

Further assistance from Arts and Culture Sector Subsidy Scheme under Anti-epidemic Fund

A spokesperson for the Home Affairs Bureau said today (June 19) that with the reopening of performance venues of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) and other places for live audiences, the Government will, with the endorsement of the Anti-epidemic Fund Steering Committee, disburse an additional subsidy of \$80,000 from the \$150 million Arts and Culture Sector Subsidy Scheme under the Anti-epidemic Fund to 44 Hong Kong Arts Development Council-funded arts groups, 14 venue partners under the LCSD and 34 Arts Capacity Development Funding Scheme grantees, with a view to strengthening the capacity of small and medium-sized arts groups to stage live performances and supporting their operation after the reopening of the performance venues.

The major facilities of the 16 performance venues of the LCSD such as concert halls, theatres, auditoriums, cultural activities halls and arenas have been reopened for performances or activities with live audiences from today with special seating arrangements. Details can be found in the press release issued by the LCSD on June 17

(www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202006/17/P2020061700360.htm).

After the completion of the above disbursement, the Government will have disbursed approximately \$110 million from the Arts and Culture Sector Subsidy Scheme under the Anti-epidemic Fund.

CHP investigates three additional confirmed cases of COVID-19

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health has announced that as of 4pm today (June 19), the CHP was investigating three additional confirmed cases of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), taking the number of cases to 1 128 in Hong Kong so far (comprising 1 127 confirmed cases and one probable case).

The newly reported cases announced today involve two males and one female aged between 9 and 41. They had travel history during the incubation period. The CHP's epidemiological investigations and relevant contact tracing on the confirmed cases are ongoing. For case details and contact tracing information, please see the Annex.

The CHP again urged members of the public to maintain an appropriate social distance with other people as far as possible in their daily lives to minimise the risk of infection. In particular, they should go out less and avoid social activities such as meal gatherings or other gatherings to reduce the chance of contacting infected persons who may not present any symptoms, and minimise the risk of outbreak clusters emerging in the community.

A spokesman for the CHP said, "Given that the situation of COVID-19 infection remains severe and that there is a continuous increase in the number of cases reported around the world, members of the public are strongly urged to avoid all non-essential travel outside Hong Kong.

"The CHP also strongly urges the public to maintain at all times strict personal and environmental hygiene, which is key to personal protection against infection and prevention of the spread of the disease in the community. On a personal level, members of the public should wear a surgical mask when having respiratory symptoms, taking public transport or staying in crowded places. They should also perform hand hygiene frequently, especially before touching the mouth, nose or eyes.

"As for household environmental hygiene, members of the public are advised to maintain drainage pipes properly, regularly pour water into drain outlets (U-traps) and cover all floor drain outlets when they are not in use. After using the toilet, they should put the toilet lid down before flushing to avoid spreading germs."

Moreover, the Government has launched the website "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk) for announcing the latest updates on various news on COVID-19 infection and health advice to help the public understand the latest updates. Members of the public may also gain access to information via the COVID-19 WhatsApp Helpline launched by the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer. Simply by saving 9617 1823 in their phone contacts or clicking the link wa.me/85296171823?text=hi, they will be able to obtain information on COVID-19 as well as the "StayHomeSafe" mobile app and wristband via WhatsApp.

To prevent pneumonia and respiratory tract infection, members of the public should always maintain good personal and environmental hygiene. They are advised to:

- Wear a surgical mask when taking public transport or staying in crowded places. It is important to wear a mask properly, including performing hand hygiene before wearing and after removing a mask;
- Perform hand hygiene frequently, especially before touching the mouth, nose or eyes, after touching public installations such as handrails or doorknobs, or when hands are contaminated by respiratory secretions after coughing or sneezing;
- Maintain drainage pipes properly and regularly (about once a week) pour about half a litre of water into each drain outlet (U-trap) to ensure environmental hygiene;
- Cover all floor drain outlets when they are not in use;
- After using the toilet, put the toilet lid down before flushing to avoid

spreading germs;

- Wash hands with liquid soap and water, and rub for at least 20 seconds. Then rinse with water and dry with a disposable paper towel. If hand washing facilities are not available, or when hands are not visibly soiled, performing hand hygiene with 70 to 80 per cent alcohol-based handrub is an effective alternative;
 - Cover your mouth and nose with tissue paper when sneezing or coughing. Dispose of soiled tissues into a lidded rubbish bin, then wash hands thoroughly; and
 - When having respiratory symptoms, wear a surgical mask, refrain from work or attending class at school, avoid going to crowded places and seek medical advice promptly.
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Thirty-five persons arrested during anti-illegal worker operations

The Immigration Department (ImmD) mounted territory-wide anti-illegal worker operations codenamed "Twilight" and "Greenlane" from June 15 to yesterday (June 18). A total of 25 suspected illegal workers and 10 suspected employers were arrested.

