

Government response on Labour Day processions

In response to the Labour Day processions today (May 1), a Government spokesman said that the Government would continue to listen to the views of employees, employers and other stakeholders, and take into account employees' interests and employers' affordability in formulating and implementing targeted labour policy initiatives for the protection of workers' rights and benefits and the enhancement of occupational safety and health (OSH) in various industries.

The spokesman said, "The Statutory Minimum Wage (SMW) rate has been raised to \$37.5 per hour with effect from today. Since the implementation of the SMW in 2011, the earnings of low-income workers recorded continued increases while total employment rose by over 300 000. The unemployment rate in the past year largely stayed at 2.8 per cent, the lowest level in more than 20 years.

"The Government has also embarked on preparatory work for abolishing the use of employers' mandatory contributions under the Mandatory Provident Fund System to offset severance payment and long service payment, including discussion with relevant stakeholders on the operational details for the abolition. It will strive to introduce the enabling bill into the Legislative Council (LegCo) next year, with a view to securing passage by the LegCo by 2022.

"On improving other labour benefits, five-day statutory paternity leave came into force in this January. Meanwhile, the Government has commenced the drafting of the enabling legislation to extend statutory maternity leave from the current 10 weeks to 14 weeks, targeting to introduce the bill into the LegCo by the end of this year.

"To afford greater protection of employment rights and benefits for non-skilled workers employed by government service contractors, the Government has implemented a set of improvement measures from April, such as increasing the technical weighting in tender evaluation and the weighting of wage level as a criterion for technical assessment, and requiring contractors to provide contractual gratuities and other employment benefits."

On working hours policy, the spokesman said that having regard to the divergent views among different sectors of the community on legislative proposals relating to working hours and the absence of a broad-based consensus, the Government had decided to focus efforts on formulating working hours guidelines for 11 designated sectors, so as to improve the working hours arrangements for employees. "The Labour Department (LD) is formulating the working hours guidelines through its industry-based tripartite committees, setting out the proposed working hours arrangements, overtime compensation arrangements and good working hours management measures for

employers' reference and adoption. Enhancement measures have also been introduced to encourage employers to disclose more information on working hours arrangements when placing job vacancies through the LD," he said.

"The Government is also highly concerned about employees' OSH and will continue to strengthen its protection through inspection and enforcement, publicity and promotion, education and training. Having consulted relevant stakeholders on the preliminary amendment proposals for raising penalties in OSH legislation, the LD will refine the legislative amendment proposals after carefully analysing and studying the views received, with a view to completing the legislative amendment exercise within the current-term Government. The LD will also continue to encourage workers to lodge complaints against unsafe operations and promote the newly launched online complaint platform so that the LD can take prompt action to prevent accidents," the spokesman added.