

Government makes "restriction-testing declaration" and issues compulsory testing notice in respect of specified "restricted area" in Kwai Fong

The Government today (January 27) exercised the power under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J) to make a "restriction-testing declaration" (declaration) effective from 8.30pm, under which people (hereafter referred to as "persons subject to compulsory testing") within the specified "restricted area" in Kwai Fong (i.e. Block C , New Kwai Fong Gardens, 12-20 Kwai Yi Road, Kwai Fong. See Annex) are required to stay in their premises and undergo compulsory testing. Persons subject to compulsory testing are required to stay in their premises until all such persons identified in the "restricted area" have undergone testing and the test results are mostly ascertained. The Government aims at finishing this exercise at about 7am tomorrow (January 28).

A Government spokesman said, "Under Cap. 599J, the Government can, according to the needs of infection control, make a 'restriction-testing declaration'. As a case tested preliminarily positive who has lived in the abovementioned building was detected today, and the preliminary test result involved a mutant strain, the risk of infection in the relevant area is assessed to be likely higher, so the Government decided to make a 'restriction-testing declaration' for the relevant area."

The Government will set up temporary specimen collection stations at the "restricted area" and request persons subject to compulsory testing to undergo testing before 12am tomorrow. Arrangements will be made for persons subject to compulsory testing to undergo a nucleic acid test at specimen collection stations where dedicated staff will collect samples through combined nasal and throat swabs. Persons subject to compulsory testing must stay at their place of residence until all test results are ascertained to avoid cross-infection risk. The Government will arrange for door-to-door specimen collection for people with impaired mobility and elderly persons.

The Government spokesman said, "We understand that this exercise will cause inconvenience to the public. The Government has made arrangements to carry out testing for all persons present in the 'restricted area' as soon as possible. The aim is to strive to complete testing of all identified persons subject to compulsory testing and confirm the results, and finish the exercise at around 7am tomorrow. The Government will make a public announcement when the declaration expires officially. In the cases in which employees are unable to go to work because of the declaration, the Government hopes their employers can exercise discretion and not deduct the salaries or benefits of the employees."

ã€ã€ã€If staying in the "restricted area" will cause unreasonable hardship to individuals who are not residents in the area when the declaration takes effect, government officers may exercise discretion and allow that person to leave the area after considering the individual circumstances. That person must have followed the instructions to undergo testing and leave his/her personal information for contact purposes.

According to the compulsory testing notice to be issued today, any person who had been present at the above building for more than two hours from January 21, 2022 to January 27, 2022, even if they were not present in the "restricted area" at the time when the declaration took effect, must undergo compulsory testing on or before January 29, 2022. As a mutant strain is involved, and having considered relevant infection risks, for prudence's sake, vaccinated persons and persons who have recently been tested are also required to undergo testing.

In addition, in accordance with the latest arrangement, persons who resided in the same building as the case involving a mutant strain are required to undergo compulsory testing on days 2, 3, 4 and 7 counting from the day subsequent to that when the case last stayed in that building before being admitted to hospital for treatment or leaving Hong Kong.

ã€ã€ã€The Home Affairs Department has set up a hotline (Tel: 2835 1473) which starts operation at 8.30pm today for residents restricted by the declaration to make enquiries and seek assistance. The Social Welfare Department will also provide assistance to the affected persons.

ã€ã€ã€The Government appeals to persons subject to compulsory testing for their full co-operation by registering and undergoing testing, and waiting for the results patiently at home. The Government will strictly follow up on whether the persons concerned have complied with the compulsory testing notices and "restriction-testing declaration". Any person who fails to comply with the compulsory testing notices commits an offence and may be fined a fixed penalty of \$5,000. The person would also be issued with a compulsory testing order requiring him or her to undergo testing within a specified time frame. Failure to comply with the compulsory testing order or the "restriction-testing declaration" is an offence and the offender would be liable to a fine at level 4 (\$25,000) and imprisonment for six months.

Immigration Department Review 2021

The following is the Review 2021 issued by the Immigration Department (ImmD) today (January 27):

Preamble

The riots in 2019 and the spread of COVID-19 in 2020 posed unprecedented challenges to departments of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government, immensely affecting the provision of public services. Nevertheless, the ImmD, standing fast at the post, managed to maintain consistently efficient services amid the many challenges, strengthened efforts in combating immigration-related offences and further raised the Immigration Service's awareness of national security. It also adopted innovative technologies proactively to provide the public with more convenient, efficient and hygienic services. The year 2021 marked the 60th anniversary of the ImmD. We kept firmly in mind our duty of serving the public and remained committed to being the foremost immigration service in the world in effectiveness and efficiency.

