

Second round of Labour Importation Scheme for Transport Sector – Public Light Bus/Coach Trade to accept applications from March 25

The Transport Department (TD) announced today (March 20) that the second round of the Labour Importation Scheme for the Transport Sector – Public Light Bus/Coach Trade (Scheme) will be open for application from next Monday (March 25).

The application procedures and operational details of the Scheme are similar to those of the first round of application. Applicants who are interested in importing public light bus or coach drivers shall submit the completed application form together with the required documents to the TD between March 25 and April 26. An interdepartmental liaison group comprising representatives from the Transport and Logistics Bureau, the Labour Department and the TD will vet the applications, and approval decisions will be made by the Commissioner for Transport. The approval process will be completed in about two months' time after the end of the application period.

The TD will continue to engage in regular meetings with the stakeholder consultative group to listen to the views of stakeholders, including employers and labour representatives, on the Scheme. Information dissemination will also be enhanced through the consultative group in order to facilitate the smooth implementation and execution of the Scheme.

The Scheme details and application form can be found on the TD's website (www.td.gov.hk/en/lispc/index.html). For enquiries, please call 2804 2600.

Premised on safeguarding the employment of local labour, the Scheme was introduced in July last year to allow the transport sector to suitably import labour with a view to relieving the acute manpower shortage and facilitating the provision of reliable public transport services. A total of 969 quotas were approved under the first round of the Scheme in September last year, with about 70 per cent having submitted to the Immigration Department visa applications for imported labour. For about half of these submitted applications, the drivers have arrived to undergo driving training and driving tests in Hong Kong and have been/will be deployed to assigned routes.

OASES welcomes new batch of strategic

enterprises to establish or expand their businesses in Hong Kong (with photos)

The Office for Attracting Strategic Enterprises (OASES) held the OASES Partnership Signing Ceremony today (March 20) and welcomed a new batch of strategic enterprises to set up or expand their businesses in Hong Kong. Most of them will set up research and development (R&D) centres or regional business headquarters in Hong Kong.

Witnessed by the Chief Executive, Mr John Lee, and the Financial Secretary, Mr Paul Chan, 25 strategic enterprises signed agreements to become strategic enterprise partners of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government. In addition to investing in Hong Kong, they will actively bring in upstream, midstream and downstream partners from their industry chains to the city, thereby promoting a more vibrant development of the innovation and technology sector.

The 25 strategic enterprises (see Annex) include 19 enterprises from the second batch of enterprises attracted as well as six enterprises from the first batch which were unable to join the Launching Ceremony of OASES Partnership last October due to scheduling reasons. They come from such industries as life and health technology, artificial intelligence and data science, fintech, and advanced manufacturing and new energy. Among them, six enterprises are from the United States, and the rest are from the Mainland.

In the coming years, the strategic enterprises, including the first batch of strategic enterprises attracted earlier, will invest more than \$40 billion in total in Hong Kong, and create over 13 000 jobs, the majority of which would be scientific research and management positions.

In his speech at the ceremony, Mr Lee said he has every confidence that the strategic enterprises would continue to thrive in Hong Kong. "Hong Kong is the only city in the world that converges both the China advantage and the global advantage, under the 'one country, two systems' principle."

"Given our long-standing strengths in finance, intellectual property protection and connectivity, Hong Kong can enable technology transfer, attract foreign investment and create the cross-boundary collaborations that drive innovation and technology," Mr Lee said.

Addressing the ceremony, Mr Chan said that under the principle of "one country, two systems", Hong Kong maintains the rule of law, a free and open business environment, free flow of capital, data and talent, as well as seamless alignment with best international governance standards. With a comprehensive and sophisticated financial eco-system, world-class academic and research institutions and their strong R&D capabilities, Hong Kong is an ideal location for strategic enterprises to expand their businesses. He also

said that the Government will continue to support R&D to drive the commercialisation of research outcomes and promote new industrialisation, nurture local start-ups and talent, and boost the collaboration with sister cities in the Greater Bay Area with a view to cultivating a more thriving innovation and technology ecosystem.

The signing ceremony today was attended by over 200 representatives of the strategic enterprises, local and foreign chambers of commerce, research institutions, relevant government bureaux/departments, and public organisations.

