

Postal services to Georgia subject to delay

Hongkong Post announced today (June 19) that, as advised by the postal administration of Georgia, due to an internal reorganisation process at its processing centre, mail delivery services to Georgia are subject to delay.

LCQ11: Promoting green transformation of public land transport

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Siu-hung and a written reply by the Secretary for Environment and Ecology, Mr Tse Chin-wan, in the Legislative Council today (June 19):

Question:

The Chief Executive has indicated in the 2023 Policy Address that the Government will promote a green transformation of public land transport and continue to test out more new energy vehicles, including (i) electric public light buses, (ii) electric heavy goods vehicles, (iii) electric coaches, (iv) hydrogen double-deck buses, and (v) hydrogen street washing vehicles, and it is envisaged that in the first half of this year, a citywide green transformation roadmap and timetable for public buses and taxis will be formulated, with a view to achieving zero vehicular emissions by 2050. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective latest numbers of new energy public transport vehicles mentioned in (i) to (v) above, together with the respective proportions of those numbers in the respective total numbers of those transport vehicle classes; the respective latest progress of promoting green transformation of new energy public transport vehicles mentioned in (i) to (v) above;

(2) whether it has assessed the operating performance of and challenges faced by new energy public transport vehicles mentioned in (i) to (v) above as they "hit the road", together with the countermeasures in place to address those challenges;

(3) whether it will expeditiously take forward the construction of comprehensive energy service stations in Hong Kong that offer "oil, gas, hydrogen, electricity and other services" under one roof (i.e. providing petrol refuelling, gas refilling, hydrogen refuelling, charging and facilitating service facilities), so as to promote the green transformation of public transport;

(4) whether it will consider advocating the policy direction for commercial vehicles to switch to hydrogen fuel cell vehicles; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(5) whether the Government Logistics Department has, in the term contracts for arranging the hiring of commercial vehicles, drawn up provisions to give priority to the use of new energy vehicles, so as to promote the green transformation of the transport industry; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Transport Department and the Government Logistics Department, my reply to the question raised by the Hon Chan is as follows:

(1) and (2) As at the end of May 2024, the numbers of new energy light buses, buses, heavy goods vehicles and special purpose vehicles registered in Hong Kong and these numbers as a percentage of the total number of the vehicles of the same type are tabulated below:

Category	No. of registered new energy vehicles (including electric vehicles and hydrogen fuel cell vehicles)	Total no. of registered vehicles	Percentage of registered new energy vehicles out of the total no. of vehicles of the same type
Light Buses	9	7 768	0.12%
Buses	120	13 947	0.86%
Heavy Goods Vehicles	3	7 929	0.04%
Special Purpose Vehicles	124	2 252	5.51%

Note: Registered vehicles are classified according to Schedule 1 of the Road Traffic Ordinance (Cap. 374). The prevailing ordinance does not have a separate vehicle class for coaches and street washing vehicles. Government vehicles are not included in the figures as government vehicles need no registration.

The Government has been introducing trial projects on new energy commercial vehicles through the New Energy Transport (NET) Fund. As at the end of May 2024, the NET Fund has approved a number of trial projects involving over 300 electric commercial vehicles (e-CVs). Generally speaking, the trial results of most of the e-CVs were found to be smooth in operation.

For coaches and medium and heavy goods vehicles, the major challenge is that although the prices of the relevant electric vehicles (EVs) started to show a declining trend in recent years, the current selling price could still be more than three times higher than that of diesel vehicles. We are actively encouraging vehicle suppliers to introduce more commercial vehicle models suitable for use in Hong Kong for promoting a healthy market competition, such that the trade can have more choices. On the other hand, we also need to provide suitable supporting facilities. We are actively establishing a quick charge network to meet the charging needs of EVs.