National Security

Without the country, there is no family. The implementation of the Hong Kong National Security Law in 2020 has halted chaos and restored order in Hong Kong. The ImmD, standing at the forefront of Hong Kong, is resolute in taking the constitutional responsibility of fully implementing the Hong Kong National Security Law and pragmatic in serving the public with a sense of patriotism. Last year, the ImmD also made pioneering efforts in highlighting the two important values of "safeguarding national security" and "patriotism and perseverance" in the department's Mission and Values, clearly demonstrating its staff's ardent love for our motherland and Hong Kong, as well as its determination to perform the duty to safeguard national sovereignty, security and development interests.

Adhering to the principle of safeguarding national security, the ImmD exercises effective immigration control to keep out undesirables, guards against terrorist activities, prevents and detects immigration-related crimes, and repatriates the undesirables who are non-residents but stranded in Hong Kong to their countries or places of origin, with a determination to safeguard national security and securely guard our country's southern gateway.

(1) Law enforcement

Counter-terrorism

In light of terrorist threat assessments and actual circumstances, the ImmD continues to step up interception of suspicious persons at various immigration control points. The ImmD will also monitor visitors suspected of being associated with terrorist activities so as to prevent such persons from attempting to enter Hong Kong. If such persons are intercepted in control points, the ImmD will consider to refuse their entry and refer them to relevant law enforcement agencies for follow-up. In 2021, a total of 12 989 operations were conducted at various immigration control points, and a total of 15 720 passengers were intercepted for enquiries.

Combating transnational illegal migration and travel document forgery

The department has long worked with overseas, Mainland and local law

enforcement agencies to combat illegal international migration and document fraud. The Anti-Illegal Migration Agency (AIM) was set up to fight against transnational illegal migration, investigates cases involving HKSAR passports, and prevents the use of forged travel documents to enter Hong Kong or go to other countries by passing through Hong Kong. In 2021, a total of 27 235 operations against forgery activities were conducted and 18 280 passengers were spot-checked. In an operation conducted at Hong Kong International Airport, the department arrested six Mainlanders suspected of using counterfeit Mexican permanent resident identity cards and counterfeit Mexican travel visas. Three of the arrestees were convicted of using false instruments whereas the others were convicted of conspiracy to obtain services by deception. They were sentenced to eight to 20 months' imprisonment each.

Operations against illegal workers

The department is greatly concerned about illegal employment offences. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we have remained committed to taking strict enforcement action against such offences to safeguard job opportunities for local residents. In 2021, 16 132 operations against illegal employment were conducted, including those against illegal workers who were non-ethnic Chinese illegal immigrants (NECIIs) or non-refoulement claimants and their employers. A total of 1 476 illegal workers and 604 local employers were arrested.

In order to step up enforcement action against illegal workers, section 38AA of the Immigration Ordinance was amended under the Immigration (Amendment) Ordinance 2021 (Amendment Ordinance) and took effect on August 1, 2021. The group of persons prohibited from taking any employment, whether paid or unpaid, or from establishing or joining in any business has been expanded to include illegal immigrants, people who are the subject of a removal order or deportation order, overstayers, and people who were refused permission to land. Offenders are liable upon conviction to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and up to three years' imprisonment. Employing a person who is not lawfully employable is also a serious offence. Subsequent to the above legal amendment, the maximum penalty for an employer employing a person not lawfully employable has been significantly increased from a fine of \$350,000 and three years' imprisonment to a fine of \$500,000 and 10 years' imprisonment to reflect the gravity of such offences. The director, manager, secretary or partner, etc, of the company concerned may also bear criminal liability. The High Court has laid down sentencing guidelines that the employer of an illegal worker should be given an immediate custodial sentence.

Establishment of the Cybercrime and Forensics Investigation Group (CFIG)

With the advancement of information technology, lawbreakers have switched to various online social media platforms or instant messaging applications to organise illegal activities and entice members of the public to commit serious offences such as illegal employment, contracting a bogus marriage and HKSAR passport trading. To effectively combat technology crimes,

the ImmD has established the CFG for strengthening the ability of case investigation and collection of evidence. CFG members use different computer forensic tools to carry out professional digital forensic examinations on electronic exhibits such as computers and smartphones seized during investigations, as well as to process and analyse digital data for the purpose of tendering as evidence in court.

Formation of the Emergency Response Team (ERT)

In view of the urgent deployment of a large amount of manpower for dealing with incidents of detainees acting collectively against the department that previously occurred in the Castle Peak Bay Immigration Centre (CIC), the CIC established the ERT in June 2020 to serve as the first-tier team for coping with and handling confrontations involving detainees at the CIC. Members of the ERT undergo regular training on tactical skills, physical fitness and firearms, etc. The ERT is also responsible for undertaking high-risk escort duties for the CIC and conducting regular duties such as searches, night patrols and peripheral patrols, so as to maintain good order in the CIC.