During the operations, ImmD Task Force officers raided 60 target locations including a commercial building, factories, flower shops, a garbage collection depot, massage parlours, premises under renovation, residential buildings, restaurants, a vegetable stall and warehouses. The suspected illegal workers comprised nine men and 16 women, aged 27 to 64. Among them, two women were holders of recognisance forms, which prohibit them from taking any employment. In addition, two men and 12 women were suspected of using and being in possession of forged Hong Kong identity cards or a Hong Kong identity card related to another person. Meanwhile, four men and six women, aged 29 to 59, were suspected of employing the suspected illegal workers.

"Any person who contravenes a condition of stay in force in respect of him shall be guilty of an offence. Also, visitors are not allowed to take employment in Hong Kong, whether paid or unpaid, without the permission of the Director of Immigration. Offenders are liable to prosecution and upon conviction face a maximum fine of \$50,000 and up to two years' imprisonment. Aiders and abettors are also liable to prosecution and penalties," an ImmD spokesman said.

The spokesman warned that, as stipulated in section 38AA of the Immigration Ordinance, illegal immigrants or people who are the subject of a removal order or a deportation order are prohibited from taking any employment, whether paid or unpaid, or establishing or joining in any business. Offenders are liable upon conviction to a maximum fine of \$50,000

and up to three years' imprisonment. The Court of Appeal has issued a guideline ruling that a sentence of 15 months' imprisonment should be applied in such cases. It is an offence to use or possess a forged Hong Kong identity card or a Hong Kong identity card related to another person. Offenders are liable to prosecution and a maximum penalty of a \$100,000 fine and up to 10 years' imprisonment.

The spokesman reiterated that it is a serious offence to employ people who are not lawfully employable. The maximum penalty is imprisonment for three years and a fine of \$350,000. The High Court has laid down sentencing guidelines that the employer of an illegal worker should be given an immediate custodial sentence. According to the court sentencing, employers must take all practicable steps to determine whether a person is lawfully employable prior to employment. Apart from inspecting a prospective employee's identity card, the employer has the explicit duty to make enquiries regarding the person and ensure that the answers would not cast any reasonable doubt concerning the lawful employability of the person. The court will not accept failure to do so as a defence in proceedings. It is also an offence if an employer fails to inspect the job seeker's valid travel document if the job seeker does not have a Hong Kong permanent identity card. The maximum penalty for failing to inspect such a document is imprisonment for one year and a fine of \$150,000.

Under the existing mechanism, the ImmD will, as a standard procedure, conduct an initial screening of vulnerable persons, including illegal workers, illegal immigrants, sex workers and foreign domestic helpers, who are arrested during any operation with a view to ascertaining whether they are trafficking in persons (TIP) victims. When any TIP indicator is revealed in the initial screening, the officers will conduct a full debriefing and identification by using a standardised checklist to ascertain the presence of TIP elements, such as threats and coercion in the recruitment phase and the nature of exploitation. Identified TIP victims will be provided with various forms of support and assistance, including urgent intervention, medical services, counselling, shelter, temporary accommodation and other supporting services. The ImmD calls on TIP victims to report crimes to the relevant departments.

Statistics of Payment Cards Issued in Hong Kong for First Quarter 2020

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority:

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) published today (June 19) statistics of payment cards issued in Hong Kong for the first quarter of 2020.

The payment card statistics (see Annex) include quarterly data on credit and debit cards issued in Hong Kong under the credit and/or debit card schemes of the eight payment card scheme operators (Note 1). The HKMA began to publish the payment card statistics on a quarterly basis in June 2010 to enhance transparency of the payment card industry in Hong Kong, in line with international practice.

According to the quarterly statistics, the total number of credit cards in circulation (Note 2) was 19.61 million by the end of Q1/2020. The figure represents a 0.5 per cent decrease from the previous quarter and a 0.6 per cent increase from the previous year. The number and value of credit card transactions (including retail sales and cash advances) (Note 3) are susceptible to seasonal factors and the general economic environment, making the trends more prone to fluctuation. The total number of credit card transactions was 202.99 million for Q1/2020, representing a 5.0 per cent decrease from the previous quarter and a 5.9 per cent increase from the same period in 2019. The total value of credit card transactions was HK\$170.4 billion for Q1/2020, representing a 11.0 per cent decrease from the previous quarter and a 11.8 per cent decrease from the same period in 2019. Of the total transaction value, HK\$131.5 billion (77.2 per cent) was related to retail spending in Hong Kong, HK\$27.1 billion (15.9 per cent) in retail spending overseas and HK\$11.8 billion (6.9 per cent) in cash advances.

