

LCQ22: Arrangements for dispersing visitors after mega events

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Hak-kan and a written reply by the Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (January 24):

Question:

It has been reported that many Mainland visitors, having attended the "Hong Kong New Year Countdown Celebrations" fireworks musical on Victoria Harbour held in the evening of December 31 last year, made their way back to the Mainland in the early hours of the following day. However, due to inadequate ancillary facilities of the relevant transport services and boundary control points (BCPs), a large number of visitors were stranded at various locations (including shopping malls in Tsim Sha Tsui, MTR Sheung Shui Station and its vicinity, fast food restaurants, etc). In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the occupancy rate of local hotels and the percentage of hotel guests who are Mainland visitors since the full resumption of normal travel between Hong Kong and the Mainland early last year; whether it has reviewed if there is a problem of insufficient rooms in local hotels, and what new measures are in place to encourage visitors to stay overnight in Hong Kong;
- (2) as there are views that manpower shortage is the cause of high room rates of local hotels, and the Government has recently included the relevant job categories in the hotel industry (e.g. waiter/waitress and cook) in the coverage of the Enhanced Supplementary Labour Scheme, of the respective numbers of applications for the various relevant job categories received and approved by the Government;
- (3) whether it will set up an emergency response mechanism such that when the arrival figures exceed the normal level, corresponding measures can be taken early to facilitate crowd flows; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (4) as the Government has indicated that it will discuss with the Mainland authorities about extending the opening hours of non-rail based BCPs during mega events, of the relevant details (including whether the Shenzhen Bay Port is covered under the discussion); and
- (5) as the Lunar New Year Fireworks Display will be held on the second day of the Lunar New Year next month, whether the Government has assessed if the number of inbound passenger trips on that day would exceed the normal level; if it has assessed and the outcome is in the affirmative, of the corresponding measures to be put in place?

Reply:

President,

The Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) organised the largest-ever "Hong Kong New Year Countdown Celebrations" firework musical on New Year's Eve, which attracted a total of 480 000 locals and tourists viewing on both sides of Victoria Harbour. Visitors had very high satisfaction towards the fireworks according to the HKTB's analysis. Various media from the Mainland and overseas made live broadcast or reported the event, which brought great publicity and promotion on Hong Kong. In preparation for the firework musical, the Tourism Commission and the HKTB held an inter-departmental meeting with relevant government departments and maintained close communication with them to facilitate various departments to grasp detailed information and operational issues of the event for planning ahead matters related to major events under their respective portfolios, such as crowd control, land and sea transportation, as well as emergency rescue services, etc, with a view to ensuring the smooth implementation of the event.

Regarding the cross-boundary passenger transport arrangement on New Year's Eve, as the Transport Department had anticipated that a considerable number of visitors would use the Lok Ma Chau/Huanggang Port to return to the Mainland after the fireworks musical, it liaised with the service operators of cross-boundary coaches and Lok Ma Chau-Huanggang cross-boundary shuttle bus (Yellow Bus) in advance and requested to increase the headway. The number of vehicles deployed for service operation was already double of that of weekdays, so that more visitors could take cross-boundary coaches or Yellow Bus to return to the Mainland via the Port. Nevertheless, due to the traffic congestion that began to occur in the vicinity of the Port in the small hours that day, many cross-boundary coaches and Yellow Bus were trapped in traffic queues and could not return to terminus in time to pick up visitors.

In respect of the question raised by the Hon Chan Hak-kan, having consulted the Chief Secretary for Administration's Private Office, the Labour and Welfare Bureau, the Security Bureau and the Transport and Logistics Bureau, the reply is as follows:

(1) According to the data collected by the HKTB, the average hotel room occupancy rate from March to November 2023 was 84 per cent, which is slightly lower than the pre-pandemic level. The average hotel room occupancy rate reached 90 per cent during the Christmas, New Year's Eve and New Year holiday in 2023, which is comparable to the pre-pandemic level. There is no breakdown of the data between Mainland and non-Mainland visitors.