(2) Comprehensive review of the strategy for handling non-refoulement claims

The HKSAR Government has taken forward the comprehensive review of the strategy of handling non-refoulement claims since early 2016, and over the years implemented measures to combat illegal immigration and overstaying at source, expedited screening of claims and appeals and removal of unsuccessful claimants, and stepped up law enforcement against unlawful employment with good progress. The Amendment Ordinance has further improved the procedure of non-refoulement claims, including enhancing the ImmD's efficiency in screening claims and preventing delaying tactics; improving the procedures and functions of the Torture Claims Appeal Board (TCAB); and stepping up interception at source, enforcement and removal as well as detention of claimants, etc.

Enforcement action against smuggling of NECIIs and taking up of illegal employment

The department has commenced special operations with the Mainland and local law enforcement agencies since mid-February 2016, taking sustained enforcement action against illegal immigration activities of NECIIs. The effectiveness of the operations has been remarkable. In 2021, a total of 850 NECIIs (monthly average of 71 persons) were intercepted, a drop of about 83 per cent as compared with the peak of 1 241 NECIIs (monthly average of 414 persons) intercepted in the third quarter of 2015. As at the end of last year, the department, working with various law enforcement agencies, smashed a number of cross-boundary crime syndicates, resulting in the arrest of 506 persons involved, including 164 core members of smuggling syndicates.

The department has kept stepping up enforcement against illegal workers who are illegal immigrants or non-refoulement claimants and their employers. Analysis indicates that those who take up unlawful employment usually do so

in the recycling, logistics and catering industries as well as renovation works for flats in certain districts. As such, the department has kept stepping up targeted inspection of such venues and will conduct arrest operations where appropriate. In 2021, a total of 544 non-ethnic Chinese illegal workers and 289 local employers were arrested by the department.

Screening procedures

Apart from the suspension of screening procedures affected by pandemic, there has been an increase in the number of new claims received during the pandemic. The ImmD has flexibly deployed manpower and increased resources to cope with the growing number of claims. In 2021, the department had processed a total of 2 220 non-refoulement claims with decisions. As at the end of last year, there were 741 claims pending screening by the ImmD.

Under the Unified Screening Mechanism, over 90 per cent of the rejected claimants would lodge appeals against the decision of the ImmD. As at the end of 2021, there were around 2 300 claimants who lodged appeals pending decision by the TCAB. The department will continue to provide vigorous support for the appeal proceedings concerned. Moreover, the department will continue monitoring the constantly rising situation of the number of applications for leave for judicial review in relation to non-refoulement claims.

Expedited removal of unsubstantiated claimants

The amendment to the Immigration Ordinance provides solid legal backing for measures in respect of removal and detention, while the department is committed to removing unsubstantiated non-refoulement claimants from Hong Kong as soon as practicable in accordance with prevailing laws. The department has all along been in close liaison with governments of major source countries of claimants, airline companies and other government departments for issuing travel documents for the return of unsubstantiated claimants and for repatriation flights. Yet, a significant proportion of claimants applied for leave to apply for judicial review after their claims and appeals were rejected respectively, leading to the department temporarily withholding the removal process according to the prevailing policy. The department will remain committed to expediting the removal process as far as practicable through various measures and maintaining close contact with different stakeholders.

Despite the impact of the pandemic on the operation of international flights, the department has endeavoured to effect repatriation. In this regard, in November 2021 the ImmD repatriated to Vietnam by a special flight 40 Vietnamese illegal immigrants and overstayers, including 36 unsubstantiated non-refoulement claimants in Hong Kong.

(3) Implementation of national security education

National security training courses

In order to ensure that new recruits have a correct understanding of the

Hong Kong National Security Law, the Immigration Service Institute of Training and Development (ISITD) has included it as part of the compulsory training for new recruits and has provided relevant training to newly recruited civilian staff. The ISITD also provides relevant training to in-service members to deepen their understanding of the Hong Kong National Security Law. Topics on national studies, covering the Constitution, the Basic Law, the national flag, the national emblem and the national anthem, have also been included in various training courses to boost the sense of national identity and the sense of belonging to the country among Immigration Service members.

Full adoption of Chinese-style footdrill

As early as 1999, the ImmD demonstrated the Chinese-style footdrill in the passing-out parades of trainees and became the first disciplinary force in Hong Kong to introduce the Chinese-style footdrill. Since late 2020, the department has arranged for all newly recruited Immigration Service members to undergo Chinese-style footdrill training. The Chinese-style footdrill elements have also been incorporated into the Elementary National Studies Course for in-service members to boost their sense of belonging to the country. The department had previously invited the Guard of Honour of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Hong Kong Garrison to provide Chinese-style footdrill training to training officers of the ISITD and members of the Departmental Contingent on a regular basis. In 2021, the department even invited members of the Military Band of the Chinese PLA for the first time to the ISITD to provide Chinese military band performance training to members of the Immigration Band, in order to elevate the Immigration Band's Chinese military band performance.