Regarding electric public light buses, the Government launched a pilot scheme and subsidised two operators to purchase electric public light buses to participate in the trial. The relevant trial has commenced since late March 2024. The Environmental Protection Department will collect 12-month operation data for further analysis and evaluation of their performance. The Government is currently reviewing the detailed arrangements of the first round of the pilot scheme and considering optimising the relevant pilot scheme with reference to the feedback from operators so as to encourage more operators to participate. Details of the second round pilot scheme will be announced in due course.

To support the development of hydrogen energy in Hong Kong, the Government set up an Inter-departmental Working Group on Using Hydrogen as Fuel (the Working Group) in 2022 to co-ordinate preparatory work of various bureaux and departments for using hydrogen as fuel locally, as well as to promote the local application of hydrogen energy through trial projects. As at May 2024, trial has been started in the case of three projects, including the Citybus Limited's first hydrogen fuel cell (HFC) double-deck bus and its hydrogen refuelling facility. The HFC double-deck bus has started the passenger service officially since February 2024 for phased trial operation in three Kowloon urban routes, namely 20, 22M and 20A. Separately, three HFC street washing vehicles from the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department have also arrived in Hong Kong successively and are currently undergoing statutory vehicle inspection procedures, with trials expected to commence later this year. The Working Group would follow up on the trial projects of the HFC double-deck bus and the hydrogen street washing vehicles. With the operational data and experience collected from the trial projects, the Working Group will evaluate the operational performance of these HFC heavy vehicles in comparison with the traditional fuel-propelled vehicles to help formulate relevant safe operation framework for the adoption of hydrogen fuel locally in the long run. Besides, the Government has earmarked funding under the NET Fund for subsidising trial projects on the procurement of HFC heavy vehicles, which are expected to start accepting applications within this financial year.

(3) and (4) Having the highly energy-efficient and less polluting features, hydrogen can be used as a fuel for transportation equipment. In this regard, compared to pure EVs, the number, volume and loading of the batteries required for HFC vehicles are smaller. It can at the same time help reduce the demand for handling retired EV batteries in the future. Hence, hydrogen energy has a wider scope of application in heavy transportation vehicles. On

the other hand, the current supply and market price of low-carbon hydrogen energy have posed a number of challenges to promoting the application of HFC vehicles. Furthermore, technologies relevant to HFC vehicles are still under trials or at an early stage of development. Overall speaking, the scale and speed of the future development of hydrogen energy transportation will still depend on whether they are more cost-effective than other green and low-carbon technologies. Hence, we consider that it is still the time now to first wait for the trial results and the market development before deciding on whether it is suitable for commercial vehicles to switch to HFC vehicles on a large scale.

In respect of promoting EVs, the focus of the Government's work at the current stage is to first support the rapid growth in the number of EVs, including offering suitable incentives to petrol filling station (PFS) operators to encourage them to retrofit EV charging facilities in the usable space of PFSs, so as to make effective use of about 180 PFSs throughout the territory to provide charging services. Moreover, the Government is also promoting the gradual conversion of some of the existing PFSs to quick charging stations.

That said, hydrogen fuel is still a type of new energy with potential. Sinopec (Hong Kong) Limited is building the first public hydrogen refuelling station in Hong Kong in Yuen Long, Au Tau. The project is expected to commence trial operation within this year. In the medium term, we aim to establish hydrogen refuelling infrastructure facilities in the Hong Kong Island, Kowloon and the New Territories by 2027 or earlier, in order to support demonstration projects or trials on hydrogen energy transportation in more sectors. In the long term, we will study the feasibility of setting up integrated energy services stations in suitable locations. In this regard, we have initially earmarked spaces in new strategic development areas, such as the Northern Metropolis, for the establishment of integrated energy services stations.

(5) Currently the supply of new energy commercial vehicles available for hiring in the market is very limited. To encourage vehicle hiring service providers to use new energy vehicles in providing services to the Government, the Government Logistics Department has specified in the marking scheme of the relevant tender documents that additional marks will be given for using EVs or hybrid vehicles in providing the required services.

