

LCQ17: Expediting processing of applications for renewal of HKSAR passports

Following is a question by the Hon Yang Wing-kit and a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr Tang Ping-keung, in the Legislative Council today (June 28):

Question:

It is learnt that quite a number of members of the public, whose Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) passports have expired, have been unable to make appointments to renew their passports, thus affecting their travel and business trips outside Hong Kong. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the respective numbers of Hong Kong residents whose HKSAR passports have expired and will expire in the coming six months;
- (2) given that in reply to a question raised by a Member of this Council in respect of the Estimates of Expenditure 2023-2024, the Government indicated that the Immigration Department (ImmD) had employed additional manpower to expedite the processing of renewal of HKSAR passports, whether ImmD will consider further employing additional manpower to expedite the processing of the backlog of applications; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (3) whether it will extend the appointment bookable period for renewal of HKSAR passports from 24 working days to 90 working days counting from the following working day, so as to facilitate members of the public to renew their HKSAR passports; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (4) of the total number of members of the public assisted in applying for passports by the HKSAR Passport Mobile Application Stations (PMAS) during their operation; the reasons for suspending the operation of PMAS, and whether it will re-launch PMAS to travel around all 18 districts through Hong Kong to call on and assist members of the public to apply for passports online; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (5) whether it will set up additional Travel Document Submission Kiosks and Passport Collection Kiosks at MTR stations and government premises such as District Offices or Government Offices in various districts, so as to ease the influx of applications for passport renewals; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (6) whether it will study the provision of passport delivery service to enable members of the public to acknowledge receipt of their HKSAR passports

through the government mobile application "iAM Smart" upon receipt of them, so as to promote e-Government; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

With the reduction of outbound travel by Hong Kong residents during the pandemic, many residents' Hong Kong Special Administrative Region passports (HKSAR passports) have expired and yet been renewed. The Immigration Department (ImmD) has been reminding members of the public through various channels to check the validity of their HKSAR passports early, arrange for renewal of their expired or expiring passports as soon as possible, and allow sufficient time for submitting applications and collection of their new passports, so as to avoid any delay in their upcoming outbound travel. With the full resumption of normal travel between Hong Kong and the Mainland and the society steadily returns to normalcy, the ImmD has already received 778 159 HKSAR passport applications during the first five months of this year (with a monthly average of about 156 000 or daily 7 100 applications), surpassing the annual total before the pandemic. The number of HKSAR passport applications has been rising continuously for several months to record-breaking high, with a daily average of over 10 000 applications in early April this year, which is more than treble the pre-pandemic daily average of 2 700 applications.

By making good use of technology and effective deployment of resources, as well as increasing the processing capacity through improving the passport application process and workflow, whilst there has been a substantial increase in HKSAR passport applications in recent months, the ImmD has been able to meet its performance pledges of completing the processing of a HKSAR passport application within five working days (and within ten working days for children under 11 not holding a Hong Kong permanent identity card) after all necessary documents, application fee and photographs that meet standard requirements are received.

As for passport collection, to minimise the waiting time of members of the public, the ImmD encourages applicants to make an appointment for collecting their new passports. Alternatively, they may collect their passports without an appointment by visiting the collection office during service hours, but the waiting time may be longer subject to circumstances of the day. To meet the demand for passport collection, the ImmD will serve all members of the public on the day of their visit to ensure that they can receive their new passports. The ImmD will deploy manpower and extend service hours according to the actual circumstances of individual regional offices. Some offices extended their service hours to 8pm or up to 10pm even on weekdays or weekends in order to complete passport issuance and related work.

My reply to the question raised by the Hon Yang Wing-kit is as follows:

(1) As at the end of May 2023, among the HKSAR passports that expired or

became invalid between 2020 and May 2023, 750 000 eligible holders have yet to apply for the renewal of passports. In addition, around 260 000 HKSAR passports will expire and become invalid between June and end-2023.

(2) The ImmD has flexibly deployed resources to handle documentation-related work to cope with the above-mentioned surge in the applications for HKSAR passports in recent months. Currently, the ImmD has allocated additional resources and increased its manpower by about 30 per cent (including working overtime, engaging retired civil servants and contract staff), to ensure timely processing of HKSAR passports applications. The ImmD will continue to review its manpower arrangements based on the service demand.

(3) The ImmD has put in place various facilitation measures to provide additional means for submitting HKSAR passport applications. In particular, members of the public are encouraged to apply via the internet or the Immigration Department Mobile Application which are both efficient and convenient. Alternatively, applications can be made by post, via drop-in box, in person, or by using the self-service Travel Document Submission Kiosks which does not require reservation and has no quota limit. At present, nearly 80 per cent of the applications are made online or in a self-service manner.

Having said that, the ImmD has been closely monitoring the current appointment situation for HKSAR passports applications, and will actively consider further extension of the appointment bookable period of the online booking system to cater for the needs of the public.

(4) During the pandemic, the ImmD noted that more than 700 000 HKSAR passport holders had yet to replace their expired passports between 2020 and end-2021, and nearly one million expired HKSAR passports had yet to be replaced by mid-2022. In view of this, the ImmD has been reminding the public to check the validity of their passports early and replace their expired or expiring passports as soon as possible since October 2021 through various channels and a series of publicity activities, including producing promotional videos and introducing a brand new HKSAR Passport Mobile Application Stations (PMAS) promotional vehicles from July to September 2022. PMAS travelled around all 18 districts in the territory with dedicated staff onboard to assist eligible applicants to submit their HKSAR passport applications online. During the period, a total of over 10 000 passport applications were received through the PMAS.

After a series of publicity activities, the number of HKSAR passport applications has been on the rise, and it has even reached a record high in recent months. Therefore, the service of PMAS concluded successfully in mid-September 2022.

(5) Regarding the suggestion of setting up additional Travel Document Submission Kiosks and Passport Collection Kiosks at MTR stations and Government premises such as District Offices or Government Offices in various districts, as it involves factors such as security and personal data (including additional information technology infrastructure, ensuring that facilities of the relevant venues can meet security requirements and are

provided with regular maintenance, and ascertaining proper access to passport documents in accordance with data protection principles), the ImmD considers that it is more secure and proper to install the kiosks at its own offices. In view of the keen public demand for self-service kiosks, the ImmD actively adopts technology and plans to substantially increase the number of self-service kiosks in the new ImmD Headquarters to be commissioned next year, so as to facilitate members of the public to apply and collect their travel documents in a self-service manner. In addition, the ImmD will actively explore the feasibility of installing more self-service kiosks in its existing offices to further enhance the processing capacity.

(6) The ImmD will, from time to time, review and explore facilitation measures on the application for and collection of travel documents, including the feasibility of introducing passport delivery service and using the "iAM Smart" Mobile Application's authentication function. To support the policy of building a smart government, the ImmD will continue to make good use of technology and improve the procedures and workflow of passport application and collection, with a view to further enhancing operational efficiency and bringing greater convenience to the public.