The year 2021 marked the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the ImmD. The department fully adopted the Chinese-style footdrill for the first time in the Passing-out Parade cum 60th Anniversary Grand Parade on December 30, 2020, displaying Immigration Service members' high degree of loyalty to the country and their ardent love for the country as well as Hong Kong.

Immigration Department Youth Leaders Corps

The ImmD established its uniformed group known as the Immigration Department Youth Leaders in December 2013 to provide disciplinary and leadership training to Secondary Three to Secondary Six students in Hong Kong. It aims at strengthening members' sense of national identity, loyalty and patriotism, building law-abiding awareness and a sense of self-discipline, while fostering good personal character, leadership, positive thinking and the spirit of serving the community. In 2021, the group was officially renamed as the Immigration Department Youth Leaders Corps (IDYL) and expanded its membership to include Secondary One and Secondary Two students, benefitting more young people. The ImmD will regularly send dedicated training officers to schools to provide training for members and to build lasting relationships, with a goal of becoming a growth partner for young people. Up to December 31, 2021, a total of 14 secondary schools had participated in the activities of the IDYL. Looking ahead, the ImmD plans to

arrange visits to the Hong Kong offices of Mainland institutions and Mainland exchange programmes for IDYL members, with a view to boosting their sense of national identity and sense of belonging to our country.

Fighting the pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc across the world for over two years, bringing about many changes to society. During this period, the department maintained its public services and made timely adjustments to the services for the greatest convenience of the public. Meanwhile, supporting the HKSAR Government's all-out efforts in coping with the pandemic has also become one of our key tasks.

(1) Implementation of facilitation measures related to visa services

The department has introduced various facilitation measures related to visa services to assist members of the public in coping with the pandemic. Such measures include facilitating employers' application for extending the validity periods of the contracts with their foreign domestic helpers (FDHs) and for deferral of home leave in respect of FDHs. Moreover, owing to the travel restrictions imposed successively around the world, some non-permanent residents outside Hong Kong were unable to return to Hong Kong to apply for extension of stay in a timely manner. In this regard, the department introduced a facilitation measure in December 2020 to accept applications from non-permanent residents outside Hong Kong for returning to Hong Kong. From the introduction of the measure up to the end of 2021, 33 539 applications were approved.

Furthermore, in response to the pandemic, the department launched the Smart Renewal service in March 2021 and expanded the scope of service in July. Regardless of whether the visa applications for further employment of FDHs are submitted online, by post or drop-in box, employers can collect the visas by post upon approval without having to go through the formalities at our offices. As at the end of 2021, there were 118 692 applications in which the visas were collected by post through the Smart Renewal service.

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

Our 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. In 2020, the AHU handled over 18 000 requests for assistance, most of which involved Hong Kong residents stranded outside Hong Kong due to the pandemic. Officers of the AHU answered telephone calls and replied to emails from assistance seekers round the clock, made records of the particulars of the assistance seekers and arranged multiple chartered flights to bring them home as soon as possible. The AHU arranged for three chartered flights to bring home a total of 193 Hong Kong residents stranded on the Diamond Princess cruise in Japan, and arranged another eight chartered flights to bring back over 1 000 Hong Kong residents stranded in Hubei Province. With the safe return of more and more Hong Kong residents to Hong Kong, the number of requests for assistance handled by the AHU in 2021 gradually stabilised. There were approximately 2 600 requests, most of which

were still related to the pandemic.

With smartphones and network data calls becoming increasingly popular, in late March 2021, a Network Data Call function was added to the Immigration Department Mobile Application (ImmD Mobile App), which enables Hong Kong residents in distress or in need of assistance outside Hong Kong to call the AHU's 24-hour hotline 1868 for assistance using network data.

(3) The work of the Contact Tracing Office

In addition to providing public services, the ImmD also deployed staff to participate in various anti-pandemic work, including multiple compulsory testing exercises in lockdown areas, door-to-door spot checks, the community-wide vaccination programme, etc. The ImmD also deployed staff on secondment to the Contact Tracing Office of the Centre for Health Protection to assist in contact tracing. In contact tracing of the patients of the first mutant strain case in the community, staff of the ImmD, with professional and seasoned interrogation skills, successfully found out that the patients had concealed information on their whereabouts and a related cluster, thus contributing to the timely cut-off of transmission chains and prevention of a new wave of breakout in the community, safeguarding the health of Hong Kong citizens. The two Hong Kong residents involved were also prosecuted by a law enforcement agency for giving false information to an authorised officer and sentenced to imprisonment.

