

## LCQ14: Combating online and telephone frauds

Following is a question by the Hon Kenneth Leung and a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr Tang Ping-keung, in the Legislative Council today (November 15):

Question:

It has been reported that the number of online and telephone frauds has been increasing in recent years and, among them, the number of frauds committed through instant messaging applications and the hijacking of other people's accounts has increased drastically in recent months. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the following information on online and telephone frauds in each of the past three years: the number of reports and requests for assistance received, the nature of the cases, the age distribution of the victims, and the amount of defrauded money involved;
- (2) of the number of frauds in the past three years involving the use of groups on instant messaging applications or the hijacking of other people's accounts, as well as the number of victims, the amount of loss and the age distribution of the victims in such cases;
- (3) as the Police have pointed out that there has been a surge in the number of frauds committed through hijacking the accounts of WhatsApp, an instant messaging application, in recent months, of the measures put in place by the authorities to step up efforts to combat such frauds; whether the authorities have immediately stepped up publicity (e.g. in television programmes and on different media platforms) targeting members of the public of different age groups (including the elderly and young people), so as to raise the public's vigilance of such frauds;
- (4) as there are views that quite a number of online frauds are related to fraudsters placing links to fraudulent websites at the top of Internet search engines by means of sponsorship or advertisement, but currently Internet search engine companies are not required to take up any responsibility in this regard, whether the authorities will consider enacting legislation to regulate the contents of advertisements placed on Internet search engines and require such companies to take up the relevant responsibilities for the frauds involved in the advertisements placed on their Internet search engines; if not, of the reasons for that; and
- (5) whether it will consider enhancing the functions of "Scameter+", a mobile application launched by the Police, including expediting the updating of the database and adding functions such as blocking risky calls and links, so as to strengthen the protection of members of the public against frauds?

Reply:

President,

With the global trend of Internet proliferation, many countries and regions have seen a significant increase in fraud cases in recent years. The Police are very concerned about the situation and have been adopting a multipronged approach, through enhanced law enforcement measures, publicity and education, multi-agency co-operation, intelligence analysis as well as cross-boundary collaboration, to combat all types of frauds and to enhance public awareness in full force.

In consultation with the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau and the Police, the reply to the Member's question is as follows:

(1) The number of online and telephone fraud cases received by the Hong Kong Police Force and the amount of losses incurred from 2020 to September 2023, with a breakdown by nature of the cases, are set out in Annex 1. The Police do not keep figures on the number of reports and requests for assistance or maintain a statistical breakdown on the age of victims.

(2) In general, cases involving the fraudulent use of accounts on social media, online payment facilities, emails, etc., are collectively defined as "unauthorised access to online service accounts" cases, a category under technology crime statistics. Scams involving losses due to fraudulent use of accounts are included under this category. In view of the recent surge in frauds committed through hijacking of instant messaging application accounts, the Police have incorporated the figures of such fraud cases into "unauthorised access to online service accounts" for statistical purposes since August this year. The number of "unauthorised access to online service accounts" cases received by the Hong Kong Police Force from 2020 to September 2023 and the amount of losses incurred are set out in Annex 2. The Police do not maintain any statistical breakdown on the number and age of victims.

(3) & (4) In the light of frauds perpetrated through instant messaging applications, social media platforms and search engines, the Office of the Communications Authority, the Police and major telecommunications service providers jointly set up a designated working group in early September last year. The working group is dedicated to devising and introducing different measures from the perspective of telecommunications services with a view to combating fraudulent messages transmitted through telecommunications networks. Among others, telecommunications service providers have established a liaison protocol with the Police in September 2022. Based on the deception records and information provided by the Police, telecommunications service providers can block users from accessing suspicious websites. By analysing the reports made by members of the public, the Police have so far assisted the telecommunications service providers in successfully intercepting more than 5 300 website links involved in fraud cases.

