and the society steadily returns to normalcy, the ImmD has already received 778 159 HKSAR passport applications during the first five months of this year (with a monthly average of about 156 000 or daily 7 100 applications), surpassing the annual total before the pandemic. The number of HKSAR passport applications has been rising continuously for several months to record-breaking high, with a daily average of over 10 000 applications in early April this year, which is more than treble the pre-pandemic daily average of 2 700 applications.

By making good use of technology and effective deployment of resources, as well as increasing the processing capacity through improving the passport application process and workflow, whilst there has been a substantial increase in HKSAR passport applications in recent months, the ImmD has been able to meet its performance pledges of completing the processing of a HKSAR passport application within five working days (and within ten working days for children under 11 not holding a Hong Kong permanent identity card) after all necessary documents, application fee and photographs that meet standard requirements are received.

As for passport collection, to minimise the waiting time of members of the public, the ImmD encourages applicants to make an appointment for collecting their new passports. Alternatively, they may collect their passports without an appointment by visiting the collection office during service hours, but the waiting time may be longer subject to circumstances of the day. To meet the demand for passport collection, the ImmD will serve all members of the public on the day of their visit to ensure that they can receive their new passports. The ImmD will deploy manpower and extend service hours according to the actual circumstances of individual regional offices. Some offices extended their service hours to 8pm or up to 10pm even on weekdays or weekends in order to complete passport issuance and related work.

My reply to the question raised by the Hon Yang Wing-kit is as follows:

(1) As at the end of May 2023, among the HKSAR passports that expired or

became invalid between 2020 and May 2023, 750 000 eligible holders have yet to apply for the renewal of passports. In addition, around 260 000 HKSAR passports will expire and become invalid between June and end-2023.

(2) The ImmD has flexibly deployed resources to handle documentation-related work to cope with the above-mentioned surge in the applications for HKSAR passports in recent months. Currently, the ImmD has allocated additional resources and increased its manpower by about 30 per cent (including working overtime, engaging retired civil servants and contract staff), to ensure timely processing of HKSAR passports applications. The ImmD will continue to review its manpower arrangements based on the service demand.

(3) The ImmD has put in place various facilitation measures to provide additional means for submitting HKSAR passport applications. In particular, members of the public are encouraged to apply via the internet or the Immigration Department Mobile Application which are both efficient and convenient. Alternatively, applications can be made by post, via drop-in box, in person, or by using the self-service Travel Document Submission Kiosks which does not require reservation and has no quota limit. At present, nearly 80 per cent of the applications are made online or in a self-service manner.

Having said that, the ImmD has been closely monitoring the current appointment situation for HKSAR passports applications, and will actively consider further extension of the appointment bookable period of the online booking system to cater for the needs of the public.

(4) During the pandemic, the ImmD noted that more than 700 000 HKSAR passport holders had yet to replace their expired passports between 2020 and end-2021, and nearly one million expired HKSAR passports had yet to be replaced by mid-2022. In view of this, the ImmD has been reminding the public to check the validity of their passports early and replace their expired or expiring passports as soon as possible since October 2021 through various channels and a series of publicity activities, including producing promotional videos and introducing a brand new HKSAR Passport Mobile Application Stations (PMAS) promotional vehicles from July to September 2022. PMAS travelled around all 18 districts in the territory with dedicated staff onboard to assist eligible applicants to submit their HKSAR passport applications online. During the period, a total of over 10 000 passport applications were received through the PMAS.

After a series of publicity activities, the number of HKSAR passport applications has been on the rise, and it has even reached a record high in recent months. Therefore, the service of PMAS concluded successfully in mid-September 2022.