Technology

In view of heightened public health awareness amid the unprecedented pandemic, the ImmD, as a government department that has frequent face-to-face contact with the public, has been responsive and innovative in incorporating anti-pandemic elements to various services by making use of innovative technologies, so as to suit the new normal of fighting the pandemic.

(1) Introduction of the Contactless e-Channel service for Hong Kong residents

In December 2021, the ImmD launched the Contactless e-Channel service at the Hong Kong International Airport, Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge Hong Kong Port, Shenzhen Bay Control Point and Kai Tak Cruise Terminal control points to allow enrolled Hong Kong residents to undergo self-service immigration clearance using a QR code generated by their smartphone and facial recognition technology without the need to present their identity cards or touch the fingerprint scanner, thus bringing faster, more convenient and more hygienic immigration clearance service. Only one month into the launch of the service, around 33 000 Hong Kong residents had registered for the service and around 20 000 people had used the service, which accounted for 32 per cent of the number of passengers who used the e-Channel service during the same period. In 2022, the ImmD will gradually extend the service to all control points and study vigorously the feasibility of extending the Contactless e-Channel service to more passengers.

(2) Introduction of electronic services for visa application

With the increasingly mature development of mobile network and electronic service platforms, the ImmD launched electronic services for visa application on December 28, 2021, allowing applicants to complete the entire application process from application submission, payment and e-Visa collection through the ImmD Mobile App, the ImmD's website or the GovHK website anytime, anywhere by using their smartphones, personal computers or other mobile devices without having to mail or attend an Immigration Office. The e-Visa arrangement was also implemented on the same day to replace sticker-type labels which allowed the applicants to download the e-Visa directly. The electronic services for visa application will be implemented in phases. The first phase covered applications for extension of stay, and applications for entry visas for FDHs and under the Immigration Arrangements for Non-local Graduates and Admission Scheme for the Second Generation of Chinese Hong Kong Permanent Residents, which accounted for 80 per cent of the total number of visa applications.

The electronic services for visa application will be extended to all types of visa applications later this year for full adoption of an electronic mode of service. Meanwhile, to cater for the needs of other members of the public, new self-service kiosks will be introduced in Immigration Offices to allow them to submit applications and supplementary documents, pay application fees and collect e-visas using self-service kiosks without the need to make prior appointment.

(3) Service Enhancements for applications of Hong Kong identity cards and HKSAR passports

To further enhance service standards and facilitate members of the public in maintaining social distance during the pandemic, the ImmD has improved the methods of applications of Hong Kong identity cards and HKSAR passport. Applicants can make use of the e-ME form-filling function of "iAM Smart" when making appointment for applications of Hong Kong identity card and HKSAR passport and submitting applications for HKSAR passports. through the ImmD Mobile App, to automatically fills in their personal particulars. The process is simple and fast. Moreover, applicants who have submitted applications through service counters or Travel Document Submission Kiosks at Immigration Offices can pay the application fees through the Faster Payment System. Applicants can even collect their Hong Kong identity cards and HKSAR passports at Self-service Collection Kiosks and Passport Collection Kiosks respectively at Immigration Offices in a self-service manner.

(4) Introduction of an I-ambassador

To support the policy initiative of smart city development, the ImmD applied artificial intelligence (AI) technology to its enquiry service and introduced an I-ambassador, a voicebot that can interact with humans, in August 2021 to give on-site navigation information to visitors to the Immigration Tower and answers their questions. The ImmD plans to adopt the AI technology and other innovative technologies in the new ImmD headquarters and set up the Next Generation Immigration Enquiry Services System to further enhance operational efficiency.

Other major activities in 2021

(1) Services provided at control points

The passenger clearance services at some control points have been suspended in phases since the end of January 2020 due to the pandemic, yet, officers of the ImmD have remained committed to performing their duties amid the volatile pandemic situation and have strived to exercise effective immigration control by adhering to the anti-pandemic measures of the HKSAR Government. In 2021, a total of 1.95 million passengers passed through Hong Kong's control points, representing a decrease of 91.9 per cent over 2020. The total number of visitor arrivals was around 90 000, representing a 97.4 per cent decrease as compared with that of 2020, of which Mainland visitor arrivals was 66 000, representing a decrease of 97.6 per cent when compared with that of 2020. Moreover, the number of arrivals of other visitors in 2021 was 26 000, which was 97.1 per cent lower than that of 2020. Among the visitor arrivals in 2021, 21 000 visitors travelled through the Airport Control Point, while 60 000 visitors and 9 000 visitors passed through land control points and sea control points respectively.

