

LCQ14: Mainland Travel Permits for Hong Kong and Macao Residents (non-Chinese Citizens)

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Kennedy Wong and a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr Tang Ping-keung, in the Legislative Council today (October 23):

Question:

The Exit and Entry Administration of the country announced on July 1 this year the issuance of Mainland Travel Permits for Hong Kong and Macao Residents (non-Chinese Citizens) (non-Chinese Permits) to non-Chinese Hong Kong permanent residents who make an application starting from the 10th of that month. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that since September 1, 2018, relevant Mainland authorities have further facilitated the use of the Mainland Travel Permit for Hong Kong and Macao Residents (commonly known as Home Return Permit) by Hong Kong and Macao residents for easy application of the Home Return Permit in areas such as transport, finance, communications, education, healthcare, social security, industry and commerce, taxation and accommodation, and the Secretary for Labour and Welfare said in July this year that the measures relating to the non-Chinese Permit would be conducive to the talent exchange between the Mainland and Hong Kong and further facilitate Hong Kong's better integration into the overall development of the country and its contribution to the country's high-quality development, but it is learnt that currently holders of non-Chinese Permits are still unable to enjoy any convenience on the Mainland, including their inability to directly open bank accounts, apply for telephone cards and purchase railway tickets, whether the authorities will seek to secure the wider and more convenient use of the non-Chinese Permit on the Mainland, so that holders of the permit can enjoy the same convenience afforded to holders of the Home Return Permit; if so, of the specific details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) of the total number of persons who have applied for non-Chinese Permits so far, their main nationalities and the situation of their use of the permit; and

(3) of the channels used by the Government to promote the non-Chinese Permit, so as to ensure that non-Chinese residents in Hong Kong who are eligible can receive the relevant information in a timely manner, and whether assistance is provided for holders of non-Chinese Permits at the relevant control points?

Reply:

President,

The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) warmly welcomes and expresses gratitude to the country for issuing non-Chinese Hong Kong permanent residents a card-type document with five-year validity (Mainland Travel Permit for Hong Kong and Macao Residents (non-Chinese Citizens)) with effect from July 2024. The new measure represents a major policy breakthrough under "one country, two systems" implemented by the Mainland authorities with innovative thinking and fully highlights the unique status of the HKSAR.

Before the introduction of the new measure, foreigners (including non-Chinese Hong Kong permanent residents) could only go through the manual channels at control points of the Mainland with their foreign passports and fill in an arrival card each time. Even though persons of certain nationalities can enjoy visa-free access to the Mainland, they still have to use the manual channels for clearance using their passports at Mainland control points. After the introduction of the new measure, individuals holding the card-type document are able to enjoy self-service clearance at control points of the Mainland, and they are no longer required to fill in any arrival card. It has significantly enhanced clearance efficiency and facilitated access to the Mainland for business, travelling and visiting relatives by non-Chinese Hong Kong permanent residents.

In consultation with the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau, the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau (CEDB), Invest Hong Kong (InvestHK), the Information Services Department (ISD) and the Home Affairs Department (HAD), my reply to the various parts of the question is as follows:

(1) The issuance of new card-type document to non-Chinese Hong Kong permanent residents has significantly enhanced clearance convenience. We understand that various sectors of the community expect wider use of the new document on the Mainland. The HKSAR Government has been in close communication with relevant Mainland authorities and will continue to do so in enhancing the level of convenience of Hong Kong residents living on the Mainland, with a view to promoting better integration of the HKSAR into the overall development of the country.

(2) The application, approval, and issuance of the new card-type document fall within the remit of the Mainland authorities. According to the figures provided by the Exit and Entry Administration of the country (EEA), from July to mid-October 2024, a total of about 55 000 non-Chinese Hong Kong permanent residents had made appointments for application, and about 20 000 new card-type documents were issued by the EEA. The number of visitor arrivals/departures made using the card-type document amounted to a total of 53 000. Applicants mainly included nationals from European, North American, Southeast and South Asian countries.

Based on the HKSAR Government's understanding, the first batch of people who obtained and used the card-type document for travelling to the Mainland (including those from the business and school sectors) greatly welcomed the new measure. They also considered that the measure could substantially shorten the clearance time and fully satisfy their needs for visiting the Mainland for business, academic and cultural exchanges, and travelling

purposes. Some of them also said that the measure had given them a stronger sense of identity and facilitated their greater participation in the development of the Greater Bay Area (GBA).

(3) The Security Bureau has been actively promoting the new measure together with relevant bureaux and departments, including the CEDB, InvestHK, the ISD, the HAD, as well as Hong Kong Economic and Trade Offices overseas and on the Mainland, etc. Apart from promoting through various channels, including mass media and social media, we have been particularly promoting this measure to foreign chambers of commerce in Hong Kong, encouraging international talents of Hong Kong companies who are permanent residents to make use of the card-type document to better seize the opportunities of the country's rapid development, especially in the building of the GBA. In addition, we have especially introduced the measure to ethnic minorities through the eight support service centres for ethnic minorities funded by the HAD and promoted the measure to ethnic minority groups, community groups and schools, etc, through relevant District Offices in districts where more ethnic minorities live.

We have also been maintaining close communication with the Mainland authorities to ensure the smooth implementation of first-time registration for the use of this permit and clearance arrangement at Mainland control points, including the provision of more directional signs in English and additional manpower to assist card holders when necessary.