In recent months, the Police have noticed a surge in the number of

account hijacking cases involving instant messaging applications (e.g. WhatsApp), and have stepped up efforts to combat the frauds on various fronts. Fraudsters perpetrate the crime by placing advertisements of false WhatsApp websites in search engines, with "WhatsApp" as the keyword, in order to deceive members of the public into logging in the false websites and then obtain their account information. In this regard, the Police have promptly alerted telecommunications service providers to intercept the relevant websites, and have requested the search engines and overseas authorities concerned to remove the false WhatsApp website advertisements.

As regards publicity and education, the Police have been adopting a multi-channel, extensive publicity strategy to heighten public awareness against fraud. Targeting frauds committed through hijacking of instant messaging application accounts, the Police have enhanced publicity via various channels such as their "CyberDefender" website and Facebook. Among others, relevant anti-fraud messages have been disseminated weekly on social media platforms since this September, and the Cyber Security and Technology Crime Bureau (CSTCB) conducted a major press interview in this October. At the press interview, fraudsters' modus operandi of hijacking instant messaging application accounts was demonstrated, and a victim of such fraud was arranged to share his personal experience of falling into the fraudster's trap as well as to advise the public on ways to prevent their accounts from being hijacked.

In October this year, the CSTCB issued a "Letter to Parents" titled "Online account hijacking" through the "CyberDefender" website, schools, as well as Crime Alerts Network Database of the Crime Prevention Bureau, discussing the relevant modus operandi and advising parents on how to prevent their children's accounts from being hijacked. Meanwhile, we call upon members of the public who have received suspected fraudulent messages via online platforms and services to block or report them through the functions provided by the respective platforms. They should also report the suspicious links to the Police so that telecommunications service providers can prevent users from accessing the websites based on the Police's investigation results.

The Government will continue to closely monitor the trend of fraud cases and review fraud combating measures and strategies from time to time, so as to enhance protection for the public.

(5) Since its launch in October 2022, "Scameter" has seen continuous enhancements to its functions. So far, it has recorded a total of more than 1.8 million searches and issued more than 280 000 alerts on frauds and cyber security risks.

The Police will continue to optimise the functions of the application and is planning to incorporate automation elements, including issuing alerts when users browse suspicious websites and receive suspicious calls, to help members of the public identify suspicious calls and websites. To further enrich the content of its database, the Police will also introduce a public "reporting" mechanism for "Scameter+" early next year for members of the

public to report suspicious calls or websites through the application.

Besides, the Hong Kong Monetary Authority will launch the first phase of a "Suspicious Indicator Alert Mechanism" at the end of November this year. Under the mechanism, the Police's "Scameter" will be connected to the Fast Payment System (FPS) platform. During online fund transfer via FPS, the matching function of the database can identify payees whose information is related to scam reports. In such cases, an alert message will appear on the confirmation page to ask the depositor whether or not to proceed with the transaction. With this mechanism, users can save the procedure of inputting suspicious mobile phone numbers and other information into the "Scameter" for verification, and alerts can hence be issued to members of the public in a more direct manner.

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## LCQ1: Labour Importation Scheme for the Construction Sector

Following is a question by the Hon Stanley Ng and a reply by the Secretary for Development, Ms Bernadette Linn, in the Legislative Council today (November 15):

Question:

The Government has launched the Labour Importation Scheme for the Construction Sector (the Scheme) and converted the community isolation facility at Tam Mei, Yuen Long into a short-term centralised quarter for the Scheme (the quarter), which is operated by the Construction Industry Council (CIC). It is learnt that the quarter has officially commenced operation and can accommodate approximately 7 000 persons. In the first round of applications under the Scheme, 20 works contracts were approved, involving a total of 4 680 labour importation quotas. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it knows how CIC ensures that imported workers under the Scheme work and live in a humane and dignified environment;

(2) as it is learnt that the authorities plan to arrange for a large number of tourist coaches to transport imported workers to and from construction sites, some Yuen Long residents are concerned that the relevant arrangement will affect the traffic and the living of residents in the district, of the corresponding measures put in place by the authorities; and

(3) whether it will, immediately after the approval of labour importation quotas for each round of applications, review the latest manpower supply and demand situation of the construction sector before considering whether or not

to launch the next round of applications, so as to ensure that the employment priority for local construction workers will be safeguarded and prevent them from becoming "substitutes for imported workers"?