To enhance the infrastructure of land boundary control points between Hong Kong and Shenzhen and progressively implement the "East in East out, West in West out" planning strategy for cross-boundary goods traffic, the governments of Hong Kong and Shenzhen have implemented round-the-clock cargo clearance at the Shenzhen Bay Control Point since December 10, 2020. Subject to the pandemic developments, the ImmD will proactively co-operate with both governments to fully commence the operation of the Heung Yuen Wai Boundary Control Point and implement 24-hour passenger clearance at the Shenzhen Bay Control Point in due course. As for pressing ahead of the redevelopment of the Huanggang Port, it's the target of governments from both sides to complete the main works of the new Huanggang Port by the end of 2023 at the earliest. The ImmD will continue to tie in with the latest development and proactively implement all relevant preparatory work.

(2) Issuance of visas

The ImmD will continue actively dovetailing with the Government's policy on attracting talent to Hong Kong, further enhancing various visa schemes to attract talent from around the world to come to Hong Kong for career development and settlement. With regard to the Quality Migrant Admission Scheme, aiming to attract highly skilled or talented persons to settle in Hong Kong, its annual quota has been increased from 1 000 to 2 000 since September 2020, and has further increased to 4 000 since October 2021. Moreover, enhancement measures under the Technology Talent Admission Scheme (TechTAS) were launched in January 2020, which include the addition of six technology areas, bringing the total number of technology areas under TechTAS to 13; the extension of the coverage of TechTAS to all companies conducting research and development activities in the relevant technology areas in Hong Kong; and the extension of the validity period of the quota from 6 months to 12 months. As regards the statistics on the admission schemes for talent, professionals and entrepreneurs, please refer to the Annex.

In addition to pooling talent, the ImmD has all along been proactively guarding against possible abuses of our visa policy. The ImmD set up a special duties team (SDT) in June 2013 to combat FDH "job-hopping" activities adopting a zero-tolerance attitude against such activities. The SDT investigates into visa applications of suspected cases and decisively rejects applications involving "job-hopping", requiring the FDHs concerned to leave Hong Kong. The SDT reviews and adjusts its work strategies from time to time, and proactively investigates into suspicious cases by, for instance, stepping up random checks on all applications involving premature termination of contracts. In 2021, 5 844 applications allegedly involving job-hopping were followed-up by the SDT and 2 833 applications were rejected, representing almost a nine-fold increase in the total number of applications rejected as compared with the 319 applications rejected in 2020. As regards persons or employment agencies (EAs) suspected of instigating FDHs to job-hop or in contravention of the Immigration Ordinance, the ImmD and the Labour Department will conduct joint operations to inspect the EAs concerned and remind them not to instigate FDHs to job-hop through improper business practices.

(3) The Territory-wide Identity Card Replacement Exercise

The Territory-wide Identity Card Replacement Exercise (Replacement Exercise) was rolled out on December 27, 2018. An electronic and self-service mode of service has been adopted during the whole replacement process from appointment booking to collection of identity cards. Members of the public could make appointments and fill in forms through the ImmD Mobile App or the departmental website. In the Replacement Exercise, more than 74 per cent of the applicants have replaced their identity cards by appointment. Among these applicants, over 60 per cent of them have filled in the form in advance via the above channels to experience a faster and smoother replacement process. Meanwhile, the Smart Identity Card Replacement Centres (SIDCCs) are equipped with various self-service facilities to allow members of the public to acquire tags at Self-service Tag Issuing Kiosks, go through the registration procedure and verify their personal particulars at Self-service Registration Kiosks, and collect their identity cards at Self-service Collection Kiosks. With these self-services, the processing time for registration at the SIDCCs has been shortened to 30 minutes, as compared with 60 minutes in the last replacement exercise. As at the end of last year, the ImmD had issued a total of nearly 5.6 million new smart identity cards, of which around 4.3 million were issued under the Replacement Exercise. As the replacement service was affected by the pandemic earlier and the replacement schedule has been amended to ensure that the Replacement Exercise can proceed in an orderly manner. The Replacement Exercise is expected to be completed in early 2023.

The On-site Identity Card Replacement Service under the Replacement Exercise was also introduced in early May 2019. Officers were deployed to visit residential care homes (RCHs) for the elderly and persons with disabilities throughout Hong Kong to provide one-stop services of registration for replacement and delivery of identity cards, so that residents of these RCHs can complete the replacement procedure at their RCHs.