LCQ1: Enhancing occupational safety and health protection for employees

Following is a question by the Hon Lam Chun-sing and a reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council

today (June 19):

Question:

On April 28 last year, the Government amended the legislation to increase the penalties for occupational safety and health (OSH) offences in order to enhance the deterrent effect of the relevant legislation. However, there are views that fatal industrial accidents have continued to occur frequently since the amendment to the legislation, which may not have a positive effect on further protecting OSH of employees. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of fatal industrial accidents recorded by the authorities from the amendment to the legislation on April 28 last year up to the end of last year and since January this year; in respect of such accidents, whether the authorities have taken out prosecutions by indictment and summary proceedings by invoking the general duty provisions for employers, proprietors and occupiers of premises under the OSH legislation; if so, of the respective average sentences for convicted prosecution cases by indictment and summary proceedings;

(2) as it is learnt that the Labour Department (LD) will request the Department of Justice where necessary to apply for reviews or appeals with regard to the sentences handed down by the court if the LD considers that the sentences do not reflect the seriousness of the offences committed by duty holders, whether the authorities have applied for reviews or appeals with regard to the sentences of the aforesaid convicted cases since the amendment to the legislation last year; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it will study promoting the industry's adoption of construction safety design by legislative means to reduce construction risks at source, so as to enhance OSH protection for frontline workers; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Government attaches great importance to occupational safety and health (OSH) of employees, and the Labour Department (LD) has been closely monitoring the level and trends of OSH risks of industrial accidents. Pursuant to the risk-based principle, the LD formulates and adjusts strategies for inspection and enforcement, publicity and promotion, as well as education and training to uplift the OSH performance.

Having consulted the Development Bureau, our consolidated reply to the question raised by the Hon Lam Chun-sing is as follows:

(1) Industrial fatalities refer to deaths arising from industrial activities in industrial undertakings as defined under the Factories and Industrial

Undertakings Ordinance (Cap. 59). 19 and 10 industrial fatalities were recorded between April 28, 2023, and the end of 2023, and between January 2024 and the end of May 2024, by the LD respectively.

The Occupational Safety and Occupational Health Legislation (Miscellaneous Amendments) Ordinance 2023 (OSH Amendment Ordinance) came into effect on April 28, 2023. As at May 31, 2024, the LD took out 111 prosecutions in total against the duty holders concerned under the OSH Amendment Ordinance in respect of eight fatal industrial accidents. There was one case in which court hearing was concluded. The case involved two proprietors of a non-construction industrial undertaking who were prosecuted for violation of the OSH Amendment Ordinance including the summary offence of general duty provisions. They were each fined \$50,000 by the court eventually.

In view of the recent serious industrial accidents, the LD will seek legal advice from the Department of Justice and consider taking out prosecutions against duty holders by way of indictment upon completion of relevant investigations.

(2) For the conviction case in reply (1), the Government had considered whether to file a review or appeal against the sentences. Upon careful deliberation of all the relevant circumstances of the case, the sentences were considered not wrong in principle or manifestly inadequate, and therefore no application to the court for a review or appeal was made eventually.

(3) The Government has been promoting the adoption of Design for Safety in public works projects and formulated guidance notes and worked examples on Design for Safety in 2006, with the aim of thoroughly considering construction and maintenance work safety during the design stage. The Government subsequently updated the guidance notes and worked examples in 2016 to clearly demarcate the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders further at various stages of a works project and require public works projects with estimated construction cost exceeding \$500 million to implement Design for Safety. On private buildings, the Buildings Department formulated, pursuant to the Buildings Ordinance (Cap. 123) and relevant subsidiary legislation, the code of practice which stipulates that the design of new private buildings should provide adequate means of access to enable maintenance personnel to carry out maintenance and repair works outside the buildings safely.