On the receiving capacity of hotels, there are currently a total of over 90 000 rooms offered by hotels, representing an increase of 11 per cent as compared with the level in end-December 2018. The overall supply is sufficient and the overall occupancy rate is also slightly lower than the pre-pandemic level.

Based on the findings of the HKTB, the average length of stay of

overnight visitors has extended from 3.1 nights before the pandemic to 3.5 nights in the third quarter of 2023. The proportion of overnight visitors over total visitors has also increased. Around 50 per cent of visitors stayed overnight last year, surpassing the average of 46 per cent of the same period in 2017 and 2018. The proportion of non-Mainland overnight visitors remained at 66 per cent, similar to the average of the same period in 2017 and 2018.

The HKTB will continue to closely observe the changes in visitors' travel pattern and preferences, enrich visitors' itineraries and experiences, and step up promotion through different strategies, so as to attract visitors to visit Hong Kong and extend their length of stay.

To complement the latest trend of visitors' interest in focusing more on in-depth experiences and passion in taking part in mega events in Hong Kong, the HKTB will combine mega events with both Chinese and Western festivals, leverage on the integration of mega events with culture, sports and tourism to develop tourism, and consolidate Hong Kong's position as the Events Capital of Asia. For example, the Government supports the match between Inter Miami CF and Hong Kong team at the Hong Kong Stadium on February 4, 2024 through the "M" Mark System; the first-ever UIM E1 World Championship (E1) will also stage its grand finale in Hong Kong for three consecutive seasons from 2024 to 2026, with the joint support from the Tourism Commission and the HKTB.

The HKTB will also attract visitors to take part in various events through linking up mega events and activities in Hong Kong during festive occasions. For example, during Christmas last year, the HKTB had not only staged the Hong Kong WinterFest, set up a giant Christmas tree in the West Kowloon Cultural District and held the whole-new Winter Harbourfront Pyrotechnics Show, but also promoted celebratory activities, shopping discounts, festive cuisine at hotels and restaurants at popular tourist spots in Hong Kong to attract visitors to come to Hong Kong to experience the joyful festive ambience.

During the Chinese New Year Golden Week of the Mainland, the HKTB will stage the International Chinese New Year Night Parade on February 10, 2024 (Lunar New Year's Day), and promote the Lunar New Year fireworks display on February 11, 2024 (the second day of Lunar New Year) in global markets and the Chinese New Year Raceday organised by the Hong Kong Jockey Club on February 12, 2024 (the third day of Lunar New Year), to attract visitors to participate in various activities to experience the festive ambience on consecutive days during the Chinese New Year Golden Week of the Mainland.

In addition, the HKTB has consolidated a series of itinerary guides for visitors on its DiscoverHongKong.com website, such as "4 days of family fun", "Two days in the islands", "3-day Hong Kong local foodie guide", etc, to provide recommended tourist attractions and activities to visitors and facilitate them to plan their overnight stay in Hong Kong.

(2) The Enhanced Supplementary Labour Scheme (ESLS) was launched on September 4, 2023. As at December 31, 2023, the Labour Department (LD) had received 72

applications from the hotel industry seeking to import 1 179 workers. The applied posts mainly included room attendant, waiter/waitress and clerical worker, etc. To ensure employment priority for local workers, applicant employers must undertake a four-week local recruitment exercise under the ESLS and accord priority to employing suitable local workers to fill the vacancies. As at December 31, 2023, 24 applications involving 421 job vacancies of the hotel industry had completed or were undertaking the four-week local recruitment exercise, of which 2 applications for importing 8 room attendants and 5 waiters/waitresses in total had been approved. The LD will continue to follow up on the recruitment results of the above applications and process the other applications.