The Chief Executive announced in his Policy Address last year that the Government will continue its endeavours to attract enterprises, particularly those pertinent to Hong Kong's development as the "eight centres", including key enterprises and leading representatives in advanced technology, innovation and strategic industries. OASES aims to reach out to no less than 300 strategic enterprises in 2024 to negotiate for establishing their foothold or expanding their operations in Hong Kong. According to the 2024-25 Budget, OASES, the Innovation, Technology and Industry Bureau, Invest Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Investment Corporation Limited will actively reach out to enterprises from the Mainland and overseas, and proactively attract and assist high value-added technology industries and other enterprises to establish a foothold in Hong Kong.

For enterprises interested in setting up their businesses in Hong Kong, OASES and other departments will engage them in detailed discussions on their business development plans and provide one-stop services to these enterprises. They will follow up on their development situations in Hong Kong and their needs.



LCQ18: Engaging consultants for public works projects

Following is a question by the Hon Stanley Ng and a written reply by the Secretary for Development, Ms Bernadette Linn, in the Legislative Council today (March 20):

Question:

It is learnt that the Development Bureau has been minimising expenditure on public works projects as far as possible under the principles of "fitness-for purpose" and "no frill". However, the construction costs of a number of projects in recent years have still amounted to billions of dollars easily, with huge expenses incurred in engaging consultants for such projects, arousing wide public concern. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) how it determines whether the fees charged by consultants are appropriate, for example, whether the fees are based on the workload and duration of projects; as regards projects with the actual expenditure on consultants' fees exceeding the estimates, whether the Government has looked into the causes for that; if so, of the details;
- (2) of the respective percentages of the expenditures on (i) consultants' fees and (ii) conducting environmental impact assessments in the overall costs of various projects with construction costs of \$50 million or below and over \$50 million in the past three years;
- (3) of the consultancy firms engaged for various projects carried out in the past three years; and
- (4) whether it has compiled statistics on the employment of retired civil servants by consultancy firms; if so, of the details?

Reply:

President,

The Government has been continuously investing in capital works to improve people's quality of life, promote Hong Kong's economic development and enhance its long-term competitiveness. With long-term planning, we implement the relevant projects in a timely and orderly manner. Public works projects normally involve efforts on various fronts, and the tasks involved in different types of projects are not the same. For example, land use planning and engineering studies normally cover technical assessments (including assessments of environment impact, traffic), carry out relevant statutory procedures, engineering designs, surveys, etc. As these tasks require professional and technical personnel of different disciplines, works

departments will consider whether they have sufficient in-house manpower resources to take forward the projects before employing consultants as necessary to assist in carrying out the relevant tasks. Depending on the scale, scope, complexity, etc, of each individual projects, the consultancy fees of the projects vary.

The reply to the question raised by the Hon Stanley Ng is as follows:

(1) The Government has been adopting the principles of "achieving best value for money" and "maintaining open and fair competition" for the procurement of public works consultancies with clear procedures and guidelines set out for selecting suitable consultants. Before tendering, works departments will consider a number of factors including the complexity, the scope of works involved and the implementation timetable of the public works project concerned so as to estimate the manpower demand of various professional and technical personnel for the consultancy and then work out the estimated consultancy fee with reference to the market wage level.

A two-envelope assessment approach has mainly been adopted in the tendering of public works consultancies. Tenderers are required to submit a technical proposal and a fee proposal at the same time. Works departments will first give a score to the technical proposal and then the fee proposal. Afterwards, a combined score will be calculated based on the weighting stipulated in the tender documents. Normally, the tenderer with the highest combined score will be awarded the consultancy. During the assessment of technical proposals, works departments will examine the consultants' job experience, understanding of the projects, proposed manpower inputs, past performance, etc. During the assessment of fee proposals, works departments will, based on the estimated consultancy fee compiled before the tendering exercise, examine whether the consultants' tender prices are reasonable and review whether they are consistent with the proposed manpower inputs. The aforesaid procedures can effectively ensure the consultancy fee is reasonable and cost-effective, and the consultants' manpower resources are sufficient to provide relevant consultancy services.

In taking forward the works projects, works departments may request consultants as necessary to undertake additional services according to the latest development of the projects. For example, in response to the suggestions raised by stakeholders during the public consultation stage, consultants need to modify the engineering designs and conduct additional impact assessments. The addition services can usually be completed within the sum reserved in the projects. So far, there were only a few cases whereby the consultancy fee had exceeded the project estimates due to additional services.