The service covers over 1 000 RCHs in Hong Kong, benefitting nearly 94 000 persons. Since the launch of the service, the Service Teams had visited over 360 RCHs to complete the procedure for replacement of identity cards for over 18 000 residents. Due to the pandemic, the On-site Identity Card Replacement Service has been suspended since January 2020. The ImmD will closely monitor the development of the pandemic and proactively communicate with all RCHs to make arrangements for providing the replacement service at the RCHs again if the situation warrants with a view to completing the procedure for replacement of identity cards for all eligible residents.

(4) Tuen Mun Regional Office

The ImmD's Tuen Mun Regional Office at the Tuen Mun Siu Lun Government Complex officially commenced operation on March 1, 2021, providing one-stop service for registration of persons, application for travel documents, application for extension of stay as well as births and marriage registration. Parents registering the birth of their newborn babies may choose to apply for HKSAR travel documents for them at the same time. Besides, an applicant only needs to fill in one application form to apply for an identity card and an HKSAR travel document at the same time. The new office also provides a number of self-service facilities and a brand new marriage hall with a photo-taking area, which has further enhanced the quality of service.

Awards

(1) Hong Kong ICT Awards 2021

The ImmD's Next Generation Electronic Passport System was given the Award of the Year, the Smart Business Grand Award and the Smart Business (Solution for Business and Public Sector Enterprise) Gold Award at the Hong Kong ICT Awards 2021 in recognition of the ImmD's contribution in providing quality public services through utilising innovative technologies. Moreover, the new system has further shortened the application processing time significantly by half, from 10 to five working days, and has been selected by the Efficiency Office as a successful case of illustration under the Streamlining of Government Services Programme for sharing with other government departments.

(2) Awards under the Jockey Club Age-friendly City Partnership Scheme 2020

The department has all along been committed to providing quality and thoughtful public services for people of all age groups. In June 2021, the ImmD's Territory-wide Identity Card Replacement Exercise, Evacuation Operations in Japan and the ImmD Volunteer Work Team won the Age-friendly Collaborator Award under the Jockey Club Age-friendly City Partnership Scheme 2020. The Age-friendly Counters of the Registration of Persons Offices and the Replacement Exercise also won the My Favourite City Partnership Scheme Award. Both awards were in recognition of the department's sustained efforts in promoting age-friendly initiatives and services for the benefit of the elderly.

Vision

In 2022, the department will provide unwavering support to integrate into the overall development strategy of the country and serving members of the public fully utilising innovative technology with professionalism and services excellent services. On the other hand, the department will continue to collaborate with other government departments to take effective epidemic control measures to fight the viruses in addition to key focuses of the following four areas:

(1) Promoting application of technology in public services

To work in tandem with the Government's smart city initiative, the ImmD has all along been sparing no effort in applying information technology across its services. At the end of last year, the department introduced the Contactless e-Channel service, allowing Hong Kong residents to use facial verification technology during automated immigration clearance. In future, the ImmD will employ more innovative technologies into its immigration control operations with aims to provide more professional and quality services to members of the public and at the same time to get well prepared for the full resumption of cross-boundary travel.

In addition, the ImmD is planning to adopt more smart living elements into its daily public services. First, it has targets to launch in the first quarter of 2022 the ImmD Personalised Notification Service, a tailor-made personalised notification service for all Hong Kong residents through the "iAM Smart" platform and acts as a caring reminder for them to submit various kinds of immigration related applications such as the renewal of HKSAR passports and replacement of new smart Hong Kong identity cards. Later on, the digital signing and authentication functions of "iAM Smart" can also be used in the ImmD's online services.

(2) Attraction of talent to promote Hong Kong's development

The department will continue to adopt an open policy of attracting talents with promotion campaigns to attract high-quality talents needed for Hong Kong's future economic development in order to grasp the huge development opportunities brought to Hong Kong by the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, the National 14th Five-Year Plan and the Belt and Road Initiative in supporting the long-term economic development of Hong Kong. The department is collaborating with other departments on exploring visa facilitation measures for talents from around the world to come to Hong Kong to participate in short-term activities.

(3) Enhancing resilience when facing emergencies outside Hong Kong

The Immigration Department has always attached great importance to assist distressed Hong Kong residents outside Hong Kong. To further step up its services and support for Hong Kong residents in distress outside Hong Kong, the ImmD is planning to restructure and expand the AHU. The ImmD will also strengthen the professional training programmes to AHU staff and provide systematic training courses, such as professional skills in crisis

management, to comprehensively improve the service standard and provide more appropriate assistance to Hong Kong residents in distress outside Hong Kong. In addition, the department will introduce an additional online channel for Hong Kong residents in distress outside Hong Kong to seek assistance anytime, anywhere with network connection to access the Assistance Request Form available through the ImmD Mobile Application or designated website.