(5) Regarding the suggestion of setting up additional Travel Document Submission Kiosks and Passport Collection Kiosks at MTR stations and Government premises such as District Offices or Government Offices in various districts, as it involves factors such as security and personal data (including additional information technology infrastructure, ensuring that facilities of the relevant venues can meet security requirements and are

provided with regular maintenance, and ascertaining proper access to passport documents in accordance with data protection principles), the ImmD considers that it is more secure and proper to install the kiosks at its own offices. In view of the keen public demand for self-service kiosks, the ImmD actively adopts technology and plans to substantially increase the number of self-service kiosks in the new ImmD Headquarters to be commissioned next year, so as to facilitate members of the public to apply and collect their travel documents in a self-service manner. In addition, the ImmD will actively explore the feasibility of installing more self-service kiosks in its existing offices to further enhance the processing capacity.

(6) The ImmD will, from time to time, review and explore facilitation measures on the application for and collection of travel documents, including the feasibility of introducing passport delivery service and using the "iAM Smart" Mobile Application's authentication function. To support the policy of building a smart government, the ImmD will continue to make good use of technology and improve the procedures and workflow of passport application and collection, with a view to further enhancing operational efficiency and bringing greater convenience to the public.

BFAC notes Government's efforts in facilitating contract compliance for construction industry

The following is issued on behalf of the Business Facilitation Advisory Committee Secretariat:

The Business Facilitation Advisory Committee held its 51st meeting today (June 28). At the meeting, the Development Bureau (DEVB) briefed members on the findings of a Business Impact Assessment related to the latest ideas on payment arrangement for construction works in Hong Kong. The Committee noted the DEVB's continuous efforts to enhance the overall development of the construction sector.

The Committee also received the work reports of its three task forces:

Wholesale and Retail Task Force (WRTF)

- The Hong Kong Productivity Council, the implementation agent of the Chinese Medicine Development Fund (CMDF), briefed the WRTF on the Proprietary Chinese Medicine Registration Supporting Scheme (A3 Scheme) under the CMDF. The A3 Scheme aims to provide eligible local licensed proprietary Chinese medicines (pCms) manufacturers or wholesalers with

subsidy and technical support for the application for Certificate of Registration of pCm, including the engagement of consultants to provide relevant expert advice and subsidisation of the conduct of necessary laboratory testing for pCm products. As at mid-March 2023, the A3 Scheme has approved approximately 650 applications, benefitting 130 qualified and licensed local manufacturers or wholesalers of pCm. The WRTF welcomed the setting up of the relevant funding scheme under the CMDF and considered it conducive to supporting the development of Chinese medicine and enhancing the overall standard of the sector.

- The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) introduced to the WRTF the System for Small Volume Exemption (SSVE) which facilitates the application and renewal for exemption from nutrition labelling by the trade. Since 2014, the trade can submit Small Volume Exemption application electronically. The CFS has further enhanced the IT systems and launched the SSVE under the Food Trader Portal in December 2022. The system provides new online payment function, and formal approval letter will be issued to applicants automatically upon confirmation of online transaction. As at the end of March 2023, over 3 200 new and renewal products had been processed by the SSVE, and 94 per cent of the products were processed via online submission. The WRTF appreciated the CFS's implementation of the SSVE which provides the trade with business facilitation e-services.

Food Business and Related Services Task Force (FRSTF)

- The FEHD reported on the implementation progress of the two new initiatives, namely, introducing a Professional Certification System (PCS) for food business-related full licences and relaxing the restrictions on types of food items sold by light refreshment restaurants, to the FRSTF. Their implementation has been generally smooth since commencement on March 1, 2023. Upon acquiring sufficient experience, the FEHD will review the effectiveness of the new measures and consider extending the PCS to other food business licences. The FRSTF welcomed the two new initiatives, and suggested the FEHD enhancing the publicity.
- The FEHD also briefed the FRSTF on the "Quick Reference Guide to Application for Restaurant Licences" published in December 2022, which provides information on the criteria for issuing restaurant licences and the application procedures in simple and easy-to-understand illustrations. The FRSTF welcomed the new Quick Reference Guide and expressed appreciation to the FEHD for their efforts in developing business facilitation measures to assist those who intend to open a restaurant to understand the relevant licensing requirements more easily.