To further promote the adoption of Design for Safety in private works projects in the construction industry, the Construction Industry Council (CIC) promulgated the reference materials on Design for Safety in November 2022, providing guidance on incorporating safety elements during the design stage and the safety responsibilities of stakeholders during the construction stage. The CIC has also formulated and provided relevant training courses and material to the construction industry. The CIC has rolled out a pilot scheme on Design for Safety in 2024 with the aim of providing advice and assistance to developers of private works projects on implementing Design for Safety.

There was no consensus in the construction industry on regulating Design for Safety by legislative means. Some stakeholders indicated that it would be difficult to generalise architectural design as it would be affected by a number of factors including project nature, locations, project characteristics and current trends. Stakeholders are worried that legislative regulation would bring constraints to the design and hinder the development of the industry. In addition, stakeholders are worried about the criminal liabilities when inadvertently contravening the law in the design process. We therefore at this stage consider that a more pragmatic strategy is to continue working with the CIC and other stakeholders to promote a wider adoption of Design for Safety in the construction industry, instead of legislative means.

LCQ12: Labour importation schemes

Following is a question by the Hon Jimmy Ng and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (June 19):

Question:

To alleviate manpower shortage across different sectors, the Government has successively launched a number of labour importation schemes, including the Enhanced Supplementary Labour Scheme (ESLS), the Special Scheme to Import Care Workers for Residential Care Homes, the Labour Importation Scheme for the Construction Sector and the Labour Importation Scheme for the Transport Sector. Employers of different sectors have relayed to me their hope that the Government can expedite the vetting and approval procedures for the aforesaid schemes, while at the same time making arrangements for the relevant schemes to accept online applications. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of applications under the various aforesaid labour importation schemes that have met the target processing time and those that have not, as well as the reasons for not meeting the target processing time;

(2) given that the Labour Importation Scheme for the Construction Sector and the Labour Importation Scheme for the Transport Sector have yet to accept online applications, whether the authorities will develop an online application system to enable employers to submit applications online; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) given that in the reply to a question raised by a Member of this Council on the Estimates of Expenditure 2024-2025, the Government has indicated that

the Supplementary Labour Division of the Labour Department (LD) will recruit additional manpower in that financial year to assist in the implementation of the ESLS, whether the LD will recruit additional manpower to assist in handling other sector-specific labour importation schemes; if so, of the details, as well as the staff establishment and expenditure involved;

(4) whether it will study increasing the labour importation quotas for other sector-specific labour importation schemes; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(5) given that according to government information, as at April 30 this year, the numbers of imported workers approved for some job categories under the ESLS were relatively small, for example, the ESLS received applications from employers for importing 269 washers, 582 drivers and 165 spray paint workers, while the LD approved applications for importing only 10 washers and one driver, and none of the applications for importing spray paint workers was approved, of the reasons for the relatively low approval rates for such trades;

(6) whether it has compiled statistics on the respective numbers of employers using the Application Form for Common Posts and the Application Form for Non-Common Posts to submit applications under the ESLS; whether the Government will amend the Application Form for Common Posts to include more posts; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(7) given that since the launch of the ESLS on September 4 last year, the LD has suspended the general exclusion of the 26 job categories as well as unskilled or low-skilled posts from labour importation under the Supplementary Labour Scheme for two years, whether such measure will be extended or regularised; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

To cope with the challenges brought by manpower shortage and on the premise of ensuring employment priority for local workers, the Government has enhanced the mechanism for importation of labour. On June 19, 2023, the Labour and Welfare Bureau introduced the Special Scheme to Import Care Workers for the Residential Care Homes (Care Workers Scheme). On July 17, 2023, the Development Bureau (DEVB) and the Transport and Logistics Bureau (TLB) respectively launched sector-specific labour importation schemes for the construction and transport sectors. In addition, the Labour Department (LD) has implemented the Enhanced Supplementary Labour Scheme (ESLS) since September 4, 2023 to enhance the coverage and operation of the Supplementary Labour Scheme (SLS) including suspending the general exclusion of the 26 job categories as well as unskilled or low-skilled posts from labour importation for two years, with a view to alleviating the manpower shortage of other sectors.

