LCQ13: Enhancing level of convenience in use of Home Return Permits

Following is a question by the Hon Maggie Chan and a written reply by the Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs, Mr Erick Tsang Kwok-wai, in the Legislative Council today (May 8):

Question:

It is learnt that when members of the public register Mainland online services with their Mainland Travel Permits for Hong Kong and Macao Residents (commonly known as Home Return Permits), they often come across situations like "authentication failure" or "non-valid type of identity document" as these permits are not Mainland identity documents. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that as pointed out by the People's Government of Guangdong Province in the "Three-Year Action Plan of Digital Greater Bay Area Construction" announced in November last year, it would promote the unification of identity authentication for residents in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) and expeditiously take forward the initiative to accord the same level of convenience for Home Return Permits and Residence Permits for Hong Kong and Macao Residents (residence permits) in the handling of businesses in areas such as transport, accommodation and job-seeking registration in the GBA as that of Mainland resident identity cards, and the HKSAR Government indicated in reply to a question raised by a Member of this Council in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2024-2025 that it would proactively participate in the Action Plan, and the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) was now studying with the Government Services and Data Management Bureau (GSDMB) of Guangdong Province, which is responsible for the implementation of the Digital GBA, the setting up of a joint task force to discuss and take the next step of work, whether the OGCIO will consider first discussing with the GSDMB of Guangdong Province the expedition of promotion of the relevant business handling arrangements for Home Return Permits and residence permits; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether it will proactively conduct regular exchanges and collaboration with the relevant Mainland authorities, so as to promote the full digitalisation of the process from application for Home Return Permits to immigration clearance with the use of Home Return Permits; if so, of the details; and

(3) given that some members of the public hope that the level of convenience in the use of Home Return Permits will be enhanced, whether the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government will relay their aspiration to the Mainland Government in the coming year and conduct regular exchanges and communication in this regard; if so, of the details?

Reply:

President,

To facilitate Hong Kong and Macao residents working, studying and living in the Mainland, since September 1, 2018, relevant mainland authorities have further facilitated Hong Kong and Macao residents to use the Mainland Travel Permits for Hong Kong and Macao Residents (commonly known as the Home Return Permits) in the application of the Home Return Permits in the areas of transport, finance, communications, education, healthcare, social security, industry and commerce, taxation, accommodation, etc.

Regarding the Hon Maggie Chan's question, after consultation with the Innovation, Technology and Industry Bureau (ITIB) and the Security Bureau, our consolidated reply is as follows:

(1) On November 21, 2023, the People's Government of Guangdong Province issued the "Three-Year Action Plan of Digital Greater Bay Area Construction" (Action Plan), which contains 60 initiatives involving multiple departments in Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao. Promoting the arrangement of full digitalisation of the process of frequently handled businesses using Home Return Permits has also been included in the Action Plan. The Chief Executive also mentioned in the 2023 Policy Address that the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government would fully support the Action Plan and collaborate with the People's Government of Guangdong Province to develop the "Digital Bay Area", promoting deeper integration of economic development, public services and social governance of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao through digitalisation, thereby facilitating the development of the Greater Bay Area (GBA) into the world's most digitally advanced bay area, and allowing Hong Kong to better integrate into the development of the GBA and the country.

The ITIB and the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer are now in close liaison with the People's Government of Guangdong Province to jointly promote the "Digital Bay Area" initiative. Paying heed to the principle of launching initiatives once they are ready, both sides have also reached consensus on setting up a task force to jointly explore the implementation direction and details of various initiatives under the Action Plan, alongside relevant departments of the HKSAR Government and Guangdong, in order to progressively promote the work relating to Hong Kong in the "Digital Bay Area".

(2) The Immigration Department (ImmD) and relevant departments of the HKSAR have been maintaining close liaison with Mainland authorities to formulate appropriate measures to enhance clearance capacity of boundary control points (BCPs), depending on the situation of each BCP. Moreover, the ImmD will also review the use of immigration facilities and system operation from time to time, and adopt innovative technologies with a view to providing services with enhanced convenience and quality, including actively study the implementation of the more tourist-friendly clearance mode of "collaborative inspection and joint clearance". Under the relevant clearance mode, automatic channels or counters of both sides will be set up side by side within their

respective jurisdiction at the boundary inside the port, such that outbound and inbound visitors only need to queue up to have their documents inspected and their identities verified once to pass through the facilities of both sides in order to complete the respective immigration procedures.

