

LCQ15: Issue of dripping air conditioners

Following is a question by Professor the Hon Priscilla Leung and a written reply by the Secretary for Environment and Ecology, Mr Tse Chin-wan, in the Legislative Council today (November 27):

Question:

There are views pointing out that the issue of dripping air conditioners in Hong Kong has become increasingly severe, not only affecting the cityscape but also posing potential safety hazards to pedestrians. Moreover, according to government data, the issue of dripping air conditioners occurs in various districts and the number of complaints is on the rise. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the statistics on cases of dripping air conditioners in various districts in the past three years, including but not limited to the number of complaints received by the Government, the handling of such complaints, the number of inspections conducted and the findings by the Government, as well as the prosecutions instituted against the persons concerned;

(2) of the details of the measures against the issue of dripping air conditioners currently taken by the Government, including but not limited to the relevant inspection, enforcement and prosecution mechanisms;

(3) of the measures currently put in place by the Government in terms of public education to enhance knowledge of the proper use and maintenance of air conditioners among members of the public; and

(4) whether it has plans to introduce new policies, education and publicity activities to address the issue of dripping air conditioners; if so, of the relevant specific contents and expected effectiveness?

Reply:

President,

According to section 12(1)(g) of the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132) (the Ordinance), the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) staff may deal with the discharge of water, whether waste or otherwise, from the ventilating system in any premises in such a manner as to constitute a nuisance, summarily under section 127 of the Ordinance.

The reply to the questions raised by Professor the Hon Priscilla Leung is as follows:

(1) The relevant statistics on water dripping from air conditioners cases handled by the FEHD from 2021 to 2023, broken down by the 19 District Environmental Hygiene Offices, are set out in Annex 1.

Apart from inspecting water dripping from air conditioners, the FEHD staff also address various other environmental hygiene matters during routine inspections in the districts. The FEHD does not maintain separate statistics on the inspections of water dripping from air conditioners during routine inspections.

In addition to routine inspections, the FEHD has set up nine dedicated teams to assist in addressing water dripping issues from air conditioners. The duty time of the dedicated teams includes public holidays and non-office hours, facilitating more flexible manpower deployment to tackle the problem by conducting proactive inspections at relatively serious black spots in the districts during different times of the day. The number of operations conducted by the dedicated teams from 2021 to 2023 is set out in Annex 2.

(2) Upon receipt of a complaint from the public about dripping air conditioner or notice of such a nuisance during routine inspection, a site inspection will be conducted. Besides, the FEHD will also deploy staff to conduct ad hoc inspections in various locations and black spots of dripping air conditioners with heavy pedestrian flow (such as roadside bus stops, public light bus stands and pedestrian crossings), during different times of the day, including the early morning and evening hours. Devices such as digital cameras, high definition telescopes, retractable and adjustable video borescope inspection cameras with LED lamps are currently used to facilitate long-range observation during night time or under poor lighting environment, with a view to identifying the sources of water dripping from air conditioners more effectively.

For most complaint cases about dripping air conditioners, upon issuance of verbal warning or advisory letter by the FEHD staff, the flat owners or occupants concerned will take action to rectify the problem of water dripping from air conditioners. If the problem persists, the FEHD will issue, in accordance with the Ordinance, a Nuisance Notice to require the relevant person to abate the nuisance within the specified period. A person who fails to comply shall be guilty of an offence and is liable to prosecution. Currently, the maximum penalty for such an offence is a fine at level 3 (\$10,000), as well as a daily fine of \$200 as long as the nuisance continues. If the nuisance has not yet been rectified upon the conviction of the accused, the FEHD will apply to the court for a Nuisance Order to require the relevant person for compliance within the specified period. Any person who fails without reasonable excuse to comply with the requirements stated in a Nuisance Order shall be guilty of an offence, and is liable to a maximum penalty of a fine at level 4 (\$25,000), as well as a daily fine of \$450 as long as the nuisance continues.