Reply:

President,

It is the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government's principle to accord priority for employment to local workers. To address the manpower shortage of the construction sector, we have been adopting multi-pronged measures such as enhancing the efforts in training local workers and recruiting new blood, and encouraging application of new technologies by the construction sector to boost its overall productivity and reduce manpower shortage. The Labour Importation Scheme for the Construction Sector (the Scheme) is a supplementary measure to fill up the remaining manpower gap. Imported labour and local labour are both manpower resources vital for facilitating the delivery of the infrastructural development projects of Hong Kong, and we should take reasonable care for the needs of the labour. In order to meet the accommodation needs of imported labour under the Scheme and at the same time avoid putting pressure on the housing supply in Hong Kong, according to the requirements of the Scheme, employers should provide the construction imported labour who will reside in Hong Kong with accommodation at designated locations arranged by the Government or at construction sites under the principal contractors.

My respective replies to the Member's questions are as follows:

(1) The designated quarters in Tam Mi, Yuen Long, used to be a community isolation facility, have been converted into the designated quarters and are operated by the Construction Industry Council (CIC) following its commencement of operation in October this year.

Apart from providing accommodation, the quarters also provide cultural and recreational facilities, pantries, laundry rooms, medical service rooms, etc., to meet the daily needs of the imported labour. The CIC also maintains close liaison with the employers of the imported labour for collaboration in the co-ordination and arrangement for meals, transportation and leisure activities for the imported labour, so as to ensure that they are properly executed. The quarters are deployed with resident staff to help imported labour settle into the quarter environment. The CIC will also make corresponding arrangement to address the labour's individual needs, such as the needs related to their religious beliefs.

(2) Earlier the Government has commissioned a consultancy study on traffic impact assessment for the operation of the designated quarters. Findings of the study have confirmed that the arrangement for the travels of the imported labour to and from the quarters is manageable within the capacity limits of the roads nearby and thus will not cause adverse traffic impact, during both morning and evening rush hours, on the road networks in the vicinity. Imported labour currently travel between the designated quarters and the

construction sites point-to-point by shuttle buses arranged by their employers. Such travels using shuttle buses will be completed before the local morning rush hours start. Moreover, transportation for leisure activities for imported labour will also be arranged in batches at different time slots as necessary.

(3) The CIC conducts manpower forecast for the construction industry every year, covering skilled workers, technicians and site supervisory personnel and professionals, to understand the latest situation of the manpower supply and demand and forecast the same for the coming five years. According to the latest manpower forecast published by the CIC this February, the industry will face manpower shortage in each of the coming five years. The Scheme has put in place a quota ceiling of 12 000 for construction imported labour, already lower than the size of the forecast manpower shortage, underlining our concurrent actions in addressing the remaining manpower shortage through measures such as local training and recruitment efforts and driving technology adoption.

The Consultative Committee for Labour Importation Scheme for the Construction Sector (Consultative Committee), established under the Scheme, comprises representatives from employers' associations, employees' organisations and training institutions in the industry. To underscore the principle of priority of employment for local labour, the trades applied for importation must be among the eligible shortage trades announced under the scheme after consultation with the Consultative Committee. Applicants are also required to carry out local recruitments in accordance with the requirements announced under the Scheme within four months preceding their submission of applications for importation of labour. The wage level should be no less than the announced prevailing level of median wage. Applications will be processed only if the vacancies concerned could not be filled upon completion of local recruitments. In addition, the applicant is also required under the Scheme to comply with the requirement for the minimum manning ratio between local labour to imported labour of 2:1. The applicant is also required to provide additional training places of existing collaborative training programmes for local labour in a number no less than 10 per cent of the approved quota for importation.

