

Government receives MTRCL's report on comprehensive review of asset management and maintenance regime and Independent Monitoring Panel's report

In relation to the Tsuen Wan Line train incident on November 13, 2022, and the Tseung Kwan O Line train incident on December 5, 2022, the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) appointed an Expert Panel on December 23 last year to conduct a comprehensive review of its asset management and maintenance regime. The Government established the Independent Monitoring Panel (IMP) on the same day to closely monitor the MTRCL's review. The Government today (June 21) received the MTRCL's comprehensive review report and the IMP's report respectively.

The Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Lam Sai-hung, said, "The MTRCL's top priority is to provide safe, reliable and efficient railway services. With the ever-expanding railway network and the increasing usage over the life of railway assets, the MTRCL needs to put in more resources and make more efforts to ensure maintenance work is conducted safely and properly. The review scrutinised the MTRCL's asset management and maintenance regime comprehensively and thoroughly for improvements in its maintenance management system structure, risk management, asset registration, corporate culture, etc. This would enhance the maintenance quality of the Corporation and allow it to continue to serve the public with high-quality railway services."

The IMP conducted seven meetings with the MTRCL over the past six months to closely monitor its review work progress and reviewed the submissions from the MTRCL. These were to ensure that the review findings and follow-up recommendations are comprehensive and thorough.

The IMP made a total of 13 recommendations on the two major areas of asset management and maintenance regime of the MTRCL, including the transformation and upgrade to technology-led maintenance, the enhancement on the identification and mitigation of high-consequence low-frequency risk items, the establishment of a dedicated team for maintenance quality assurance, and putting in more resources for asset upkeep and replacement. These are to fundamentally optimise the entire asset management and maintenance regime, and further enhance the reliability of MTR services.

The IMP confirmed that the MTRCL had incorporated the IMP's findings and recommendations in its review.

"The Government will closely monitor the MTRCL to ensure the full implementation of the various follow-up measures put forward in its review report. We will also continue to monitor and review their effectiveness to

ensure that the MTRCL's asset management and maintenance work keeps pace with the times, and that the MTRCL continues to provide safe and reliable railway services to the people of Hong Kong," Mr Lam said.

Mr Lam expressed his gratitude towards the IMP Chairman, Mr Wai Chi-sing, and the three members Mr Warren Chim, Dr Lee Kang-kuen and the Director of Electrical and Mechanical Services, Mr Eric Pang, for their efforts in closely monitoring the completion of the MTRCL's review within six months, and providing valuable advice to the Government on the regulation of railway safety.

The IMP report has been published on the Transport and Logistics Bureau website ([www.tlb.gov.hk/eng/publications/transport/studies/IMP%20Report%20\(Eng\)%20230621.pdf](http://www.tlb.gov.hk/eng/publications/transport/studies/IMP%20Report%20(Eng)%20230621.pdf)).

Government welcomes passage of Betting Duty (Amendment) Bill 2023

The Government welcomed the passage of the Betting Duty (Amendment) Bill 2023 by the Legislative Council today (June 21). The Bill gives effect to a proposal in the 2023-24 Budget, which imposes an annual special football betting duty (SFBD) of \$2.4 billion on the football betting conductor for five years from 2023-24 to 2027-28. The current betting duty rates will be maintained.

The Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury, Mr Christopher Hui, said, "The proposal helps increase government revenue in the short term by bringing about a total receipt of \$12 billion of the SFBD for five years. In proposing to levy the SFBD, we have taken into consideration a number of factors, including the affordability of the Hong Kong Jockey Club (HKJC), which is the parent entity of the incumbent football betting conductor, and the external competition faced by the local football betting business. The HKJC has also undertaken that it would not reduce its commitment to local charities."

The Bill provides for matters relating to the charging of the SFBD, including the amount of the duty, the payment day, and other relevant administrative arrangements. The Bill is deemed to have come into operation on April 1 this year.

LCQ17: Manpower of optometrists

Following is a question by the Hon Shiu Ka-fai and a written reply by the Secretary for Health, Professor Lo Chung-mau, in the Legislative Council today (June 21):

Question:

Some operators of optical shops have relayed that the shortage of optometrists in Hong Kong has resulted in recruitment difficulties, which has affected the daily operation and development of their shops, and they have therefore proposed to bring in optometrists from the Mainland cities of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) to share some of the basic work of optometrists (e.g. work limited to refraction of eye examinations). On the other hand, the Government announced in May this year the expansion of the Talent List by increasing the number of professions covered from the original 13 to 51, and such professions include optometrists. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it knows the current number of registered optometrists in Hong Kong and, among them, the number of those who are employed in optical shops and work as frontline optometrists;
- (2) whether it has assessed the demand for and supply of optometrists in each of the next five years;
- (3) given that persons receiving relevant professional training for optometrists in other regions are required to apply to the Optometrists Board for registration before they can practise as optometrists in Hong Kong, whether it knows the respective numbers of persons receiving training in other regions who made applications and were allowed to become registered optometrists in each of the past five years (set out by the region in which they received training); and
- (4) whether it has assessed how the expansion of the Talent List helps bring in optometrists from the Mainland cities of GBA and even from the entire Mainland; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Government has been adopting a multi-pronged approach to tackle the problem of shortage of healthcare manpower, including strengthening training for local healthcare professionals and admitting non-locally trained healthcare professionals. The reply to the various parts of the question raised by the Hon Shiu Ka-fai is as follows:

- (1) As at end-April 2023, the total number of registered optometrists in Hong Kong was 2 244. Among them, 110 were working in the public and subvented sectors, while 2 134 were working in the private sector. According to the

results of the 2017 Health Manpower Survey, 89 per cent of the serving optometrists in the private sector were working in optical companies or shops.

(2) The Healthcare Manpower Projection 2020 (i.e. the last round of projection) showed that the optometrist supply dropped from 2017 onwards as a result of cohort retirement, resulting in severe manpower shortage. The shortage of local optometrists would persist by 2040. The demand for optometrist was projected to peak in 2035 before declining thereafter. According to the last round of projection, the manpower gap of optometrists (in full-time equivalents) over the coming five years from 2023 (i.e. 2023 to 2027) would be 151, 186, 223, 251 and 287 respectively. By 2040, the manpower gap (in full-time equivalents) would be 654. The Healthcare Manpower Projection 2023 (i.e. the new round of projection) is underway and is expected to be completed by the end of this year. Factors such as demographic and structural changes, increase in chronic patients, known and planned services and developments, etc. will be taken into account in projecting the future healthcare manpower requirements to meet service needs.

(3) and (4) The Optometrists Board (the Board) under the Supplementary Medical Professions Council (the Council) is a statutory body established under section 5 of the Supplementary Medical Professions Ordinance (Cap 359). The Board is responsible for the registration of optometrists and regulation of their professional conduct and practice. Applications for registration submitted by holders of non-local academic qualifications are subject to vetting and approval of the Council and the Board. The number of applications for registration as an optometrist submitted by holders of non-local academic qualifications and applications approved over the past five years (i.e. 2018 to 2022), broken down by the place of training, are set out at Annex. The Government announced in May 2023 the expanded Talent List, the coverage of which has been increased from 13 to 51 professions, with a view to attracting more high-quality talents to come to Hong Kong to meet our development needs. The inclusion of healthcare professions in the list not only provides immigration facilitation for those who have already fulfilled local registration requirements to work in Hong Kong, but also conveys the positive message that the Government is determined to attract qualified non-locally trained healthcare professionals to come to Hong Kong, which will have a positive effect in attracting talents.

The Government expects the new round of manpower projection exercise will be completed by end-2023. Subject to the projection results, the Government will review the strategies for increasing local healthcare manpower (including optometrists) and consider the need to further raise the number of healthcare training places or explore other new measures to admit qualified non-locally trained healthcare professionals.

Effective Exchange Rate Index

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Wednesday, June 21, 2023 is 104.2 (up 0.2 against yesterday's index).

LCQ5: Cases of fraud through mobile phone SMS messages

Following is a question by the Hon Leung Man-kwong and a reply by the Acting Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Dr Bernard Chan, in the Legislative Council today (June 21):

Question:

It has been reported that despite the Government's implementation of the Real-name Registration Programme for Subscriber Identification Module Cards, there are still quite a number of overseas fraudsters who steal the credit card or online banking information of members of the public by sending them mobile phone SMS messages impersonating various retail shops and telecommunication companies the authenticity of which is hard to identify, causing members of the public to suffer losses. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as some phishing mobile phone SMS messages originate from overseas, whether the Government will consider, by making reference to the practice of issuing alerts for incoming overseas calls, adding alerts to mobile phone SMS messages originating from overseas, so as to raise the alertness of members of the public and prevent fraud cases; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether it will expeditiously launch a SMS sender registration system or other mobile phone SMS message authentication systems to provide special authentication for SMS messages sent by reputable organisations, so as to increase the identifiability of such SMS messages; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) as most of the cases of fraud through mobile phone SMS messages involve fraudulent use of credit card information, whether the Government has plans to step up publicity on the security issues of online banking and mobile payment services and introduce new safeguards, so as to prevent cyber frauds; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Any form of deception is a serious criminal offence and enforcement action will be undertaken by the Police. The Police has been implementing new measures to prevent cyber fraud. For fraudulent calls and messages transmitted via telecommunications networks, the Office of the Communications Authority (OFCA) is also committed to, from the perspective of telecommunications services, providing assistance to the Police in their law enforcement operations. At the same time, the Police has been working with the Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) and the banking industry to explore various new approaches to combat deception activities.