(3) Apart from the discussion on enhancing the level of convenience of using Home Return Permits in the Mainland with Mainland authorities mentioned above, the Mainland Offices and the Liaison Units of the HKSAR Government have been maintaining close liaison with the relevant authorities, and conveying the views and requests of Hong Kong residents living, working and studying in the Mainland, including the requests for wider and more convenient use of the Home Return Permits in the Mainland, etc. The HKSAR Government will continue to maintain close liaison and co-operation with the Mainland authorities with a view to enhancing the level of convenience for Hong Kong people living in the Mainland.

LCQ20: Multi-functional smart lampposts

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Yuet-ming and a written reply by the Secretary for Innovation, Technology and Industry, Professor Sun Dong, in the Legislative Council today (May 8):

Question:

In the 2017 Policy Address, the Government proposed to implement the Multi-functional Smart Lampposts Pilot Scheme (the Scheme) in selected urban locations. The Scheme was completed in December last year with over 400 multi-functional smart lampposts equipped with smart devices (smart lamppost) installed in selected locations. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective installation cost of various smart devices in a smart lamppost; as there are views pointing out that most smart lampposts are only equipped with radio frequency identification tags and Geo-□QR code tags, rendering their deployment of smart devices incomplete, whether the Government will consider equipping these smart lampposts with more smart devices;

(2) as there are views that smart lampposts have been densely installed in many districts, so much so that dozens of smart lampposts can be found on the same street, of the justifications for the relevant arrangement;

(3) whether it has evaluated the effectiveness of the Scheme, and whether it will make a report on the Scheme to this Council;

(4) as the 2023 Policy Address proposed to expedite the expansion of mobile network infrastructure in rural and remote areas, whether the Government will pilot the use of smart lampposts as fifth generation (5G) radio base stations in rural areas with poorer mobile network signals, with a view to improving mobile communications services in these areas; and

(5) given that in reply to a question raised by a Member of this Council on the Estimates of Expenditure 2024-2025, the Government indicated that smart lamppost would be a standard infrastructure to be installed in new development areas, whether the Government will replace conventional lampposts already installed with smart lampposts in large numbers; if so, of the relevant expenditure?

Reply:

President,

Under the Multi-functional Smart Lampposts Pilot Scheme (Pilot Scheme) launched in 2019, over 400 multi-functional smart lampposts have been installed in locations with higher pedestrian and vehicular flow in the territory (including Central and Admiralty, Wan Chai, Yau Tsim Mong, Kwun Tong / Kai Tak Development Area, Kowloon City district and Sai Kung district) to provide intelligent public lighting services and facilitate concerned bureaux/departments (B/Ds) to collect different kinds of city data through smart devices as well as to support the development of 5G mobile communications services. The Pilot Scheme was completed in December 2023.

Having consulted the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau and the Highways Department, a consolidated reply in response to the questions raised by the Hon Chan Yuet-ming is as follows:

(1) and (2) Smart lampposts are the infrastructure for building smart city, allowing B/Ds to install relevant smart devices and applications at suitable locations in accordance with their operational needs to assist in their work on city management. The distance between lampposts is mainly determined by relevant technical standards, including pedestrian flow. The smart devices to be installed on smart lampposts depend on the real-time city data required to be collected or published by respective B/Ds. Due to the differences in functionality and coverage of different smart devices, the relevant departments would, based on the actual circumstances, install different smart devices at different locations on the same street where the smart lampposts are installed, in order to achieve the best effect and collect the required data for analysis and reference by the relevant B/Ds. On average, the cost of each smart lamppost with smart devices is about $140,000.

(3) and (5) The Pilot Scheme was completed in December 2023. We have reported the initial achievements and the way forward in the meeting of the Legislative Council Subcommittee on Matters Relating to the Development of Smart City on April 25, 2023, and in the paper for the Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting on April 8, 2024 respectively. The experience gained from the Pilot Scheme shows that smart lampposts are suitable for installing with smart devices and can help collect real-time city data of the

area. Mobile network operators have also expressed their wish for installing more radio base stations (RBSs) on smart lampposts to promote the development of 5G network services. In addition, various sectors across the community and the general public hold positive views on going ahead with installation of smart lampposts and smart devices, and suggest that the Government install more smart devices on smart lampposts so as to meet the needs of smart city.