- To further assist an applicant holding a provisional food business licence to obtain a full licence in a timely manner, the FEHD also briefed the FRSTF on the specific action timetable for each licence application in the notification letter for approval for a provisional food business licence. In parallel, the time allowed for a food business licence applicant to comply with all licensing requirements for a full licence has been revised to three months after the expiry of the provisional licence. The FRSTF expressed its understanding on the revision of the time allowed to comply with all licensing requirements and suggested the FEHD further digitise the process of licence applications between departments with a view to shortening the lead time.

Task Force on Business Liaison Groups (BLGTF)

- The Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD) briefed the BLGTF on the e-services provided for the application for Permit to Use and Operate for Amusement Rides, including e-submission, e-payment, e-tracking and e-licence, which can enhance the efficiency of the whole application process. The BLGTF thanked the EMSD for implementing the e-services which facilitate the trade in licence applications.
- The EMSD and the Buildings Department (BD) also briefed the BLGTF on the Feed-in Tariff (FiT) Scheme and the facilitation measures for the installation of solar photovoltaic system by the private sector. The BLGTF appreciated the efforts of the EMSD and the BD for the clear explanation of the FiT Scheme and the relevant facilitation measures which help encourage the private sector to consider investing in renewable energy.

The Committee expressed appreciation of the commitment and achievements of the bureaux and departments in continuously implementing the business facilitation measures under the "Be the Smart Regulator" Programme to enhance their business licensing services.

Papers for the Committee meeting are available at www.gov.hk/en/business/supportenterprises/bf/advisory/index.htm for public access.

Fraudulent website related to Chong Hing Bank Limited

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority:

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) wishes to alert members of the public to a press release issued by Chong Hing Bank Limited relating to a fraudulent website, which has been reported to the HKMA. A hyperlink to the press release is available on the [HKMA website](#).

The HKMA wishes to remind the public that banks will not send SMS or emails with embedded hyperlinks which direct them to the banks' websites to carry out transactions. They will not ask customers for sensitive personal information, such as login passwords or One-Time Password, by phone, email or SMS (including via embedded hyperlinks).

Anyone who has provided his or her personal information, or who has conducted any financial transactions, through or in response to the website concerned, should contact the bank using the contact information provided in the press release, and report the matter to the Police by contacting the Crime Wing Information Centre of the Hong Kong Police Force at 2860 5012.

LCQ18: Promoting development of maritime industry

Following is a question by the Hon Holden Chow and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Lam Sai-hung, in the Legislative Council today (June 28):

Question:

It is learnt that in order to promote the development of the maritime industry, the Government has introduced in recent years a number of policies, such as tax concession measures. There are views that should the Government be more proactive in attracting more international maritime enterprises to set up their operations in Hong Kong, Hong Kong's maritime industry will certainly be taken to a higher level. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether, in order to support the development of a high value-added maritime industry, the Government has considered upgrading the Hong Kong Maritime and Port Board to an independent statutory body, thereby conferring on it wider powers and functions, and enabling it to steer more effectively

the development of a high value-added maritime industry;

(2) whether it has considered allocating government land for pooling together the operations set up by international organisations in the maritime industry (including organisations relating to issues such as marine insurance, maritime arbitration and ship leasing), so as to establish a landmark conducive to the clustering of the maritime industry, as well as strengthen Hong Kong's image of promoting a high value-added maritime industry; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) given that there is an offshore liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal in the waters of Hong Kong, whether the Government has set up a task force to explore the feasibility of allowing vessels to receive LNG offshore with the latest technology, so as to facilitate the development of Hong Kong's maritime industry, as well as achieve the targets of protecting the environment and reducing emissions, and tying in with the Central Government's efforts to realise carbon neutrality; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Government is committed to reinforcing Hong Kong's position as an international maritime centre and enhancing our strengths in high value-added maritime services. In fact, the "Outline of the 14th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China and the Long-Range Objectives Through the Year 2035" and the "Outline Development Plan for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area" have shown express support to the position of the Hong Kong port and the development of high value-added maritime services in Hong Kong for better integration into the country's development course.

