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Panel on Manpower

**Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 21 September 2021**

Occupational safety performance in Hong Kong

Purpose

This paper gives an account of the past discussions by the Panel on Manpower ("the Panel") on Hong Kong's occupational safety performance since the Fifth Legislative Council ("LegCo").

Background

2. According to the Administration, the number of occupational injuries (including industrial and non-industrial accidents)¹ in 2020 was 27 127 and it was 32 872 in 2019. The injury rate per 1 000 employees was 9.3 in 2020 and it was 10.8 in 2019. The number of industrial accidents² for all sectors in 2020 was 7 202, and it was 9 254 in 2019. The accidents mainly involved "slip, trip or fall on the same level" and "incorrect manual lifting or carrying".

Deliberations of the Panel

Industrial accidents in the food and beverage services sector

3. Some members expressed concern about the effectiveness of the measures

¹ Occupational injuries (including industrial and non-industrial accidents) refer to injury cases in workplaces reported under the Employees' Compensation Ordinance (Cap. 282), resulting in death or incapacity for work of over three days.

² Industrial accidents refer to injuries and deaths arising from industrial activities in industrial undertakings as defined under the Factories and Industrial Undertakings Ordinance (Cap. 59).

as well as the publicity and educational efforts put in place by the Administration in addressing industrial accidents in the food and beverage services sector. There was a view that the Administration should continue its provision of subsidy for the purchase of personal protective equipment to further enhance the work safety standards of the catering industry. According to the Administration, with a view to consolidating its efforts in publicity and promotion, education, training, research and sponsorship schemes for the catering industry, the Occupational Safety and Health Council ("OSHC") established the Catering Safety and Health Steering Committee in 2015 to further promote and enhance the work safety standards of the industry. In addition, OSHC continued to implement the "OSH Star Enterprises Catering OSH Enhancement Pilot Scheme" to further improve the work safety of the catering industry practitioners, and to encourage the industry to improve tidiness and cleanliness standards at workplaces. Members were also advised that the Labour Department ("LD") would conduct special enforcement operations targeting at the occupational safety and health ("OSH") of the catering industry.

4. Given that the operation of catering establishments was closed on several occasions in 2020 because of the prevention and control measures for the COVID-19 epidemic, some members expressed concern about the difficulties in conducting occupational safety workplace inspections in the sector to ensure work safety therein. The Administration advised that LD had been exploring innovative means to strengthen its publicity efforts in raising the OSH awareness in the food and beverage services sector, including placing OSH advertisements at popular websites as well as making use of Catering Safety Animation videos which were widely disseminated through different channels to draw the attention of interested parties to the general safety precautionary measures necessary to protect employees engaging in similar work activities.

Site safety of public works projects

5. Members noted with grave concern about the fatalities and injuries of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge ("HZMB") project as well as other major infrastructure projects such as the Three-Runway System. Some members queried whether such accidents had occurred because employers/contractors sought to catch up with works progress at the expense of safe work practices and the Administration's monitoring measures failed to achieve its purpose. Members took a strong view that the Administration should conduct investigation into the causes of such accidents as well as draw up preventive measures and take specific enforcement actions against unsafe work practices. They also called on the Administration to improve the occupational safety of construction workers and prevent recurrence of similar accidents.

6. According to the Administration, LD had been closely monitoring the occupational safety of HZMB local projects. It had completed the investigation work of the fatal accident occurred on 29 March 2017 and, after consulting the

Department of Justice, initiated prosecutions against the duty holders who were suspected to have contravened the OSH legislation. In addition, LD had in conjunction with the Marine Department organized talks and seminars on marine industrial safety for the resident site staff and frontline workers of HZMB projects. Members were also advised that given the commencement of various major infrastructure projects in recent years, LD established a number of dedicated offices which were tasked with inspecting these projects and conducting related law enforcement work. A new dedicated office was set up in 2019 to monitor and safeguard OSH of the workers under the Three-Runway System.

Safety of working at height

7. Given that most of the construction fatal accidents were related to fall of persons from height, members were concerned about the preventive measures adopted by the Administration to reduce risks associated with working at height, in particular the risk involved in the use of truss-out scaffolds and suspended working platforms.

8. According to the Administration, the Construction Industry Council ("CIC") had issued the revised Guidelines on Planking Arrangement for Providing Working Platforms on Bamboo Scaffolds ("the Guidelines") in September 2017 and revised the Code of Practice for Bamboo Scaffolding Safety ("CoP"). LD would make reference to the Guidelines and CoP when enforcing safety legislation relating to the use of bamboo scaffolds. In addition, LD had in collaboration with OSHC launched the Safety Helmets with Y-type Chin Straps Sponsorship Scheme in 2017 to encourage the use of helmets that conformed to safety standards.

9. Members expressed concern how the Administration would strengthen the work safety of workers undertaking maintenance works on external walls of new buildings and existing buildings which were not conducive to the adoption of common work methods for maintenance work at external walls of these buildings. They considered that specific measures should be taken to reduce risk associated with such works.