To further promote smart city development in Hong Kong, smart lampposts will be a standard infrastructure to be installed in new development areas under planning or construction in future, so as to facilitate B/Ds to install suitable smart devices and applications in accordance with their operational needs for enhancing city management and developing innovative services. As for developed areas, in the light of the experience gained from the Pilot Scheme, we consider that large-scale replacement of existing conventional lampposts is not cost-effective and may not be feasible from the technical and engineering perspectives. It is more preferable to replace the existing lampposts with smart lampposts in suitable urban locations where feasible, and duly taking into account the operational and services requirements of individual departments.

(4) To enhance mobile network coverage in rural and remote areas, the Chief Executive announced in the 2023 Policy Address that the Government will proactively co-ordinate with the mobile network operators (MNOs) and explore the feasibility of providing subsidies to expedite the expansion of mobile network infrastructure in rural and remote areas, with a view to enhancing the mobile network coverage and capacity in these areas so as to improve the quality of life of the residents and safeguard the safety of visitors. The Office of the Communications Authority (OFCA) is now conducting the preparatory work for the implementation of the programme, including drawing up MNO's eligibility, proposed coverage scope and areas, number of mobile network facilities to be constructed, implementation timetable, funding mechanism and amount, etc. OFCA will conduct an industry consultation in the second half of 2024 to finalise the detailed implementation arrangement.

As for the use of smart lampposts as 5G wireless RBSs, the Government has established mechanism to reserve space and carrying capacity in multi-functional smart lampposts set up in various areas for MNOs to install RBSs in order to further expand 5G network coverage.

LCQ10: Lifts connecting to public footbridges

Following is a question by Professor the Hon Lau Chi-pang and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Lam Sai-hung, in the Legislative Council today (May 8):

Question:

Regarding lifts connecting to public footbridges (the lifts), will the Government inform this Council:

(1) how it monitors the cleansing works performed by the contractors for the lifts (e.g. whether the contractors are required to submit regular reports) to ensure that the lifts are clean and bright;

(2) how frequently the maintenance works of the lifts are carried out, and of the average time taken by the contractors to deal with unforeseen lift failures; how the Government monitors and ensures that the contractors carry out regular inspections;

(3) given that the Government has enhanced its newly constructed lifts for the convenience of users (including the introduction of touchless lift buttons, the installation of reflective panels inside the lifts and the provision of buttons on the side walls of the lift cars), whether the Government has plans to adopt such a design in all its lifts; if so, of the specific work plan; if not, the reasons for that;

(4) given that the Government indicated in its paper submitted to the Panel on Transport of this Council in October last year that it was conducting tests on a number of materials and devices (including nano-self-cleaning coatings and nano-fibre filters) for its lifts and lift towers to reduce the accumulation of dust and dirt, whether the results of the tests meet the relevant requirements; if so, of the specific timetable for the adoption of such materials; if not, the improvement plans in place to meet the relevant requirements; and

(5) given that the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department is contemplating the use of cleansing robots to carry out cleansing works for the lifts, whether the Government has plans to introduce more similar programmes to reduce the workload of cleansing workers and minimize the impact of the suspension of lift service on the public?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Environment and Ecology Bureau, the Highways Department (HyD) and the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD), my reply to the various parts of the question raised by Professor the Hon Lau is as follows:

(1) The HyD employs contractors on a term contract basis to clean the lifts attached to public footbridges (Note 1). The contractors clean the lift structures (e.g. the external glass walls of lift towers and lift cars) once every three months. Facilities such as the internal walls of lift cars, lift doors and control panels will be cleaned once a day.

