

LCQ13: Enhancing level of convenience in use of Home Return Permits

Following is a question by the Hon Maggie Chan and a written reply by the Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs, Mr Erick Tsang Kwok-wai, in the Legislative Council today (May 8):

Question:

It is learnt that when members of the public register Mainland online services with their Mainland Travel Permits for Hong Kong and Macao Residents (commonly known as Home Return Permits), they often come across situations like "authentication failure" or "non-valid type of identity document" as these permits are not Mainland identity documents. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that as pointed out by the People's Government of Guangdong Province in the "Three-Year Action Plan of Digital Greater Bay Area Construction" announced in November last year, it would promote the unification of identity authentication for residents in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) and expeditiously take forward the initiative to accord the same level of convenience for Home Return Permits and Residence Permits for Hong Kong and Macao Residents (residence permits) in the handling of businesses in areas such as transport, accommodation and job-seeking registration in the GBA as that of Mainland resident identity cards, and the HKSAR Government indicated in reply to a question raised by a Member of this Council in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2024-2025 that it would proactively participate in the Action Plan, and the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) was now studying with the Government Services and Data Management Bureau (GSDMB) of Guangdong Province, which is responsible for the implementation of the Digital GBA, the setting up of a joint task force to discuss and take the next step of work, whether the OGCIO will consider first discussing with the GSDMB of Guangdong Province the expedition of promotion of the relevant business handling arrangements for Home Return Permits and residence permits; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether it will proactively conduct regular exchanges and collaboration with the relevant Mainland authorities, so as to promote the full digitalisation of the process from application for Home Return Permits to immigration clearance with the use of Home Return Permits; if so, of the details; and

(3) given that some members of the public hope that the level of convenience in the use of Home Return Permits will be enhanced, whether the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government will relay their aspiration to the Mainland Government in the coming year and conduct regular exchanges and communication in this regard; if so, of the details?

Reply:

President,

To facilitate Hong Kong and Macao residents working, studying and living in the Mainland, since September 1, 2018, relevant mainland authorities have further facilitated Hong Kong and Macao residents to use the Mainland Travel Permits for Hong Kong and Macao Residents (commonly known as the Home Return Permits) in the application of the Home Return Permits in the areas of transport, finance, communications, education, healthcare, social security, industry and commerce, taxation, accommodation, etc.

Regarding the Hon Maggie Chan's question, after consultation with the Innovation, Technology and Industry Bureau (ITIB) and the Security Bureau, our consolidated reply is as follows:

(1) On November 21, 2023, the People's Government of Guangdong Province issued the "Three-Year Action Plan of Digital Greater Bay Area Construction" (Action Plan), which contains 60 initiatives involving multiple departments in Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao. Promoting the arrangement of full digitalisation of the process of frequently handled businesses using Home Return Permits has also been included in the Action Plan. The Chief Executive also mentioned in the 2023 Policy Address that the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government would fully support the Action Plan and collaborate with the People's Government of Guangdong Province to develop the "Digital Bay Area", promoting deeper integration of economic development, public services and social governance of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao through digitalisation, thereby facilitating the development of the Greater Bay Area (GBA) into the world's most digitally advanced bay area, and allowing Hong Kong to better integrate into the development of the GBA and the country.

The ITIB and the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer are now in close liaison with the People's Government of Guangdong Province to jointly promote the "Digital Bay Area" initiative. Paying heed to the principle of launching initiatives once they are ready, both sides have also reached consensus on setting up a task force to jointly explore the implementation direction and details of various initiatives under the Action Plan, alongside relevant departments of the HKSAR Government and Guangdong, in order to progressively promote the work relating to Hong Kong in the "Digital Bay Area".

(2) The Immigration Department (ImmD) and relevant departments of the HKSAR have been maintaining close liaison with Mainland authorities to formulate appropriate measures to enhance clearance capacity of boundary control points (BCPs), depending on the situation of each BCP. Moreover, the ImmD will also review the use of immigration facilities and system operation from time to time, and adopt innovative technologies with a view to providing services with enhanced convenience and quality, including actively study the implementation of the more tourist-friendly clearance mode of "collaborative inspection and joint clearance". Under the relevant clearance mode, automatic channels or counters of both sides will be set up side by side within their

respective jurisdiction at the boundary inside the port, such that outbound and inbound visitors only need to queue up to have their documents inspected and their identities verified once to pass through the facilities of both sides in order to complete the respective immigration procedures.

(3) Apart from the discussion on enhancing the level of convenience of using Home Return Permits in the Mainland with Mainland authorities mentioned above, the Mainland Offices and the Liaison Units of the HKSAR Government have been maintaining close liaison with the relevant authorities, and conveying the views and requests of Hong Kong residents living, working and studying in the Mainland, including the requests for wider and more convenient use of the Home Return Permits in the Mainland, etc. The HKSAR Government will continue to maintain close liaison and co-operation with the Mainland authorities with a view to enhancing the level of convenience for Hong Kong people living in the Mainland.