(4) Construction of the new Immigration Headquarters

The construction of ImmD Headquarters has commenced in June 2019. The piling and foundation works were completed in July 2020 while the construction works is undergoing and expected to be completed in the second quarter of 2023 tentatively. The relevant offices and facilities will be relocated to the new ImmD Headquarters by phases in 2024. To provide more convenient and efficient services for the public, the department plans to make use of innovative technologies to introduce smart elements into the new Headquarters, such as the provision of self-service station with diversified services so that the public can submit applications and collect documents or visas without queuing for services over the counters.

The ImmD had remained true to its aspirations over the past six decades. As always, we will continue to fully support the HKSAR Government's policy for promoting the development of Hong Kong. We will keep abreast with the times, strive for excellence and serve the public with the principles of putting people first, safeguarding national security and contributing to the stability and prosperity of Hong Kong.

[New functions added to “LeaveHomeSafe” for easy display of vaccination QR codes](#)

The Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) announced today (January 27) that the "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile app version 3.0.2 is now available for update. To prepare for the future expansion of the "vaccine pass", the process of displaying the QR codes for COVID-19 vaccination records (electronic vaccination records) has been streamlined. The new version also supports the saving of the QR codes for COVID-19 Vaccination Medical Exemption Certificates. Upon successful scanning of the "LeaveHomeSafe" venue QR codes, the app will automatically show users' QR codes of electronic vaccination records or Exemption Certificates stored in their mobile phones to assist venue operators in checking whether users have complied with relevant vaccination requirements.

The enhancements of the "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile app include:

* Automatic display of the QR code of an electronic vaccination record or an Exemption Certificate: After scanning the venue QR code, the app will automatically show information of the premises and a blue QR code of either the user's electronic vaccination record or Exemption Certificate, the authenticity of which has been verified and stored in his/her mobile phone. If the app does not contain relevant QR codes, the display will be labelled as red for easy identification;

* Support storage of Exemption Certificate: Members of the public who have been issued with an Exemption Certificate due to health reasons can store the relevant information in the "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile app by scanning the QR code on the certificate with the app's storage function for easy display; and

* Refinement of the confirmation page after entering a venue: A timer will now be displayed on the page after the scanning of a venue QR code. Not only does the upgrade allow easy checking of a user's duration of stay, it also prevents anyone from using screenshots to enter a venue and thereby helps venue operators to verify the authenticity of the app.

A spokesman for the OGCI0 said that the latest number of downloads of the "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile app is around 7.5 million. At present, over 110 000 public and private venues have participated in the scheme, among which about 87 000 are private venues. The OGCI0 will continue to enhance the "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile app in accordance with the needs of epidemic prevention and control, bringing convenience and benefits to members of the public and joining hands with them in the fight against the epidemic.

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The spokesman also reminded members of the public to update the "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile app to version 3.0.2 through App Store, Google Play or Huawei AppGallery directly and refrain from deleting the old version and reinstalling the app. Updating the app will not affect previous visit records saved in users' mobile phones.

[Works supervisor of Highways Department tests positive for COVID-19](#)

The Highways Department (HyD) today (January 27) said that a works supervisor of the Lighting Division has tested positive for COVID-19. He is staying at a hospital for treatment.

The works supervisor concerned worked at the site depot in Shau Kei Wan. He last performed duties on January 25. He underwent a compulsory COVID-19 test earlier as he lives in a building included in the list of specified premises for compulsory testing notice, and was notified yesterday (January 26) that he had tested preliminarily positive for COVID-19.

The staff concerned has no recent travel history. He wore surgical masks when performing duties, and his body temperature was normal when undergoing temperature screening during work.

The HyD has arranged a thorough cleaning and sterilisation at his working area and the public utilities according to the guidelines of the Centre for Health Protection (CHP). All staff who might have been in contact with the officer concerned have been arranged to undergo a COVID-19 test.

The HyD is highly concerned about the COVID-19 epidemic and will continue to maintain close liaison with the CHP. Staff are reminded to pay attention to personal hygiene and to stay vigilant. They should seek medical advice immediately if feeling unwell.

Special service arrangements for child care centres and special child care centres

In light of the latest situation of the COVID-19 epidemic as well as the related arrangements for kindergartens, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) announced today (January 27) that all child care centres and special child care centres will continue to implement special service arrangements up to February 21.

To minimise the chance of infection, the SWD advises members of the public not to take their children to child care centres or special child care centres during the period. However, these centres will remain open to serve service users who have difficulty in taking care of their children. Service users in need may contact the centres or service units concerned in advance.

In addition, operators of pre-school rehabilitation services (including special child care centres) may arrange appropriate modes of individual training, such as centre-based training, e-learning and home training, for service users having regard to the epidemic situation, service users' circumstances and their parents' preference during the period.

For enquiries, please call the SWD hotline on 2343 2255.