The HyD has stipulated in the contracts a stringent mechanism to monitor the performance of contractors. Upon completion of the relevant work, the

contractors are required to submit work records, including on-site photographs, in accordance with the contract requirements. The HyD will examine the relevant work records or reports to ensure that the work complies with the contract requirements and is completed within the required timeframe. The HyD will also send its staff to conduct weekly random checks on the work of the contractors. If the level of the relevant work fails to meet the specified standards, the HyD will take appropriate follow-up actions in accordance with the contract requirements and the established mechanism, such as issuing warning letters, reflecting the findings in the quarterly performance reports of the contractors, and deducting the relevant payment in accordance with the contract terms.

In addition, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) is responsible for the daily floor sweeping of the lifts concerned. The FEHD conducts inspections based on the principle of risk management to ensure that the frontline sweeping services meet the required performance standards. Besides, the FEHD maintains effective communication with the outsourced contractors, advises and reminds them of the areas requiring attention, follow-up and improvement. If the contractor is found to be in breach of the contract terms, verbal warning, written warning or various types of Default Notices will be issued to the contractor and the monthly service fee will be deducted accordingly.

Note 1: They refer to public footbridges across public roads which are repaired and maintained by the HyD.

(2) The HyD engages the EMSD to carry out maintenance of the electrical and mechanical equipment of the lifts concerned and the EMSD engages registered lift contractors to perform the work. The contractors will carry out weekly routine maintenance and inspection of the lifts and arrange for appropriate repairs when necessary. According to the performance pledge, the contractor is required to arrive at the scene within one hour upon receipt of a report of lift malfunctions. For malfunctions involving trapped passengers, the contractor is required to arrive at the scene within 30 minutes. In both cases, the compliance rate should be at least 95 per cent.

The EMSD will monitor the progress of the contractors' maintenance and repair work, including reviewing the logbooks and maintenance reports of the contractors, and dispatching staff from time to time to carry out surprise inspections of the contractors' work. If a contractor is found not to have taken timely follow-up actions or its performance is not up to the required standard, the EMSD will follow up with the contractor in accordance with the requirements of the contract, including the issuance of warning letters and reflecting the findings in the quarterly performance reports of the contractors.

(3) The HyD has been striving to optimise the design of lifts to meet the needs of users. For new lifts retrofitted under the Universal Accessibility (UA) Programme since August 2022, the HyD has introduced touchless buttons, and added reflective panels inside the lifts and control panels on the side walls of the lifts for the convenience of wheelchair users. The HyD and the EMSD will tie in with the maintenance cycle and refurbishment arrangement of

footbridges and pedestrian subways, and consider adding relevant installations to existing lifts as necessary, taking into account the actual situation and relevant factors, such as the site environment and the existing equipment of the lifts.

(4) The HyD has been exploring the introduction of new designs and materials to enhance the cleanliness of lifts and lift towers. In March 2024, the HyD completed a number of material and installation tests for new lifts retrofitted under the UA Programme, including the testing of nano-self-cleaning coatings and nanofiber filters. The results showed that the nano-self-cleaning coatings could effectively reduce the accumulation of dust and dirt on the glasses of lift towers and lift cars, while the nanofiber filters could prevent dust and dirt from entering the lift towers through the louvers. In view of this, the HyD will adopt these technologies in its new lifts in future.

(5) The HyD is committed to exploring the technical feasibility of using cleansing robots to carry out cleansing work for lifts attached to public footbridges, including the internal and external glass surfaces of lift towers and lift cars. However, due to the complex structure and narrow space of lift shafts, it is technically challenging to use robots for cleansing. The HyD has commissioned the EMSD to encourage the industry to come up with innovative technological solutions through the E&M InnoPortal (Note 2). In addition, the EMSD and the HyD will continue to liaise with the industry to keep in view the development of new technologies and introduce other innovative solutions for field trials as appropriate, with a view to further alleviating the workload of cleansing workers and minimising the service interruptions caused by regular cleansing.

Note 2: The EMSD launched the E&M InnoPortal which lists the service wishes of various government departments, public organisations and the electrical and mechanical trades, and invites the innovation and technology (I&T) sector, including start-ups and universities to propose relevant I&T solutions for matching. For successfully matched I&T wishes and solutions, the EMSD will carry out field trials in a bid to promote and drive the research and development and application of innovative technologies.