In addition to following up on complaints and conducting inspections, the FEHD launched a pilot enforcement operation codenamed "CLEARSKY" from May to October 2024 in Eastern, Central and Western, Yau Tsim, Sham Shui Po,

Tsuen Wan and Yuen Long Districts. The operation has achieved significant results by systematically analysing complaint statistics to identify targets with dripping air conditioners and deploying manpower to proactively enhance inspections, complemented with publicity and education efforts. During the operation, the FEHD staff issued a total of 1 505 Nuisance Notices to owners or occupiers of premises, requiring them to resolve the problem of dripping air conditioners within a specified period. The number represents an increase of more than 1.2 times compared to the same period last year. The FEHD will assess the effectiveness of the operation and consider extending it to all districts in the coming year.

On the other hand, the FEHD has been collaborating with property management agents (PMAs) to assist residents in addressing water dripping from air conditioners. The Scheme of Participation by Property Management Agents in Tackling Dripping Air-conditioners (the Scheme) was initiated by the FEHD to solicit the assistance of PMAs in handling complaints about dripping air conditioners in private housing estates during the summer season (from May to November). The PMAs, familiar with the situation of their housing estates and residents, can help identify the source of water dripping in the affected premises and advise the occupants concerned to rectify the problem, thus reducing the potential disputes among residents and maintaining a harmonious living environment. Currently, over 280 PMAs of private housing estates are participating in the Scheme. On average, over 4 000 complaints against dripping air conditioners were followed up and handled through the Scheme annually.

(3) The FEHD has been carrying out territory-wide publicity and education work on the prevention and handling of water dripping from air conditioners, including co-operating with PMAs and local community members to remind the public to properly address the issue of dripping air conditioners through promotional leaflets, posters and banners. Furthermore, various channels such as Announcements in the Public Interest on TV and radio, advertisements on public transport, dissemination of information on online platforms and launch of a thematic webpage have been used to raise public awareness and foster a sense of responsibility regarding dripping air conditioner issues.

(4) The Government is committed to enhancing the environmental hygiene of Hong Kong and resolving environmental hygiene problems that cause irritation to members of the public. The Environment and Ecology Bureau will introduce the Public Health and Municipal Services (Amendment) Bill 2024 into the Legislative Council in December this year to enhance enforcement efficiency and deterrent effect to effectively achieve sustainable improvements in environmental hygiene. For effectively handling of water dripping from air conditioners, the source of the nuisance must first be ascertained, and the relevant owner or occupier should be urged to abate the nuisance within a reasonable time. To enable investigation officers to enter premises suspected of being the source of the nuisance as soon as possible, the Amendment Bill recommends making it an offence for failing to comply with a notice of intended entry without reasonable excuse, with a maximum penalty of a level 2 fine (\$5,000), and extending the period allowed for entering premises for investigations from the current period between 7am and 7pm to between 7am and

10pm, accommodating contemporary lifestyle and work schedules of citizens. The Amendment Bill will also increase penalty levels for non-compliance with the Nuisance Notice and Nuisance Order. For the former, we suggest raising the penalty from a fine at level 3 (\$10,000) and a daily fine of \$200 to a fine at level 4 (\$25,000) and a daily fine of \$450. For the latter, we recommend increasing from a fine at level 4 (\$25,000) with a daily fine of \$450 to a fine at level 5 (50,000) with a daily fine of \$600 to ensure that public health nuisances are abated expeditiously. Subject to the passage of the Amendment Bill by the Legislative Council, the above amendments will take effect three months after gazettal. During the three-month period, the FEHD will conduct extensive publicity for the general public and relevant sectors, so that all parties will understand the relevant amendments.

At the same time, the FEHD will continue to step up the publicity and education work at the district level to remind the public to properly address the issue of dripping air conditioners. To further promote the Scheme of Participation by Property Management Agents in Tackling Dripping Air-conditioners, the FEHD will invite more PMAs of private housing estates to participate in the Scheme. Priority will be given to organising seminars at participating housing estates to provide property management personnel and residents with knowledge on water dripping from air conditioners, and offer assistance in identifying the available methods and techniques for locating the source of the dripping.

