

LCQ1: Labour Importation Scheme for the Construction Sector

Following is a question by the Hon Stanley Ng and a reply by the Secretary for Development, Ms Bernadette Linn, in the Legislative Council today (November 15):

Question:

The Government has launched the Labour Importation Scheme for the Construction Sector (the Scheme) and converted the community isolation facility at Tam Mei, Yuen Long into a short-term centralised quarter for the Scheme (the quarter), which is operated by the Construction Industry Council (CIC). It is learnt that the quarter has officially commenced operation and can accommodate approximately 7 000 persons. In the first round of applications under the Scheme, 20 works contracts were approved, involving a total of 4 680 labour importation quotas. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it knows how CIC ensures that imported workers under the Scheme work and live in a humane and dignified environment;

(2) as it is learnt that the authorities plan to arrange for a large number of tourist coaches to transport imported workers to and from construction sites, some Yuen Long residents are concerned that the relevant arrangement will affect the traffic and the living of residents in the district, of the corresponding measures put in place by the authorities; and

(3) whether it will, immediately after the approval of labour importation quotas for each round of applications, review the latest manpower supply and demand situation of the construction sector before considering whether or not to launch the next round of applications, so as to ensure that the employment priority for local construction workers will be safeguarded and prevent them from becoming "substitutes for imported workers"?

Reply:

President,

It is the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government's principle to accord priority for employment to local workers. To address the manpower shortage of the construction sector, we have been adopting multi-pronged measures such as enhancing the efforts in training local workers and recruiting new blood, and encouraging application of new technologies by the construction sector to boost its overall productivity and reduce manpower shortage. The Labour Importation Scheme for the Construction Sector (the Scheme) is a supplementary measure to fill up the remaining manpower gap. Imported labour and local labour are both manpower resources vital for

facilitating the delivery of the infrastructural development projects of Hong Kong, and we should take reasonable care for the needs of the labour. In order to meet the accommodation needs of imported labour under the Scheme and at the same time avoid putting pressure on the housing supply in Hong Kong, according to the requirements of the Scheme, employers should provide the construction imported labour who will reside in Hong Kong with accommodation at designated locations arranged by the Government or at construction sites under the principal contractors.

My respective replies to the Member's questions are as follows:

(1) The designated quarters in Tam Mi, Yuen Long, used to be a community isolation facility, have been converted into the designated quarters and are operated by the Construction Industry Council (CIC) following its commencement of operation in October this year.

Apart from providing accommodation, the quarters also provide cultural and recreational facilities, pantries, laundry rooms, medical service rooms, etc., to meet the daily needs of the imported labour. The CIC also maintains close liaison with the employers of the imported labour for collaboration in the co-ordination and arrangement for meals, transportation and leisure activities for the imported labour, so as to ensure that they are properly executed. The quarters are deployed with resident staff to help imported labour settle into the quarter environment. The CIC will also make corresponding arrangement to address the labour's individual needs, such as the needs related to their religious beliefs.

(2) Earlier the Government has commissioned a consultancy study on traffic impact assessment for the operation of the designated quarters. Findings of the study have confirmed that the arrangement for the travels of the imported labour to and from the quarters is manageable within the capacity limits of the roads nearby and thus will not cause adverse traffic impact, during both morning and evening rush hours, on the road networks in the vicinity. Imported labour currently travel between the designated quarters and the construction sites point-to-point by shuttle buses arranged by their employers. Such travels using shuttle buses will be completed before the local morning rush hours start. Moreover, transportation for leisure activities for imported labour will also be arranged in batches at different time slots as necessary.

(3) The CIC conducts manpower forecast for the construction industry every year, covering skilled workers, technicians and site supervisory personnel and professionals, to understand the latest situation of the manpower supply and demand and forecast the same for the coming five years. According to the latest manpower forecast published by the CIC this February, the industry will face manpower shortage in each of the coming five years. The Scheme has put in place a quota ceiling of 12 000 for construction imported labour, already lower than the size of the forecast manpower shortage, underlining our concurrent actions in addressing the remaining manpower shortage through measures such as local training and recruitment efforts and driving technology adoption.

The Consultative Committee for Labour Importation Scheme for the Construction Sector (Consultative Committee), established under the Scheme, comprises representatives from employers' associations, employees' organisations and training institutions in the industry. To underscore the principle of priority of employment for local labour, the trades applied for importation must be among the eligible shortage trades announced under the scheme after consultation with the Consultative Committee. Applicants are also required to carry out local recruitments in accordance with the requirements announced under the Scheme within four months preceding their submission of applications for importation of labour. The wage level should be no less than the announced prevailing level of median wage. Applications will be processed only if the vacancies concerned could not be filled upon completion of local recruitments. In addition, the applicant is also required under the Scheme to comply with the requirement for the minimum manning ratio between local labour to imported labour of 2:1. The applicant is also required to provide additional training places of existing collaborative training programmes for local labour in a number no less than 10 per cent of the approved quota for importation.

We will continue to work closely with the construction industry and the labour sector to enhance local training and recruitment efforts. We will also improve the quarters arrangement and support for imported labour, with a view to ensuring the availability of an adequate workforce for the construction industry to support the future infrastructural development of Hong Kong.