(2) and (3) In the past three years, no matter the value of a public works project is over or below \$50 million, if it is necessary to employ consultants to assist in the implementation of such projects, the consultancy fee generally accounts for about two to three per cent of the overall project cost, which is similar to the ratio of consultancy fee of public works projects elsewhere in the world. Nevertheless, for works projects of small

scale and less complexity, works departments can normally implement the projects using their in-house manpower resources, thereby avoiding the employment of consultants. If a works project involves an environmental impact assessment, the expenditure of such assessment generally accounts for about five to 10 per cent of the overall consultancy fee.

There are different types of public works consultancies. The Engineering and Associated Consultants Selection Board is responsible for approving consultancies related to civil infrastructure, drainage and sewerage, electrical and mechanical works, environment, geotechnical works and slopes, roads, town planning, traffic and transport, and waterworks. The Architectural and Associated Consultants Selection Board is responsible for approving consultancies related to architectural services, building services, building surveying, landscape architectural services, quantity surveying and structural engineering. In the past three years, there were 244 and 59 public works consultancies approved by the Engineering and Associated Consultants Selection Board and the Architectural and Associated Consultants Selection Board respectively, which were awarded to 17 and 25 consultants. The list of consultants is shown at Appendix.

(4) There is an established control regime governing the taking up of post-service outside work by civil servants in the Government with an aim to ensuring that civil servants who have left the Government will not take up any work outside the Government which may constitute real or potential conflict of interest with their former government duties during the control period. In general, if retired civil servants would like to take up post-service outside work during the control period, they are required to apply for prior permission from the relevant authority. Since we have not conducted any survey on the employment of retired civil servants by consultants, we are unable to provide the relevant statistics.

[LCQ3: Piling up miscellaneous articles in public places](#)

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Hoi-yan and a reply by the Secretary for Home and Youth Affairs, Miss Alice Mak, in the Legislative Council today (March 20):

Question:

Recently, some members of the public have relayed that the piling up of miscellaneous articles in subways near their homes has become increasingly serious. Apart from using wooden panels and cloths by some people to enclose street sleeping spaces, appliances such as liquefied petroleum gas cylinders and cassette cookers are also placed at the scene, posing serious fire

hazards. The large amount of miscellaneous articles obstructing passageways has also given rise to environmental hygiene and safety issues, causing great distress to nearby residents. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of interdepartmental joint operations coordinated by the Government in the past three years to tackle cases of miscellaneous articles piling up in public places; among such cases, the number of those involving illegal acts, and the respective numbers of fixed penalty notices issued and prosecutions instituted by the Government in respect of such cases;

(2) among the aforesaid operations, of the number of those involving street sleepers; the number of such street sleepers who have moved into public rental housing, short-term hostels or other suitable accommodation with the Government's assistance, and how it balanced the interests of street sleepers, residents and relevant stakeholders in the process; and

(3) as it is learnt that the number of cases involving the occupation of public places for piling up miscellaneous articles has shown an upward trend, and many of such cases involve various issues such as housing, finance, family conditions and even mental health, which are complex and entail a complicated handling process, whether the authorities will consider setting up a dedicated interdepartmental joint office to deal with the relevant issues, so as to prevent the situation from worsening?

Reply:

President,

Accumulation of miscellaneous articles in public places is often associated with street sleeping, which is a complicated social issue. Each and every street sleeping case has its own circumstances, which may involve family, economic and financial or even mental health problems; whereas environmental hygiene is one of the impacts arising from the accumulation of articles. Relevant government departments have all along been handling the problems of accumulated articles in public places and street sleeping according to their delineated purviews and responsibilities, including providing assistance to street sleepers on areas such as accommodation, welfare and medical services, as well as conducting inter-departmental clearance operations at the district level. Departments have been collaborating closely with a view to rendering appropriate support to facilitate the return of street sleepers to sheltered life on the one hand, and on the other clearing black spots and articles accumulated thereat as soon as possible so as to minimise environmental nuisance to nearby residents.

Having consulted the Labour and Welfare Bureau, the Environment and Ecology Bureau and the Development Bureau, the consolidated reply to the three parts of the questions is as follows:

(1) The Government is committed to improving environmental hygiene in order

to safeguard public health. Tackling the issue of accumulated articles in public places involves the work of various departments. Generally speaking, depending on the areas and situations of the accumulation concerned law enforcement departments including the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) and the Lands Department (LandsD) will exercise their respective authorities to undertake clearance actions. District Offices (DOs) will co-ordinate inter-departmental joint operations on a need basis where cases are more complicated or require multiple departments to address.