In consultation with the DEVB and the TLB, our reply to the Hon Jimmy

Ng's questions is as follows:

(1) The Care Workers Scheme has completed three rounds of quota allocation and received 1 261 applications. All applications were vetted within two months as planned, and is shorter than the vetting time of around five months for previous applications under the SLS.

The Labour Importation Scheme for the Construction Sector (Construction Scheme) accepts applications quarterly. As at May 2024, vetting of the first three rounds of 77 received applications was completed. All applications were vetted within the target of two months after the closing of each application period.

For the Labour Importation Scheme for the Transport Sector – Aviation Industry (Aviation Scheme), 57 applications were received in the first round and second round. Vetting of the two rounds of applications was completed within the target time (i.e. in about two weeks' time).

For the Labour Importation Scheme for the Transport Sector – Public Light Bus/Coach Trade (Transport Scheme), 118 applications were received in the first round of applications and vetting was completed within two months as planned. The second round of applications ended on April 26, 2024 and it is envisaged that the vetting will be completed in around two months after the closing of application period.

As for the ESLS, 4 939 applications were received as at June 6, 2024. The LD has implemented a series of new measures including introducing an application form for common posts and assigning a designated team for processing, with a view to expediting the preliminary screening for commencement of the four-week local open recruitment; deploying staff specialised in screening applications submitted by employers, and reminding employers as soon as possible if the information in the application forms is incomplete or lacks the required supporting documents; exercising flexibility in handling recruitment advertisements during the four-week local recruitment and not requiring the employers to extend the local recruitment period as far as possible, and expediting the follow-up on interview results; and organising briefings for employment agencies involved in labour importation matters and explaining the application arrangements of the ESLS to facilitate employment agencies to assist employers in the handling of applications etc, to expedite the processing of applications. Upon receipt of all information required for processing and after screening-in of the applications, the LD can generally complete the vetting of the applications under the ESLS within three months.

(2) The Care Workers Scheme accepts applications submitted by electronic forms. Since the launch of the Construction Scheme, the application process (including application submission methods) has been operating smoothly. The DEVB had already considered setting up an online electronic application form when formulating the Scheme and is taking forward the work as scheduled. Since the launch of the Aviation Scheme, the application and vetting process has been smooth. The Airport Authority Hong Kong (AAHK) will keep in view the

application and assessment of the Aviation Scheme and adjust the arrangement when appropriate. As for the Transport Scheme, it is a common practice for the Public Light Bus (PLB) and coach trade to submit applications by post or in person. The current mode of application is smooth and therefore there is no plan to develop an online application system at this stage.

(3) The Supplementary Labour Division of the LD is responsible for implementing the ESLS while relevant bureaux/departments are responsible for implementing sector-specific labour importation schemes and the Care Workers Scheme. If necessary, relevant bureaux/departments will apply for additional resources in accordance with the established mechanism.

(4) The prevailing overall importation quota under the Care Workers Scheme is capped at 7 000, including around 4 000 care workers previously imported under the SLS and around 3 000 additional new quotas. So far, nearly all 3 000 additional quotas have been approved through the three rounds of allocation, with 2 200 quota applications declined due to exhaustion of quotas. The Government is examining the manpower supply of and demand for care workers in the residential care home sector, and reviewing the overall quota of the Care Workers Scheme as appropriate on the premise of safeguarding the employment priority for local workers.

Since the implementation of the Construction Scheme last July, the DEVB has been listening to the feedback of stakeholders through the Consultative Committee under the Scheme. Overall speaking, members agreed that the Scheme has been implemented smoothly and its operation has been effective. At present, the DEVB will make good use of the quotas and through multi-pronged measures, including enhancing local training and recruiting new blood to join the industry and promoting the use of applied technology to uplift the overall productivity and tackle the manpower need of the construction industry; and at the same time closely monitor the implementation progress of the Scheme and the manpower forecast of the construction industry by the Construction Industry Council, as well as reviewing the situation of the industry to ensure the Scheme moves with the times.