LCQ18: The situation of importation of labour

Following is a question by the Hon Yiu Pak-leung and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (May 8):

Question:

The Government successively launched the Labour Importation Scheme for the Transport Sector – Aviation Industry and the Enhanced Supplementary Labour Scheme (ESLS) last year to alleviate the manpower shortage across different sectors. However, members of various sectors have relayed to me that these two schemes, which have been implemented for more than half a year, are not as effective as expected and have failed to help them alleviate the imminent manpower shortage. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of imported workers who have arrived to work in Hong Kong since the implementation of the Labour Importation Scheme for the Transport Sector – Aviation Industry, with a breakdown by the 10 job types under the scheme;

(2) of the respective numbers of applications received and approved by the authorities and the number of workers involved since the implementation of the ESLS, and whether the authorities will compile statistics on/estimate the number of workers who have arrived to work in Hong Kong; of the aforesaid information on the 26 job categories normally excluded from the Supplementary Labour Scheme;

(3) of the respective numbers of applications from the hotel, guesthouse and travel agent industries received, being processed, approved and rejected by the authorities and the job types involved since the implementation of the ESLS; whether the authorities will compile statistics on/estimate the number of workers who have arrived to work in Hong Kong; and

(4) as members of the industry generally consider that the progress of processing applications under the ESLS has been slow, making it difficult to alleviate the imminent frontline manpower constraints facing the industry, and the Government indicated in the reply to a question raised by a Member of this Council on the 10th of last month that new measures will be introduced shortly to further improve the workflow of processing relevant applications, of the anticipated reduction in the average time taken to process each application following the implementation of the new measures?

Reply:

President,

To cope with the challenges brought by manpower shortage, the Government has enhanced the mechanism for importation of workers on the premise of safeguarding the employment priority for local workers. On July 17, 2023, the Transport and Logistics Bureau (TLB) launched the Labour Importation Scheme for the Transport Sector – Aviation Industry (Aviation Scheme). The Labour Department (LD) has also implemented the Enhanced Supplementary Labour Scheme (ESLS) since September 4, 2023 to enhance the coverage and operation of the Supplementary Labour Scheme, including suspending the general exclusion of the 26 job categories as well as unskilled/low-skilled posts from labour importation for two years.

In consultation with the TLB, my reply to the Member's question is as follows:

(i) The Aviation Scheme allows aviation-related companies with direct contractual relationships with the Airport Authority Hong Kong to suitably import workers on the prerequisite of safeguarding the employment priority of local workers, with a quota ceiling of 6 300.

In the first round of application from July to August 2023, the TLB approved the applications from 28 eligible companies with a total of 2 841 quotas covering all 10 job types under the Aviation Scheme. As at April 2024, 1 450 imported workers had arrived to work in Hong Kong and their distribution with a breakdown by job type is at Annex 1.

The second round of application under the Aviation Scheme was conducted from March to April 2024. The TLB approved the applications from 27 eligible companies with a total of 2 982 quotas also covering all job types. The employers concerned have already started recruiting imported workers and those approved in the second round are expected to arrive to work in Hong Kong starting from June to July 2024.

(2) and (3) From September 4, 2023 to April 30, 2024, 4 239 applications seeking to import 41 470 workers were received under the ESLS. Of these applications, 31 574 imported workers intended to take up posts which were generally excluded from labour importation before (21 662 and 9 912 respectively for the 26 job categories and the unskilled/low-skilled posts). During the same period, 1 277 applications seeking to import 8 586 imported workers were approved under the ESLS, including 4 929 workers approved to take up posts which were generally excluded from labour importation in the past (3 910 and 1 019 respectively for the 26 job categories and the unskilled/low-skilled posts). A breakdown of the numbers of imported workers applied for and approved by the 26 job categories is at Annex 2.

In addition, apart from the approved applications, as at April 30, 2024, 1 028 applications in respect of those received after the launch of the ESLS had started or completed the local recruitment exercise, seeking to import 11 313 workers. The LD expects that the vetting of most of these applications will be completed in the second quarter of this year. The exact number approved will depend on the results of local recruitment and the application details of the cases.

As at April 30, 2024, the major posts related to the accommodation services industry (including the hotel and boarding house sectors) received under the ESLS included room attendant, waiter/waitress and receptionist, etc. A breakdown of the numbers of applications received, under processing, approved and refused relating to the accommodation services industry is at Annex 3. The LD does not maintain a breakdown on the travel agency sector.