For the three-year period between 2021 and 2023, 18 DOs have co-ordinated nearly 1 770 inter-departmental joint operations to clear accumulated articles in public places, including but not limited to street-sleeping spots. We do not have a breakdown for joint operations targeting specifically street-sleeping spots.

During the inter-departmental joint operations, the FEHD will take enforcement actions targeting the environmental hygiene problems caused by accumulation of articles in public places according to the established mechanism, and will provide cleansing services such as street sweeping and washing as necessary. Over the past three years, the FEHD issued a total of 30 summonses and 36 fixed penalty notices during the joint operations. No summonses or fixed penalty notices were issued to street sleepers during these operations.

The Lands Department (LandsD) also actively participates in the inter-departmental joint operations, invoking the Land (Miscellaneous Provisions) Ordinance (Cap. 28) to enforce against unlawful occupation of government land by structures or fixed objects. In respect of miscellaneous articles placed in public places, the LandsD is mainly responsible for handling tents and structures left behind. During the joint operations, the LandsD will post statutory notices in accordance with the said ordinance requiring the occupier to cease occupation before a specified deadline. If the situation does not improve upon expiry of the deadline, the LandsD will take further actions, including taking possession of and clearing the property or structures remaining on the land. In the past three years, the LandsD encountered 49 substantiated cases of illegal occupation of government land when participating in the inter-departmental joint operations. All of them have been handled or cleared.

(2) The Social Welfare Department (SWD) provides subvention to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for operating Integrated Services Teams for Street Sleepers (ISTs) to conduct outreach visits for proactively reaching out to street sleepers, thereby understanding their reasons for street sleeping and rendering integrated services according to their actual needs and willingness to receive services. These services, including counselling, service referral, short-term accommodation and application for financial assistance, etc., are provided to address the urgent welfare needs of street sleepers, thereby helping them live off the streets and reintegrate into the community.

Through the ISTs, the SWD also provides emergency cash relief to street

sleepers in need, for tidying over their financial difficulties and interim expenses arising from emergency situations, such as rental and living expenses, rental deposits, other moving expenses and short-term living expenses, etc.

In addition, the SWD provides subvention to NGOs to operate short-term hostels, with a view to providing transitional accommodation for street sleepers to tide them over to more stable living arrangements. Hostel social workers will maintain close communication with caseworkers to rigorously review the actual situation of street sleepers during their stay at these short-term hostels, and help them make more stable accommodation arrangements. Examples of such arrangements include assisting them in renting private tenements, referring them to apply for residential care services for the elderly and other accommodation assistance programmes.

(3) As previously mentioned, street sleeping is a complicated social issue and the issue cannot be tackled solely from the environmental hygiene perspective. Relevant departments have been fostering close collaboration to provide welfare support to street sleepers and help them live off the streets. Through enforcement actions undertaken on their own or jointly with others, departments have also been addressing environmental hygiene conditions associated with street sleeping so as to mitigate environmental nuisance caused to nearby residents.

The Home Affairs Department (HAD) and DOs have been closely monitoring street sleeping situations at the districts. Apart from regularly referring cases to relevant departments for follow-up, DOs also coordinate joint operations as necessary to improve environmental hygiene at the street sleeping spots. Prior to the conduct of a joint operation, DO concerned will liaise with the SWD on the clearance plan and the SWD will then approach street sleepers to provide suitable assistance beforehand. Social workers of agencies subvented by the SWD also visit the street sleepers at different time to understand their needs and offer assistance.

Under the strengthened structure of district governance, the Task Force on District Governance (TFDG) chaired by the Deputy Chief Secretary for Administration oversees bureaux and departments in the provision of district work and implementation of related policies and measures, and where necessary coordinates the handling of inter-departmental and/or cross-district issues. The Working Group of Environmental Hygiene and Cityscape under the TFDG has also been following up on environmental hygiene issues, and provides steer for addressing "longstanding, big and difficult" environmental hygiene problems as necessary.

All in all, the HAD and DOs together with relevant departments including the FEHD and the LandsD will continue to implement various measures for improving environmental hygiene and conduct inter-departmental joint operations in a timely manner with a view to enhancing the local environment. Meanwhile, the SWD and relevant departments will closely monitor the welfare needs of street sleepers and provide appropriate support so as to facilitate their reintegration into the community.

Effective Exchange Rate Index

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Wednesday, March 20, 2024 is 105.1 (up 0.1 against yesterday's index).