10. The Administration advised that the Committee on Construction Site Safety under CIC had formed a Task Force, comprising members from relevant government departments (including LD and the Buildings Department ("BD")) and industry stakeholders including representatives of relevant trade associations and workers' unions, to follow up the design safety for works on external walls of buildings. LD had also been working closely with BD in revising its Practice Notes to require developers when constructing new buildings to provide air-conditioner platforms with suitable guard-rails to facilitate air-conditioner maintenance, and devices to facilitate cleaning and repair at buildings with curtain walls. According to the Administration, the Building (Construction) Regulation, which came into operation on 1 February 2021, required, among

others, adequate means of access for maintenance at the exterior of buildings in order to provide better protection of workers' safety. As regards existing buildings, LD had recently started to step up engagement with property management companies and further enhanced the promotion work to owners' corporations to raise their awareness on the common hazards associated with repair and maintenance works, including work-at-height safety. In addition, the Special Duties Office formed in April 2019 was working full steam ahead with relevant professionals to study the external wall designs of some existing residential buildings, which might not be conducive to the adoption of common work methods for maintenance work at external walls of these buildings, and identify possible problems so encountered. Given the considerable number of buildings involved in some 456 housing estates, it would take three years to complete the exercise.

11. Members also expressed concern about the specific measures drawn up by the Administration to enhance work safety in respect of minor maintenance works on external walls engaged by property management companies. The Administration advised that LD had been encouraging the contractors employed by property management companies and tenants to use suitable working platforms for above ground work and raise the awareness of workers engaging in renovation and repair works to use safe working platforms. To this end, LD in collaboration with the Hong Kong Association of Property Management Companies and OSHC launched a scheme in January 2018 to provide free of charge light-duty working platforms to property management companies for lending to contractors/workers working in properties under their management. Starting from January 2020, LD collaborated with the property management sector to strengthen the referral mechanism under which LD would be notified of the relatively high risk renovation and repair works (e.g. truss-out scaffolding works at external wall) to be carried out in individual units of estates, thus enabling LD to conduct targeted inspections.

Worksite inspections

12. Noting that the number of fatal accidents in the construction industry had been increasing, members were concerned about LD's monitoring efforts and difficulties in manpower deployment for worksite inspections. The Administration advised that LD had and would continue to bid for additional manpower resources in the resources allocation exercises for stepping up inspection and enforcement targeting at the construction industry. Apart from conducting in-depth surprise inspections targeting work sites with high risk processes or poor safety performance, LD would continue to adopt a risk-based approach in devising measures to enhance OSH performance of the construction industry. Specifically, LD would participate in site safety management committee meetings of public works projects so as to appreciate more accurately the projects' OSH conditions and risks, with a view to devising more focused inspection strategies accordingly. A new online OSH complaint platform was

launched in March 2019 to facilitate construction workers to report unsafe working condition so that LD could conduct prompt follow-up actions and targeted inspections.

13. Concern was raised over the work safety and the low OSH awareness of those ethnic minorities working in the construction industry. Members were advised that LD had stepped up its efforts to enhance the OSH awareness of workers of diverse races, including producing OSH promotional leaflets in language of diverse races and disseminated work safety messages through newspapers and periodicals to these workers.

14. Some members were concerned that the number of constructional fatalities involving minor works projects had remained high and considered that there was a need to enhance the safety awareness of the Registered Minor Works Contractors and strengthen the provision of necessary occupational safety training to them. The Administration advised that it attached great importance to work safety of undertaking repair, maintenance, alteration and addition ("RMAA") works. To this end, the Panel was briefed at its meeting on 16 March 2021 on the Administration's legislative amendment proposal to refine the statutory notification mechanism for construction works with short durations or engaging less workers so as to enable LD to effectively identify higher-risk workplaces for early inspections.

15. Some members, however, pointed out that currently, a contractor who undertook small-scale construction works lasting less than six weeks or engaging not more than 10 workers at any one time were not required under the OSH legislation to furnish LD with the information of the construction works within seven days after commencement of the works. Concern was raised about whether safety inspections would be arranged to the work sites of these small-scale construction projects. The Administration advised that while the contractors undertaking such small-scale construction works were not required to notify LD under the current statutory notification mechanism for construction works, staff of Occupational Safety – Operations would nonetheless conduct inspections to these work sites. In addition, LD had established referral mechanisms with the Housing Department and The Hong Kong Association of Property Management Companies Limited respectively for follow-up on high-risk RMAA works.

Raising penalties of the occupational safety and health legislation

16. Members noted with concern that the construction industry topped all industries in terms of the number of industrial fatalities and accident rate. Most members called for the imposition of heavier penalty on convicted cases related to fatal industrial accidents in the construction industry so as to increase the deterrent effect against non-compliance with OSH legislation. The Panel passed a motion at the special meeting on 12 April 2017 urging the Administration to,

among others, increase the penalties by forbidding the companies concerned to tender in public works contracts for one year after the occurrence of a fatal accident, and to introduce legislative amendments to subject those consultants and contractors who were found to be negligent in their safety performance to criminal liability so as to further enhance the deterrence effect.