LCQ5: Nurturing foreign language talents

Following is a question raised by the Hon Benson Luk and a reply by the Acting Secretary for Education, Dr Sze Chun-fai, in the Legislative Council today (November 27):

Question:

In 2018, the State President stated at the National Conference on Education that vigorous efforts should be made to nurture international talents proficient in foreign languages and adept at Chinese-foreign negotiations and communications. There are views that as the country's super connector and super value-adder, as well as the premier international financial centre connecting the country and the Middle East market, Hong Kong needs to nurture a large pool of foreign language talents. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) when Government officials make overseas visits and when the Government releases videos and hands out publications overseas to promote Hong Kong, whether local mother tongues of the relevant places have been used as the

medium of communication; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) as it is learnt that there are a number of language universities in the country, such as Beijing Foreign Studies University, which is approved to teach more than a hundred foreign languages, whether the Government will study allocating more resources to tertiary institutions to strengthen training in foreign languages other than English, or establishing foreign language universities drawing on the models of the Mainland, with a view to nurturing multilingual talents in public and private organisations, so that they can tell the good stories of Hong Kong in different languages; and

(3) whether it will study enhancing the existing "biliterate and trilingual" policy by turning it into a "triliterate and quadrilingual" policy?

Reply:

President,

Hong Kong is a cosmopolitan city. In recent years, various national strategies have even brought about tremendous development opportunities for Hong Kong, which require us to strengthen exchanges and co-operation with the Mainland and overseas regions and countries by capitalising on our advantage of "linkage with our Motherland and close connection to the world". To enhance our international competitiveness and strengthen our position as an international post-secondary education hub, we have been striving to nurture talents who are biliterate and trilingual, and proficient in other languages.

Having consulted the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau and the Information Services Department (ISD), I would like to reply to the Hon Benson Luk's questions as follows:

(1) Currently, in taking forward overseas promotion work, the overseas Economic and Trade Offices (ETOs) of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government and Invest Hong Kong (InvestHK) will make appropriate arrangements taking into account the common languages of the relevant places. For instance, apart from the English version of the relevant ETOs' websites, languages commonly used in the countries/regions under their respective purview are also available, e.g. Japanese, Thai, German, Arabic to facilitate local people in understanding the information disseminated by ETOs. Also, for meetings between officials of the HKSAR Government and local officials/representatives of the political and business sectors and preparation of relevant promotional materials, the ETOs concerned will arrange interpretation and prepare and issue the relevant promotion materials in local languages as appropriate.

In addition, to facilitate investors from around the world to understand the latest information about Hong Kong's business environment, InvestHK's website is available in a number of major languages, including simplified Chinese, traditional Chinese, English, Japanese, Spanish, French, Italian, as well as Arabic, which has been newly added. Separately, InvestHK's promotional videos are mainly in English and Putonghua. Depending on the

origin of individual successful case studies, subtitles may be available in the local language. As for InvestHK's client meetings and promotional materials, Putonghua and simplified Chinese are used on the Mainland, while English and the local language where necessary are used in overseas markets. Interpretation will also be arranged at investment promotion seminars.

On external promotion, the ISD produces a series of creative contents in multiple languages for placement in overseas and Mainland cities through digital and social media platforms, as well as outdoor advertising, in the form of short videos and banner advertisements to tell the good stories of Hong Kong. These creative contents are available in Arabic, Bahasa Indonesia, Dutch, English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Malay, Thai, Vietnamese, etc. The ISD also translated and printed the promotional booklet entitled "HK Connect" into foreign languages such as Arabic, Bahasa Indonesia, Malay and Thai for distribution to target recipients at promotional activities during senior officials' overseas visits.

Moreover, the ISD has held the "Immersive Hong Kong" promotional roving exhibitions in Jakarta, Indonesia; Bangkok, Thailand; Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; and Guangzhou, China since July 2023. It will also be staged in Dubai, the Middle East next month. In addition to English, the exhibition information is also available in the local languages of each stop to enhance the publicity effect.