Employers approved to import workers under the ESLS are required to sign a standard employment contract with each of its prospective imported worker.

They shall arrange their prospective imported workers to submit visa/entry permit applications to the Immigration Department within the period specified in the approval-in-principle letter (generally within six months from the issue date of the said letter). The arrival time of the imported workers depends on the progress of the employers' handling of the relevant procedures. The LD does not maintain the number of imported workers arriving and working in Hong Kong under the ESLS.

(4) The time required for the LD to process each application under the ESLS 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. If the job vacancies involves novel job titles or special skills, the LD will need more time to seek advice from relevant bureaux and/or departments, training bodies, professional bodies, etc., to set the reasonable wages, entry requirements, scope of duties, etc.

The LD has uploaded to the ESLS dedicated website the "List of Common Posts" covering the median monthly wage, working hours, entry requirements and duties of 156 common posts in different industries for employers' reference. To further enhance the workflow of processing applications, the LD on May 2, 2024, introduced a series of new measures, striving to complete the processing of newly-received applications for common posts within around three months. The new measures include:

(i) introducing an application form for common posts and assigning designated teams to process these applications to expedite the preliminary screening process for commencement of the four-week local open recruitment;

(ii) deploying staff designated to vet applications submitted by employers. The LD will remind the employers as soon as possible in case the information on the application forms is incomplete or the required supporting documents are missing;

(iii) exercising flexibility in the handling of recruitment advertisements placed by employers during local recruitment, and avoiding to extend the four-week local recruitment period as far as possible; and expediting the process of following up on interview results;

(iv) organising briefings for employment agencies involved in labour importation matters to explain the application arrangements of the ESLS to facilitate employment agencies to assist employers on the handling of applications; and

(v) increasing the frequency of circulating the recommendations on the applications of the ESLS to the Labour Advisory Board.

The LD will continue to closely monitor the implementation of the ESLS, safeguard the employment priority for local workers and improve the processing of applications.

LCQ7: Handling of styrofoam waste

Following is a question by the Hon Lam So-wai and a written reply by the Secretary for Environment and Ecology, Mr Tse Chin-wan, in the Legislative Council today (May 8):

Question:

Regarding the handling of styrofoam waste, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the current daily amount of styrofoam waste being sent to landfills;

(2) as it is learnt that styrofoam is widely used as a packaging material for some household electrical appliances (e.g. air-conditioners, refrigerators, washing machines and televisions), whether the Government has compiled statistics on the amount of styrofoam waste generated from the packaging materials of household electrical appliances in each of the past three years and, among such waste, the amount that was sent to landfills;

(3) as there are views that the economic benefits of styrofoam recycling are relatively low, how the Government assists the recycling industry in handling large volumes of styrofoam waste when alternatives that can completely replace styrofoam have not yet emerged;

(4) whether it has assessed if the problem of styrofoam waste can be fully resolved when I·PARK1, a modern waste-to-energy incinerator for treating municipal solid waste, becomes operational in 2025; and

(5) whether the Government currently has plans to fully resolve the problem of styrofoam waste?

Reply:

President,

Given styrofoam being lightweight but bulky in volume, even when a large amount of styrofoam is recovered and processed, only a small amount of raw plastics will be produced. The costs on transportation and recycling are high. Coupled with the fact that most of the waste styrofoam is either contaminated or mixed with impurities, the recycling efficiency of styrofoam is comparatively low. Hence, the Government has put forward various strategies on handling styrofoam waste: (i) reducing use at source, such as banning the sale or supply of styrofoam tableware, and encouraging electrical appliances suppliers to reduce the use of styrofoam packaging materials; (ii) encouraging reuse, such as styrofoam boxes used for storage of vegetables and fruits; and (iii) providing outlets for recycling, such as recycling of

styrofoam products at the GREEN@COMMUNITY facilities. As regards styrofoam that cannot be reused or recycled, to reduce the amount of such waste to be transferred to landfills for handling, the Government is constructing the Integrated Waste Management Facilities Phase 1 (I·PARK1), with a view to transforming waste into energy with advanced technology.