As for the Aviation Scheme, the flight handling capacity of the Hong Kong International Airport is expected to gradually rise after the commissioning of the Three-Runway System. It is expected that the manpower demand of the airport will also increase gradually. The AAHK will conduct a fresh round of airport manpower survey this year to review the manpower situation of the airport community. The TLB will make reference to the survey results as well as the implementation of the Aviation Scheme etc, to consider the way forward of the Scheme.

For the Transport Scheme, 969 quotas were approved in the first round of applications. As at end May this year, about 600 drivers had arrived in Hong Kong to undergo driving training and take driving test, and started work by phases. The Transport Department (TD) is now processing the second round of applications. The TD will maintain communication with relevant transport trade associations and labour representatives through the stakeholder consultative group, closely monitor the implementation of the Transport

Scheme and the manpower need of PLB and coach drivers, and review the Scheme when appropriate.

(5) The time required to process each ESLS application is affected by a number of factors, including whether the applicant employer has provided sufficient information or has requested changes to the application details during processing; whether the LD needs to consult relevant bureaux and/or departments on the applied posts to obtain policy support on labour importation and to ensure the applied posts fulfil other relevant regulations. If the post under application involves new types of work or special skills, the LD will need more time to consult relevant bureaux and/or departments, training institutions, professional bodies, etc, to determine the reasonable salary, entry requirements and scope of work etc.

As mentioned in the reply to Part (1), the LD has implemented a series of new measures to expedite the processing of the ESLS applications.

(6) Since the introduction of the Application Form for Common Posts and Application Form for Non-common Posts on May 2, 2024, the ESLS received 699 applications as at June 6, 2024, of which 267 were submitted by Application Form for Common Posts and 31 were submitted by Application Form for Non-common Posts. The LD has reminded employers through the dedicated webpage of the ESLS and other channels that the ESLS will no longer accept applications submitted via the old version of application form (ESLS-1) starting from June 17, 2024.

The LD will continue to keep in view the applications for importation of labour by different industries, and include suitable posts in the List of Common Posts in a timely manner for reference of employers.

(7) The LD will review the ESLS prior to the lapse of its two-year implementation period.

The Government will continue to closely monitor and formulate measures in the light of the supply and demand of manpower, so as to sustain the economic and social development of Hong Kong.

Ninth round of Countryside Conservation Funding Scheme approves five projects

The Secretariat of the Countryside Conservation Funding Scheme (CCFS) announced today (June 19) that the Advisory Committee on Countryside Conservation (ACCC) had approved five CCFS projects, involving a total grant

of around \$39 million in the latest round of applications.

The newly approved projects include enhancing conservation of biodiversity in Fung Yuen, Tai Po, and nature conservation in Mui Tsz Lam, Sha Tau Kok; research on conservation of the ecology and wetland system in Sha Lo Tung (SLT); the establishment of a smart ecological monitoring network in Mai Po; and the application of data analysis in Yim Tin Tsai to promote the conservation of ecological and cultural resources. These projects will help continuously promote countryside conservation and village revitalisation, and attract more people to conduct eco-tours in the countryside.

In addition, the tendering exercise in relation to the Proactive Conservation Project in SLT approved by the ACCC in the last round of applications was completed through the Government's established procurement and tendering procedures and commenced on May 1, 2024, with a view to strengthening conservation of biodiversity in SLT and implementing the long-term strategies for conserving SLT.

A total of 50 projects involving a total subsidy amount of around \$274 million has been approved under the nine rounds of CCFS applications conducted so far, supporting local non-profit-making organisations' work in promoting different aspects of conservation and revitalisation, such as natural ecology, non-graded built heritage, and cultural and historic assets. All CCFS applications are examined and considered by the ACCC, which is chaired by the Secretary for Environment and Ecology. Details of the approved projects are available on the CCFS webpage (www.eeb.gov.hk/en/conservation/ccfs/ccfs_approved_projects.html).