

LCQ13: Real-name Registration Programme for Subscriber Identification Module Cards

Following is a question by the Hon Leung Man-kwong and a written reply by the Acting Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Dr Bernard Chan, in the Legislative Council today (December 13):

Question:

It has been reported that after the implementation of the Real-name Registration Programme for Subscriber Identification Module (SIM) Cards (Real-name Registration Programme), many SIM cards suspected to be registered with personal data of inbound tourists or stolen data of other people are available for sale in the market. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the current number of SIM cards in the market with real-name registration and service activation completed and, among them, the number of those with real-name registration completed with the personal data of inbound tourists;
- (2) whether it has compiled statistics on the current number of individual users who have registered 10 SIM cards (i.e. the limit on the number of SIM cards to be registered by an individual user); if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (3) of the change in the number of deception cases involving local mobile phone numbers since the implementation of the Real-name Registration Programme when compared with that in the same period last year;
- (4) of the number of persons prosecuted for breaching the law since the implementation of the Real-name Registration Programme, as well as the number of SIM cards involved; and
- (5) whether the Government has, since the implementation of the Real-name Registration Programme, taken the initiative to conduct random checks on pre-paid SIM card users for non-compliances; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Government has implemented the Real-name Registration Programme for SIM Cards (RNR Programme) since February 24 this year, requiring that all SIM cards issued and used locally (including SIM service plans (SSP) and pre-paid SIM (PPS) cards) must complete real-name registration before service activation. The Telecommunications (Registration of SIM Cards) Regulation

(Cap 106AI) (the Regulation) has stipulated various requirements of the RNR Programme. The Communications Authority has also issued guidelines to provide specific operational details and requirements of the RNR Programme for telecommunications service providers. The RNR Programme helps 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 involving the use of PPS cards (including phone deception), which in turn safeguards the integrity of telecommunications services and safety of the communications networks, thereby maintaining social order and preventing crimes.

Having consulted the Office of the Communications Authority (OFCA), the Security Bureau and the Hong Kong Police Force (Police), our reply to the question raised by the Member is as follows:

(1) As at end October this year, around 13.9 million SIM cards (including SSP and PPS cards) have completed real-name registration and service activation. The Government does not collect information on SIM cards registered by inbound visitors. However, according to the statistics provided by the telecommunications service providers, around 60 per cent of the PPS cards were registered under Hong Kong Identity Cards while the remaining 40 per cent were registered under other identity documents.

(3) and (4) Since the implementation of the RNR Programme, the OFCA has maintained close liaison with telecommunications service providers and the Police, including the establishment of a working group with them since September 2022 to provide assistance from the telecommunications perspectives to facilitate the Police in combating deception cases. According to information provided by the Police, in the first 10 months of the year, there were 2 717 telephone fraud cases, a monthly average of 272 cases, representing a drop of 29 per cent when compared with the monthly average of 381 cases in the fourth quarter of last year when telephone fraud was at its peak. The Police does not keep statistics on how many of these cases involved local mobile phone numbers.

(2) and (5) To prevent criminals from using false information to undergo real-name registration, the OFCA has requested telecommunications service providers to conduct regular sample checks on the registration information of registered PPS card users and manual checks on suspected cases, including cases where a single user is found to have registered a considerable number of PPS cards with the same telecommunications service provider. According to the information provided by telecommunications service providers, the number of users who have registered 10 PPS cards with the same telecommunications service provider is insignificant. If users subject to sample checks are unable to verify the registration information following the instructions of the respective telecommunications service providers, the relevant PPS cards will be deregistered and cannot be used afterwards. As of end October, telecommunications service providers have cancelled registration records of some one million non-compliant PPS cards in accordance with the registration requirements of the RNR Programme. Around 360 000 PPS cards were rejected since the clients failed to provide information in compliance with the registration requirements. The OFCA will continue to maintain close contact

with the telecommunications service providers and if any suspicious cases are identified, the telecommunications service providers will promptly refer them to the law enforcement agencies for follow-up actions. Recently, based on a suspected case reported by a telecommunications service provider, the Police successfully arrested individuals who were suspected of using fake identity card information to register a large number of PPS cards and around 60 000 PPS cards were involved.

Also, the telecommunications service providers are requested to adopt different measures to verify information of their users, including face-to-face registration, making use of optical character recognition to automatically extract information from identity documents, manual verification of information, so as to effectively verify identity documents of users and to ensure that the registration systems comply with the requirements of the Regulation and the guidelines. The OFCA has also requested telecommunications service providers to continue to enhance the registration platforms taking into account the operational experiences since the implementation of the RNR Programme, including the introduction of the Government's "iAM Smart" application to verify the registrants' identities so as to ensure the effective implementation of the RNR Programme.

To ensure the proper implementation of the RNR Programme, the OFCA will also continue to conduct ad hoc market surveillance from time to time and step up publicity efforts to enhance public understanding of the requirements of the RNR Programme. Members of the public are reminded to complete the real-name registration with their own identity documents and not to purchase or sell PPS cards from unknown sources in the market or cards that have allegedly completed registration in order to protect their own interests and avoid any loss or criminal liability in association with those cards.