The consolidated reply to various parts of the question raised by the Hon Lam So-wai is as follows:

The Environmental Protection Department (EPD) has not compiled the breakdown of statistics on the quantity of waste styrofoam generated and disposed of.

As mentioned in the Government's overall strategies in the preamble, in respect of styrofoam tableware, the Government has implemented the new regulation on disposable plastic tableware and other plastic products on April 22 this year. Restaurants and retail stores are not allowed to sell or supply all styrofoam tableware (including plates, food containers and cups), thereby directly and significantly reducing the use of styrofoam at source.

In respect of packaging materials for household electrical appliances, the EPD conducted a survey on packaging materials for the trade of electrical and electronic appliances suppliers in 2022 and encouraged them to reduce the amount of styrofoam packaging materials as much as possible. Among the replies from electrical appliances suppliers, more than 50 respondents (about 60 per cent) stated that they had actively reduced the use of styrofoam in the packaging of electrical and electronic products, and, when practicable, even ceased using styrofoam altogether. According to the responses of these electrical appliances suppliers, the use of styrofoam for packaging in most of their small household appliances have been reduced or ceased. To commend companies with outstanding performance, the EPD presented awards to several electrical and electronic appliances suppliers who have reduced the use of styrofoam packaging in at least 60 per cent of their products, including Gilman Group Limited, Arçelik Hitachi Home Appliances Sales Hong Kong Limited, Shun Hing Electric Works and Engineering Company Limited, Midea Electric (Hong Kong) Limited and German Pool (Hong Kong) Limited, at the opening ceremony of the "GREEN@COMMUNITY Recycling Month" in November 2022. Through this event, we had also appealed to more suppliers of different products to reduce the use of packaging material (including styrofoam). In addition, the EPD published the "Practical Guides on Packaging Reduction and Management" (Guides) for the electrical and electronic appliances sector on May 2 this year and issued letters to electrical appliances suppliers to encourage them to make reference to the Guides and use recyclable packaging materials in place of styrofoam.

To facilitate different sectors in kick-starting their journey on packaging reduction and management, apart from the electrical and electronic appliances sector, the EPD is also developing a set of Guides for specific sectors to provide practical tips and experience sharing on how to avoid and reduce packaging consumption (including styrofoam containers) so as to achieve sustainable packaging management in their daily operations. For

details about the Guides, please visit the following website: www.wastereduction.gov.hk/en-hk/resources-centre/packaging-reduction-tips-different-sectors.

In respect of styrofoam boxes used for vegetables and fruits, those used for transporting vegetables and fruits supplied to Hong Kong from the Mainland are mainly returned to the Mainland for reuse. With the resumption of normal travel between the Mainland and Hong Kong since January 2023, the arrangement has been running smoothly. In addition, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department, and the Fish Marketing Organisation have installed cold-press machines in the overhauled markets and wholesale markets respectively and arranged local recyclers to recover and recycle styrofoam boxes that cannot be reused due to damage or other reasons on the spot.

From the perspective of environmental benefits, reusing styrofoam boxes is better than recycling. However, styrofoam also has unfavourable characteristics, such as poor strength, brittleness and low degradability. Balancing the cost-effectiveness and the long-term development of the industries, we will continue to maintain dialogue with the food and recycling industries, encourage the food industry to switch to stackable, durable and easy-to-clean plastic boxes for transportation of goods in the long-run as far as practicable.

In terms of recycling styrofoam, all GREEN@COMMUNITY facilities accept styrofoam items generated from households for passing on to downstream recyclers approved by the EPD for proper treatment and turning them into resources. Each Recycling Stations and Recycling Stores under GREEN@COMMUNTIY has a workshop for temporary storage of recyclables. If members of the public need to hand over styrofoam that is relatively bulky in size to GREEN@COMMUNITY, they are advised to contact the relevant facility to make prior arrangements.

Meanwhile, the EPD is working at full steam on constructing I·PARK1 near Shek Kwu Chau, which is the first modern waste-to-energy incineration project in Hong Kong, with an expected handling capacity of 3 000 tonnes of municipal solid waste (MSW) per day. I·PARK1 will mainly receive MSW, including styrofoam waste, transported by sea from the West Kowloon Transfer Station and turn the waste into energy.