In consultation with the Security Bureau, Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau and the Police, the consolidated reply in response to the question raised by the Member is as follows:

OFCA established a working group with the Police and major mobile network operators (MNOs) in early September last year to devise and implement feasible technical measures to cooperate with the Police in combating deception cases from the telecommunications perspectives. Under the coordination of OFCA, major MNOs are actively following up with implementation details of various measures and strengthening their network management.

We have noticed that in many cases, SMS messages with embedded phishing links were used to lure victims to access suspected fraudulent websites. In this connection, MNOs and the Police have established a liaison protocol, based on the deception record and identified deception websites provided by the Police, to block or suspend services of the phone numbers suspected to be involved in deception cases and to prevent users from accessing the suspicious fraudulent websites. The measure has effectively forestalled users' access to fraudulent websites upon the receipt of phishing SMS messages.

In addition, to assist the public in ascertaining the authenticity of SMS sender addresses, OFCA, joined by the MNOs, the Police, the banking sector and its regulatory authority, have established another dedicated working group to formulate technical proposals and details in relation to the implementation of the registration scheme for SMS senders. It is our target to commence a pilot run of the scheme for the banking industry by end of this year.

New measures introduced by the Police to prevent cyber fraud include the one-stop scam and pitfall search engine "Scameter" and its application "Scameter+" launched in September last year and February this year respectively, which would assess the risk of fraud and cybersecurity by inputting suspicious platform account names, bank account numbers, phone numbers, email addresses, etc. They help the public in distinguishing, strengthening prevention, detection and curb on fraud behaviors, as well as reducing financial losses. These applications have recorded about 900 000

searches and have gained the support of the HKMA, the Hong Kong Association of Banks, the banking and stored value facility sectors.

The Police are exploring with the HKMA and the banking industry a number of new measures to combat fraudulent activities, including enhancing co-operation with the banking industry, providing immediate assistance to the Police in fraud cases, strengthening intelligence analysis and exchange, enhancing the ability to identify suspicious accounts, detecting the whereabouts of fraudulent funds and intercepting fraudulent funds, and conducting targeted and immediate anti-fraud operations to identify and assist victims at an early stage so as to combat fraudulent activities and related criminal syndicates more effectively together. In particular, the Police are planning to set up a new joint platform with major banks to provide immediate assistance to the Police in fraud cases.

As for the HKMA, card issuing banks have all along been required to implement effective measures to ensure the security of credit card transactions in order to protect the interests of customers. In view of the recent rise in unauthorised transactions involving the binding of the victim's credit card to a new mobile payment application, the HKMA has provided new guidance to the industry, requiring banks to perform additional authentication apart from issuing an SMS one-time-password for binding of credit cards to a new mobile payment application, in order to confirm that the customer has actually given such binding instructions. Moreover, with the development of payment card services and related scams, the HKMA and the Hong Kong Association of Banks have established a taskforce earlier this year to proactively explore the enhancement of protection measures for payment cards. Details will be announced after finalisation.

Concurrently, in order to safeguard the integrity of telecommunications services and the security of the communications networks, the Government has implemented the Real-name Registration Programme for SIM Cards (the RNR Programme) on February 24 this year, requiring all SIM cards issued and used locally (including SIM service plans and pre-paid SIM (PPS) cards) must complete real-name registration before service activation. The RNR Programme can plug the loophole arising from the anonymous nature of PPS cards used in conducting illegal activities in the past, and is one of the ways to assist law enforcement agencies in the detection of crimes including phone deception involving the use of PPS cards. OFCA will work with MNOs to ensure that the RNR Programme is effectively implemented through conducting sample checks and verification of suspicious PPS cards with a view to assisting the Police in combating phone deception.

All in all, the most effective anti-deception means is to remind ourselves, our families and friends to stay highly vigilant at all times. Once again, we would like to remind members of the public that upon receiving calls or messages from strangers, regardless of the displayed number, they stay highly vigilant and do not disclose personal information or transfer money to unknown callers or senders, or click the hyperlinks embedded in SMS messages, to avoid suffering from losses. If in doubt, they should report the case to the Police immediately. On this, the Police's Anti-Deception

Coordination Centre has set up a 24-hour "Anti-Scam Helpline 18222" to provide immediate consultation services to members of the public so as to handle suspicious deception cases more effectively.

OFCA, the Police and MNOs will continue to strengthen co-operation to step up public education and publicity through different channels, such as issue of press releases and consumer alerts, launching announcements on TV channels, arranging roving exhibitions, community seminars and consumer education programmes, with a view to widely disseminating anti-deception messages to all members of the public and reminding them to stay alert to all received calls and messages.