(2) The eight University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded universities have all along been making flexible use of their resources to offer a wide range of publicly-funded programmes with regard to their respective roles and positioning, as well as providing diversified learning opportunities for students in response to market demands. Learning foreign languages can help students to understand multiculturalism and strengthen their connections with different parts of the world, thereby enhancing their competitiveness in entering the workforce, pursuing further studies or starting their own businesses in the future. University education also aims to encourage students to acquire knowledge and skills in different fields, and nurture the high-calibre talents required by different industries, so as to inject impetus into the development of Hong Kong.

In recent years, the eight UGC-funded universities have offered as many as 12 contemporary foreign languages for learning, including Arabic, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Kiswahili, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, Swedish, Spanish and Thai. They also offer a range of specialised programmes majoring in individual foreign languages or cultures for students who aspire to become professionals in relevant fields in the future. As for students pursuing undergraduate programmes in other areas such as engineering technology, business or social sciences, a number of universities also offer minor options or foreign language courses as free electives for interested students to pursue having regard to their personal aspirations and abilities. In addition, a number of self-financing institutions at present offer post-secondary programmes related to different foreign languages and relevant elective subjects according to market demand.

The above arrangements for major, minor and free electives enable students to study foreign languages having regard to their learning objectives in an appropriate manner. The existing arrangements meet practical needs with flexibility; hence the Government has no plans to set up a foreign language university. Nevertheless, we will continue to encourage the UGC-funded universities to provide students with opportunities to learn foreign languages, and through various avenues, such as student exchange programmes and experiential learning activities, enable students to gain exposure to the cultures of more places, broaden their horizons, seize Hong Kong's unique advantages, and be better prepared for their future development.

(3) Over the years, the Government has been collaborating with the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research, other advisory bodies and stakeholders to enable the Hong Kong people, particularly students and working adults, to become biliterate and trilingual, through sponsoring and implementing various measures using the Language Fund. Moreover, the Education Bureau (EDB) endeavours to develop students' multilingual competence, enabling them to make life planning based on their own interests, abilities and aspirations, and to connect to the world. Over the years, the EDB has offered "other languages" courses (Note 1) (Category C of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination) for senior secondary students to study as an elective subject. As announced in the 2024 Policy Address, the EDB will implement a pilot scheme to invite schools to apply for additional resources to provide opportunities for junior secondary students to learn "other languages" (Note 2), in order to facilitate a stronger articulation in their learning of "other languages" as an elective subject at the senior secondary level.

Thank you, President.

Note 1: The EDB subsidises schools to offer courses of the six "other languages", i.e. French, German, Japanese, Korean, Spanish and Urdu, for secondary four to six students.

Note 2: Schools can use the funding to offer junior secondary courses of the six designated "other languages" (i.e. French, German, Japanese, Korean, Spanish and Urdu), which are the senior secondary elective subjects. Arabic and Russian could also be considered.

LCQ6: Financial planning of elderly persons

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Tan Yueheng and a reply by the Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury, Mr Christopher Hui, in the Legislative Council today (November 27):

Question:

The Chief Executive has proposed in the 2024 Policy Address to set up a Working Group on Promoting Silver Economy, and one of its five areas of work is to enhance silver financial and security arrangements. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the implementation of the various schemes under the "Retire 3" (i.e. the HKMC Annuity Plan, the Reverse Mortgage Programme and the Policy Reverse Mortgage Programme) operated by The Hong Kong Mortgage Corporation Limited, which is wholly owned by the Government through the Exchange Fund, including the respective numbers of participating elderly persons;

(2) of the measures currently put in place by the Government, in addition to the Retire 3, to assist elderly persons in making arrangements for retirement financial security and planning, as well as to enhance the financial planning and management capabilities of elderly persons; and

(3) whether it will formulate a roadmap in the future to gradually improve measures for meeting the financial security and management needs of elderly persons from various classes; if so, of its plans; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Chief Executive announced in the 2024 Policy Address the setting up of the Working Group on Promoting Silver Economy, which will implement measures in five areas, including the promotion of "silver financial and security arrangements", thereby assisting the elderly in making suitable financial arrangements and strengthening retirement protection. The Working Group held the first meeting in early November to examine the initial work directions of bureaux concerned under the five areas, and discuss ways to strengthen collaboration among relevant bureaux and departments to build a silver-friendly community in concerted efforts and accelerate the development of silver economy.