We will continue to work closely with the construction industry and the labour sector to enhance local training and recruitment efforts. We will also improve the quarters arrangement and support for imported labour, with a view to ensuring the availability of an adequate workforce for the construction industry to support the future infrastructural development of Hong Kong.

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**[November 2023 issue of “Hong Kong](#)**

# Monthly Digest of Statistics" now available

The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) published today (November 15) the November 2023 issue of the "Hong Kong Monthly Digest of Statistics" (HKMDS).

Apart from providing up-to-date statistics, this issue also contains two feature articles entitled "Statistics on Chinese Medicine in Hong Kong, 2022" and "Usage of Information Technology and the Internet by Hong Kong Residents, 2022".

"Statistics on Chinese Medicine in Hong Kong, 2022"

Chinese medicine has a long history in Hong Kong. The Government has been adopting a multi-pronged approach to facilitate the development of the Chinese medicine sector in Hong Kong. The Chinese medicine sector comprises: (a) manufacture of Chinese medicines; (b) distribution of Chinese medicines, including import/export, wholesale and retail trades; and (c) practising Chinese medicine, including Chinese medicine practitioners of general practice, acupuncture and bone-setting.

This feature article discusses the updated situation of some Chinese medicine activities including the manufacture of Chinese medicines and the distribution of Chinese medicines, as well as the external trade of Chinese herbal medicines.

For enquiries about this feature article, please contact the Distribution Services Statistics Section of the C&SD (Tel: 3903 7398; email: [asw@censtatd.gov.hk](mailto:asw@censtatd.gov.hk)).

"Usage of Information Technology and the Internet by Hong Kong Residents, 2022"

To keep track of the latest developments in information technology (IT) in the community, the C&SD has been conducting the Thematic Household Survey on "Information Technology Usage and Penetration" and "Internet and Personal Computer Penetration" regularly since 2000. The survey results provide a useful reference in formulating the strategy for the development of IT in Hong Kong. This feature article describes the usage of IT and the Internet by Hong Kong residents in 2022.

For enquiries about this feature article, please contact the Social Surveys Section (1) of the C&SD (Tel: 2887 0416; email: [thematic@censtatd.gov.hk](mailto:thematic@censtatd.gov.hk)).

Published in bilingual form, the HKMDS is a compact volume of official statistics containing about 140 tables. It collects up-to-date statistical series on various aspects of the social and economic situation of Hong Kong. Topics include population; labour; external trade; National Income and

Balance of Payments; prices; business performance; energy; housing and property; government accounts, finance and insurance; and transport, communications and tourism. For selected key statistical items, over 20 charts depicting the annual trend in the past decade and quarterly or monthly trend in the recent two years are also available. Users can download the Digest at the website of the C&SD ([www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/EIndexbySubject.html?pcode=B1010002&scode=460](http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/EIndexbySubject.html?pcode=B1010002&scode=460)).

Enquiries about the contents of the Digest can be directed to the Statistical Information Dissemination Section (1) of the C&SD (Tel: 2582 4738; email: [gen-enquiry@censtatd.gov.hk](mailto:gen-enquiry@censtatd.gov.hk)).

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## **Effective Exchange Rate Index**

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Wednesday, November 15, 2023 is 105.6 (down 0.8 against yesterday's index).

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## **SED leads delegation to visit Guizhou**

The Secretary for Education, Dr Choi Yuk-lin, will lead a delegation of the first Mainland study tour outside Guangdong Province for students of the senior secondary subject of Citizenship and Social Development (CS) tomorrow morning (November 16) to visit Guizhou.

During the visit, Dr Choi will tour multiple destinations of the study tour with students studying CS, and meet local students. She will also call on representatives of the Department of Education of Guizhou Province.

Dr Choi will return to Hong Kong on November 18 afternoon. During her absence, the Under Secretary for Education, Mr Sze Chun-fai, will be the Acting Secretary for Education.