The Government has been implementing multi-faceted measures to further promote the development of the high-end maritime services industry. The Government has introduced various tax concessions since 2020, including tax exemption for ship leasing businesses, as well as half-rate tax concessions for the businesses of marine insurance and shipping commercial principals (i.e. ship managers, ship agents and ship brokers), in order to attract maritime enterprises to establish presence in Hong Kong. At the same time, we are actively promoting the development of "Smart Port", through putting in place a brand new data sharing platform by phases for facilitating data sharing in the maritime and port industry, thereby enhancing port efficiency. Besides, an additional HK\$200 million has been injected to the Maritime and Aviation Training Fund this year to enhance related manpower training. Furthermore, we will actively strengthen the collaboration between Hong Kong and ports in the Greater Bay Area (GBA). For example, a Memorandum of Understanding on Guangzhou-Hong Kong Greater Bay maritime co-operation was signed between the Transport and Logistics Bureau and the Guangzhou Port Authority in May 2023 to establish a communication and co-operation mechanism for port and maritime matters.

Looking ahead, we are actively taking forward a series of new measures announced in the 2023-24 Budget by the Financial Secretary. A Task Force on Maritime and Port Development Strategy has been set up with representatives from the Hong Kong Maritime and Port Board (HKMPB) and high-end maritime services industry, aiming to promulgate an action plan on the following strategies by the end of this year. These strategies include:

- (1) enhancing business sectors including ship finance, marine insurance, maritime arbitration and ship management, thereby enabling Hong Kong to become a global leading high-end maritime services market;
- (2) facilitating transformation of global maritime and port business towards zero emission;
- (3) promoting the development of smart initiatives and digitalisation in the maritime industry; and
- (4) fostering exchanges and collaboration among maritime industries in the GBA and those around the world.

We will also expedite studies on strategies for promoting the high-end maritime services industry and enhance exchanges among industries in the international arena and the GBA. The scale of the annual flagship event "Hong Kong Maritime Week" will also be expanded to strengthen the promotion of Hong Kong's maritime and port industries, so as to reinforce and continuously enhance Hong Kong's position as an international maritime centre.

In consultation with the Environment and Ecology Bureau and the Marine Department, the consolidated reply to the various parts of the question raised by the Hon Holden Chow is as follows:

- (1) With regard to the suggestion of setting up a statutory maritime body, we consider that key issues such as financial sustainability and the need to carry statutory functions have to be resolved first. If the proposed statutory maritime body does not have a recurrent and stable source of income, it would be difficult to maintain effective and sustainable operation.

In fact, the HKMPB and its three committees have been playing an active role since their establishment in 2016. Thanks to the valuable suggestions by members of the HKMPB, we have implemented a number of new policies and measures in recent years, such as the new tax regime for ship leasing and shipping commercial principals as well as the arrangements for service enhancement of the Hong Kong Shipping Registry. In sum, the Government is open to the suggestion for establishing a statutory maritime body as a long-term arrangement and will consider the way forward as necessary.

- (2) We are committed to reinforcing Hong Kong's position as an international maritime centre. Further to the establishment of the Asian Hub in Hong Kong by the International Union of Marine Insurance (IUMI) in 2016 to enhance marine insurance support in Asia, which is IUMI's first overseas office outside its headquarters in Hamburg, we have secured the establishment of the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS)'s first-ever overseas office outside its London headquarters in Hong Kong in 2019, since ICS's establishment in 1921. In addition, the Baltic and International Maritime Council (BIMCO)

announced in September 2020 its adoption of the BIMCO Law and Arbitration Clause 2020 which has included Hong Kong as one of the four designated arbitration venues in its global standard maritime contracts. The annual general meeting of BIMCO was also held in Hong Kong in May this year. According to our understanding from the industry, international maritime organisations often co-operate with local industry organisations when setting up their offices in Hong Kong, including sharing of office and secretariat facilities. In view of the above, we have no plans at this stage to allocate government land for pooling together international maritime organisations.