My reply to the question raised by the Dr Hon Tan Yueheng is as follows:

(1) One of the missions of The Hong Kong Mortgage Corporation Limited (HKMC) is to promote the development of the retirement planning market. In mid-2021, the "HKMC Retire 3" brand was launched to promote the HKMC Annuity Plan, the Reverse Mortgage Programme (RMP) and the Policy Reverse Mortgage Programme (PRMP). These three products share the common feature of providing retirees with immediate, stable and lifelong income. Their implementation progress is set out below:

(a) The HKMC Annuity Plan enables customers to turn their savings into lifelong monthly annuity income. Since its launch in 2018 up to end-October

2024, the HKMC Annuity Plan had acquired nearly 20 000 customers with total subscription at approximately \$18 billion. In the first ten months of 2024, the HKMC Annuity Plan received over 6 500 applications, representing a year-on-year increase of almost three times, with total subscription exceeding \$3.3 billion, marking a year-on-year increase of 1.5 times.

(b) The RMP helps homeowners release the value of their residential properties, so that they can receive monthly income and stay in the properties for the rest of their lives. Since its launch in 2011 up to end-October 2024, the RMP had received 7 837 applications with an average monthly payout of \$16,700. In the first ten months of 2024, the RMP received 859 new applications, representing a year-on-year increase of 45 per cent.

(c) The PRMP enables borrowers to use their life insurance policies as collaterals, so that they can receive lifelong payouts. Since its launch in 2019 up to end-October 2024, the PRMP had received 124 applications with an average monthly payout of around \$2,700. In the first ten months of 2024, the PRMP received 35 applications.

(2) The Government has been working closely with relevant regulators to enhance the elderly's understanding of retirement planning. We, together with the Securities and Futures Commission and its subsidiary, the Investor and Financial Education Council (IFEC), conduct investor education through various means and channels (including public activities, community outreach, social media platforms, etc.) to enhance the public's financial literacy. The IFEC's website provides information on different investment tools and diverse digital financial management tools for free public use. Meanwhile, financial planning for retirement should begin during working years. Therefore, the IFEC's education foci for working adults cover "saving more for retirement" and "selecting suitable financial products". With the introduction of the "Retirement Planning Toolkit" and "Retirement Planner" calculator, etc., the IFEC assists working adults in assessing readiness for retirement and setting retirement goals and action plans.

In respect of investor education for the elderly, the IFEC's education foci include "selecting suitable financial products", "making the most of retirement savings", "building resilience against financial adversities" and "anti-financial scam". In particular, the IFEC endeavours to enhance the elderly's digital financial literacy and capabilities in detecting financial scams, while alerting investors to the risks and opportunities in respect of digital financial management. For example, the IFEC has introduced the first-ever anti-financial-scam educational scheme designed for the elderly. Through interactive game provided by the scheme, the elderly can learn how to identify and prevent falling prey to financial scams. The IFEC has also launched from March this year the first digital experiential "IFEC FinEd Hub" which provides free immersive learning experiences for the elderly to enhance their fraud prevention awareness.

The HKMC is also committed to enhancing public financial literacy. Through collaboration with various organisations in arranging the launch of educational videos, seminars, exhibitions, loyalty programmes etc., the HKMC

provides information on the concepts of longevity risk and retirement financial planning to assist the elderly in making suitable financial arrangements.