17. At the Panel meeting on 19 March 2019, members were briefed on the Administration's preliminary proposed legislative amendments to, among others, increase the maximum fine of the general duty ("GD") provisions in the OSH legislation to \$6 million or 10% of the turnover of the convicted company, whichever was the greater. Noting that no employer who was convicted of violating the OSH legislation had so far been sentenced with immediate imprisonment term, most members urged the Administration to expedite the introduction of the relevant legislative proposals to increase the deterrent effect. Some other members, however, took a strong view that the proposed increase of the maximum fine levels of contravening the GD provisions in the OSH legislation were too drastic. They called on the Administration to fully consult the relevant stakeholders on the legislative proposal.

18. Members were further briefed on the Administration's revised amendment proposal in January 2021. In view of the grave concern expressed by employers about pitching the maximum fine at 10% of the turnover without a cap, it was proposed to modify the original turnover-pegged maximum fine to a maximum fine capped at \$50 million. Some members considered that the revised proposal would achieve sufficient deterrent effect and was conducive to the improvement of OSH performance. However, some other members held a strong view that the proposed maximum fine of \$50 million was too high. In their view, the revised amendment proposal, if enacted, would adversely affect the operation of the small and medium-sized enterprises and the business environment.

19. The Administration advised that comparing to the penalties of the OSH legislation in other advanced countries/regions, the penalties of the OSH legislation in Hong Kong, which had not been revised for over 20 years, were on the low side. To strengthen the deterrent effect of the penalties, LD had been making efforts to assist the courts to determine appropriate sentences, in particular to impose higher penalties on duty holders for serious cases. The proposal of turnover-pegged maximum fine had made reference to the overseas legislation, and the Administration considered the proposed maximum fines for extremely serious offences appropriate. To ensure that the fines handed down for the indictable offences were commensurate with convicted entities of different scales in order to achieve sufficient deterrent effect, new provisions would be added to require the court to take the convicted entity's turnover into account in determining the fine level. The Administration stressed that the maximum fines would only be applicable to extremely serious cases of extremely high culpability or serious negligence which led to serious consequences.

20. In response to members' enquiry about the legislative timetable, the Administration advised that LD was launching a new round of consultation to consult relevant stakeholders, including major chambers of commerce, various trade associations and relevant labour unions, in particular those in the construction industry. Subject to stakeholders' views and progress of law drafting, the Administration would submit an Amendment Bill into LegCo as soon as possible. It was the Administration's plan to complete the amendment exercise within the current term of Government for immediate commencement.

Motion passed by the Panel

21. At its meeting on 16 June 2020, the Panel passed a motion urging the Administration to erect a monument for the deceased workers at a prominent location in the city centre to commemorate the deceased workers who contributed to the urban development of Hong Kong over the years, and at the same time, enhance the occupational safety education.

Relevant papers

22. A list of the relevant papers on the LegCo website is in the **Appendix**.

**Relevant papers on the
occupational safety performance in Hong Kong**

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Manpower	18.12.2012 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Manpower	25.1.2013 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Manpower	16.4.2013 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Manpower	19.11.2013 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Manpower	17.12.2013 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Legislative Council	18.12.2013	Official Record of Proceedings (Question 13)
Legislative Council	8.1.2014	Official Record of Proceedings (Question 21 and 22)
Panel on Manpower	15.4.2014 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes LC Paper No. CB(2)1836/13-14(01)
Legislative Council	16.4.2014	Official Record of Proceedings (Question 6)
Legislative Council	30.4.2014	Official Record of Proceedings (Question 2)

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Legislative Council	11.6.2014	Official Record of Proceedings (Question 1)
Panel on Manpower	17.6.2014 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Manpower	18.11.2014 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Manpower	17.3.2015 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Manpower	16.6.2015 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Manpower	14.7.2015 (Item II)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Manpower	17.11.2015 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
Legislative Council	3.2.2016	Official Record of Proceedings (Question 15)
Panel on Manpower	15.3.2016 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Manpower	21.6.2016 (Item III)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Manpower	15.11.2016 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes LC Paper No. CB(2)866/16-17(01)
Legislative Council	16.11.2016	Official Record of Proceedings (Question 19)
Legislative Council	30.11.2016	Official Record of Proceedings (Question 1)

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Legislative Council	11.1.2017	Official Record of Proceedings (Question 4)
Panel on Manpower	23.1.2017 (Item III)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Manpower (Special meeting)	12.4.2017 (Item I)	Agenda LC Paper No. CB(2)1357/16-17(05)
Panel on Manpower	16.5.2017 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Manpower	20.6.2017 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Manpower	18.7.2017 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Manpower	19.12.2017 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Manpower	17.7.2018 (Item II & III)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Manpower	15.1.2019 (Item III)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Manpower	19.3.2019 (Item III)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Manpower	8.11.2019 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Manpower	17.12.2019 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Manpower	16.6.2020 (Item II)	Agenda Minutes LC Paper No. CB(2)1381/19-20(02)

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Manpower	17.11.2020 (Item VI)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Manpower	7.1.2021 (Item VII)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Manpower	16.3.2021 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Manpower	18.5.2021 (Item VI)	Agenda Minutes

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