We will continue to maintain close communication with the industry to understand their actual needs, and will adopt various measures to actively attract more international maritime organisations to set up offices in Hong Kong.

(3) As an international maritime centre, Hong Kong has been promoting the development of green port through different measures and encouraging the industry to adopt more sustainable shipping initiatives. To this end, Hong Kong becomes the first port in Asia to mandate ocean-going vessels (OGVs) to switch to low sulphur fuel while at berth. The Government has been collaborating with the Mainland to reduce emissions from vessels, including establishing jointly with the Guangdong Provincial Government a Domestic Emission Control Area in the waters of the Pearl River Delta Region that further tightened requirements for all vessels to use compliant fuel (i.e. low sulphur fuel or liquefied natural gas (LNG)), irrespective of whether they are sailing or berthing. To further encourage the use of clean marine fuel by OGVs, the Government has also been examining measures to take forward the adoption of LNG in OGVs. As such, the Environment and Ecology Bureau and the Transport and Logistics Bureau have set up a joint working group to actively explore with the industry stakeholders specific measures to provide LNG replenishment for OGVs, such as to actively explore possible solutions of using the offshore LNG terminal newly constructed by the two power companies as a bunkering facility for OGVs, and to develop technical standards of LNG bunkering applicable to Hong Kong with reference to international practices, so as to actively co-operate in achieving the national carbon emission reduction goals and to contribute to the country's effort on shipping emissions reduction.

[Fire Service \(Installations and Equipment\) \(Amendment\) Regulation 2023 to be gazetted on Friday](#)

A spokesperson for the Security Bureau said today (June 28) that the Government will publish the Fire Service (Installations and Equipment)

(Amendment) Regulation 2023 in the Gazette on Friday (June 30), with a view to promoting the wider use of approved portable equipment of the public's own volition in domestic premises for enhancing home fire safety.

The spokesperson said, "Portable equipment, such as fire extinguishers and fire blankets, are handy, easy to operate and very effective in putting out small fires. With portable equipment installed voluntarily in domestic premises, members of the public could tackle the fire early in case of fire at home, thereby enhancing home fire safety in a holistic manner.

"Taking into account the effective enhancement of fire protection coverage with the voluntary installation of portable equipment in domestic premises, and the fact that portable equipment installed in domestic premises could be maintained in a better condition over years as they are free from external interference and are generally less susceptible to deterioration by factors, such as humidity, dust and human activities, etc, as well as the consideration that the Fire Services Department (FSD) has put in place an approval mechanism to examine the performance and safety aspects of the portable equipment when considering whether to grant the approval, the Government proposes to amend the Fire Service (Installations and Equipment) Regulations (FS(IE)R) to exclude approved portable equipment that is installed in domestic premises of one's own volition (i.e. not required by or pursuant to law) from the application of regulation 8(1) of FS(IE)R, to the effect that the owners of such portable equipment will be exempted from the statutory duty of keeping those equipment in efficient working order at all times and having them inspected by registered fire service installation contractors at least once in every 12 months."

"Nevertheless, owners of any portable equipment that are required by or pursuant to law to be installed in any premises, portable equipment in common area of domestic buildings (e.g. common corridors, lobbies, staircases, etc.) installed of one's own volition, and portable equipment installed of one's own volition in any premises which are not intended to be used solely or principally for residential purposes (such as industrial buildings, etc.) should continue to be subject to the relevant statutory duty," the spokesperson added.

"The FSD will launch promotional activities to explain to the public the benefits of and how to use the portable equipment through social media and traditional media. It will also publish guidelines to facilitate the public in selecting appropriate portable equipment and in checking those equipment by themselves."

The Government has consulted key stakeholders on the proposal, and they are in support of it. In addition, the FSD uploaded an information note regarding the above proposal onto its website in March for public information.

The Amendment Regulation will be tabled at the Legislative Council for negative vetting on July 5, and is expected to become effective on November 1.