(3) In view of the surge in passenger and vehicular flow during festive periods, the Inter-departmental Joint Command Centre, composed of relevant departments including the Customs and Excise Department, the Hong Kong Police Force, and the Immigration Department, will be activated during the period to monitor the situation at boundary control points (BCPs) and take contingency actions where necessary. Manpower will be deployed flexibly to open more e-Channels, counters and vehicle clearance kiosks to facilitate passenger and vehicular movement, so as to ensure the smooth operation of BCPs. When needed, the Security Bureau will also activate the Emergency Monitoring and Support Centre to closely monitor the public order at respective BCPs and coordinate inter-departmental follow-up actions.

Prior to major long holidays, the HKSAR Government will announce through press releases and social media apps the expected passenger flow during the holiday period, and encourage the public and passengers to plan their trips in advance and make good use of BCPs with less passenger traffic, while appealing to Mainland visitors and Hong Kong residents planning to enter or leave Hong Kong to cross the boundary during non-peak hours as far as possible, with a view to minimising the congestion at land BCPs during the morning and evening peak hours during holiday periods.

(4) With an aim to facilitate diversion of cross-boundary passenger and vehicular movements during the Lunar New Year holidays, the HKSAR Government and the relevant departments of Guangdong Province and Shenzhen Municipality have agreed to put in place the following special arrangements:

(i) passenger and passenger vehicle clearance services at the Shenzhen Bay BCP, which originally closes at 12 midnight, will operate overnight, i.e. to provide round-the-clock service, from February 9, 2024 (Chinese New Year's Eve) to February 13, 2024 (the fourth day of Lunar New Year); and

(ii) passenger clearance service at the Lo Wu BCP, which originally closes at 12 midnight, will be extended to 2am next day on February 9, 2024 (Chinese New Year's Eve) and February 11, 2024 (the second day of Lunar New Year). MTR East Rail Line will also extend its service accordingly.

The round-the-clock operation of the Shenzhen Bay BCP can provide one more option for visitors using cross-boundary passenger vehicles, so as to avoid bunching at Lok Ma Chau/ Huanggang Control Point and causing

congestion. Extending the operating hours of Lo Wu BCP can attract some visitors to cross the boundary by railway service instead of passenger vehicles, which can help relieve the burden on land BCPs given the capability of mass transit system in diverting visitors.

(5) The Immigration Department estimates that around 7.5 million passengers (including Hong Kong residents and visitors) will pass through Hong Kong's sea, land and air control points during the upcoming Lunar New Year festive period (February 9 to 17, 2024). Among them, about 80 per cent will pass through land BCPs. It is expected that the number of outbound passengers using land BCPs will be relatively higher on February 11, 2024, and the number of inbound passengers will be relatively higher on February 13, 2024.

The Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism convened a meeting on January 15, 2024, to co-ordinate the preparation for visitor arrivals to Hong Kong during the eight-day Chinese New Year Golden Week of the Mainland from February 10 to 17, 2024. In view of the anticipated increase of visitor arrivals to Hong Kong during the Chinese New Year Golden Week of the Mainland, various relevant departments of the HKSAR Government and organisations are working closely together, making early preparations for deployment of resources as well as stepping up co-ordination and communication with their respective Mainland counterparts. The Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism will also convene another meeting before the Chinese New Year Golden Week of the Mainland to follow up on the preparation situation of various departments, so as to create good travel experiences for the visitors arriving in Hong Kong during the Golden Week.

To cope with the anticipated heavy traffic during the festive period, relevant departments have minimised leave for frontline officers for flexible deployment and operation of extra clearance counters and kiosks to facilitate passenger and vehicular movement. Additional security assistants will also be deployed to provide crowd management support. As stated in Part 3 of the reply above, the Inter-departmental Joint Command Centre, composed of relevant departments including the Customs and Excise Department, the Hong Kong Police Force, and the Immigration Department, will be activated during the period to ensure smooth passenger traffic flow. When needed, the Security Bureau will also activate the Emergency Monitoring and Support Centre to co-ordinate inter-departmental follow-up actions.