(3) The IFEC has formulated the Financial Literacy Strategy, targeting the Hong Kong public, with the elderly identified as a core segment. The IFEC has been devoting resources to assist the elderly in managing and protecting their retirement savings, based on three main themes concerning the elderly's behaviours, namely "making the most of limited income", "building resilience against financial adversities" and "selecting suitable financial products". During the annual territory-wide financial education campaign "Hong Kong Money Month" held in March this year, the IFEC collaborated with stakeholders from different sectors to conduct multiple seminars and activities for the elderly and pre-retirees with an aim to enhance their financial literacy. The IFEC will continue to provide fresh investor education experiences and step up its partnerships with stakeholders such as social welfare organisations in catering for the elderly's financial management needs. At the same time, we understand that elders from different walks of life have different needs. Therefore, we will continue to maintain communication with relevant organisations and stakeholders, organise various activities, and strengthen information provision, with a view to enhancing the awareness of the elderly and pre-retirees of retirement preparation.

Thank you, President.

Home and Youth Affairs Bureau launches new round of Funding Scheme for International Youth Exchange

The Home and Youth Affairs Bureau (HYAB) and the Youth Development Commission (YDC) jointly launched the Funding Scheme for International Youth Exchange 2025-26 today (November 27). Eligible non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are invited to submit applications.

The Government attaches great importance to youth development. The HYAB promulgated the Youth Development Blueprint at the end of 2022, which states that the Government will further strengthen the breadth and depth of the Mainland and international internship and exchange programmes with a view to enhancing young people's understanding of the development of the country and the world. Through the Funding Scheme for International Youth Exchange, the HYAB and the YDC provide funding for NGOs to organise international exchange projects for Hong Kong young people to broaden their global exposure and their understanding of the history, culture and the latest developments of different places. The funding scheme also covers exchange projects to the

regions along the Belt and Road to promote cultural exchanges and foster people-to-people bonds. Launched earlier this year, the Pilot Scheme on Subsidy to Grassroots Youth for Participating in Exchange Activities Outside Hong Kong will also continue to provide additional subsidies to grassroots youth with financial needs to participate in exchange projects under the 2025-26 funding scheme.

Details and application forms of the new round of the funding scheme are available on the YDC website (www.ydc.gov.hk/en/programmes/ep/ep_fundingschemeinternational.html). Interested NGOs should submit their applications on or before December 30.

Inspection of aquatic products imported from Japan

In response to the Japanese Government's plan to discharge nuclear-contaminated water at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Station, the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene issued a Food Safety Order which prohibits all aquatic products, sea salt and seaweeds originating from the 10 metropolis/prefectures, namely Tokyo, Fukushima, Ibaraki, Miyagi, Chiba, Gunma, Tochigi, Niigata, Nagano and Saitama, from being imported into and supplied in Hong Kong.

For other Japanese aquatic products, sea salt and seaweeds that are not prohibited from being imported into Hong Kong, the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department will conduct comprehensive radiological tests to verify that the radiation levels of these products do not exceed the guideline levels before they are allowed to be supplied in the market.

As the discharge of nuclear-contaminated water is unprecedented and will continue for 30 years or more, the Government will closely monitor and step up the testing arrangements. Should anomalies be detected, the Government does not preclude further tightening the scope of the import ban.

From noon on November 26 to noon today (November 27), the CFS conducted tests on the radiological levels of 192 food samples imported from Japan, which were of the "aquatic and related products, seaweeds and sea salt" category. No sample was found to have exceeded the safety limit. Details can be found on the CFS's thematic website titled "Control Measures on Foods Imported from Japan" (www.cfs.gov.hk/english/programme/programme_rafs/programme_rafs_fc_01_30_Nuclear_Event_and_Food_Safety.html).

In parallel, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

(AFCD) has also tested 50 samples of local catch for radiological levels. All the samples passed the tests. Details can be found on the AFCD's website (www.afcd.gov.hk/english/fisheries/Radiological_testing/Radiological_Test.html).

The Hong Kong Observatory (HKO) has also enhanced the environmental monitoring of the local waters. No anomaly has been detected so far. For details, please refer to the HKO's website (www.hko.gov.hk/en/radiation/monitoring/seawater.html).

From August 24, 2023, to noon today, the CFS and the AFCD have conducted tests on the radiological levels of 102 360 samples of food imported from Japan (including 65 822 samples of aquatic and related products, seaweeds and sea salt) and 22 964 samples of local catch respectively. All the samples passed the tests.