The total number of debit cards in circulation is not available due to overlapping of debit card brands in a single card. Like the number and value of credit card transactions, the number and value of debit card transactions in relation to retail sales and bills payments (Note 4) are also affected by seasonal factors. On a quarterly basis, the total number of debit card transactions in relation to retail sales and bills payments decreased 18.3 per cent to 37.81 million while the total value increased by 0.9 per cent to HK\$85.4 billion in Q1/2020. When compared to the same period in 2019, the total number decreased by 2.6 per cent and the total value dropped by 5.3 per cent in Q1/2020.

Notes:

Note 1: The payment card statistics are compiled from data on credit and debit cards issued in Hong Kong by both authorised institutions (AIs) and non-authorised institutions (non-AIs) under the credit and/or debit card schemes of the eight payment card scheme operators (the card operators). The card operators, in alphabetical order, are American Express International, Inc., Discover Financial Services (Hong Kong) Limited, EPS Company (Hong Kong) Limited (EPSCO), JCB International (Asia) Ltd, Joint Electronic Teller Services Ltd. (JETCO), MasterCard Asia/Pacific Pte. Ltd., UnionPay International Co. Ltd and Visa Worldwide Pte. Limited.

Note 2: A credit card issued in Hong Kong only carries one credit card brand. The total number of credit cards in circulation refers to the total number of credit cards (i.e. cards with a credit function) issued in Hong Kong under the credit card schemes of card operators (but excluding EPSCO and

JETCO, which do not operate a credit card scheme). Some of these credit cards carry debit card functions, i.e. the credit card can be used for making purchases/payments or cash withdrawal at ATMs through directly debiting cardholders' bank accounts.

Note 3: The total number/value of credit card transactions refer to the total number/value of transactions made via credit card accounts of credit cards issued in Hong Kong under the credit card schemes of card operators (excluding EPSCO and JETCO). Starting from March 2015, a Hong Kong/overseas spending breakdown of credit card retail sales transactions is provided.

Note 4: The total number/value of debit card transactions in relation to retail sales/bill payments refers to the total number/value of those transactions made via debiting cardholders' bank accounts. Some of the eight card operators do not operate a debit card scheme. Care should be exercised in combining the credit card retail sales figures and the debit card retail sales/bills payment figures because of the possibility of double counting.

Statistics of Stored Value Facilities (SVF) Schemes issued by SVF licensees

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority:

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) published today (June 19) statistics on Stored Value Facilities (SVF) schemes issued by SVF licensees for the first quarter of 2020.

The SVF scheme statistics (see Annex) include quarterly data on SVF schemes issued by the eighteen SVF licensees (Note 1).

According to the quarterly statistics, the total number of SVF accounts in use (Note 2) was 63.61 million by the end of Q1/2020, representing a 0.8 per cent increase from the previous quarter. The total number of SVF transactions (Note 3) was around 1.2 billion for Q1/2020, or 20.0 per cent lower than the previous quarter. The total value of SVF transactions was HK\$49.0 billion for Q1/2020, representing a 7.5 per cent decrease from the previous quarter. Of the total transaction value, HK\$21.5 billion was related to point-of-sale spending payment, HK\$18.3 billion in online spending payment and HK\$9.2 billion in P2P funds transfer. The total float and SVF deposit (Note 4) was HK\$11.7 billion for Q1/2020, 1.2 per cent higher than the previous quarter.

As compared with the end of Q1/2019, the total number of SVF accounts in use at the end of Q1/2020 was up by 7.2 per cent, and the total float and SVF deposit was up by 13.0 per cent. The total number and value of SVF transactions during Q1/2020 were down by 22.9 per cent and up by 3.2 per cent

respectively year-on-year.

Notes:

Note 1: The SVF scheme statistics are compiled from data on SVF schemes issued by the eighteen SVF licensees. The SVF licensees, in alphabetical order, are 33 Financial Services Limited, Alipay Financial Services (HK) Limited, Autotoll Limited, Bank of Communications (Hong Kong) Limited, Dah Sing Bank, Limited, ePaylinks Technology Co., Limited, Geoswift Cards Services Limited, HKT Payment Limited, Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation Limited (The), K & R International Limited, Octopus Cards Limited, Optal Asia Limited, PayPal Hong Kong Limited, TNG (Asia) Limited, Transforex (Hong Kong) Investment Consulting Co., Limited, UniCard Solution Limited, WeChat Pay Hong Kong Limited, and Yintran Group Holdings Limited.

Note 2: "Total number of SVF accounts in use" refers to the total number of SVF accounts that can be used as at the end of the reporting period.

Note 3: SVF transactions include point-of-sale spending payment, online spending payment and P2P funds transfer.

Note 4: The following terms follow their definitions in the Payment Systems and Stored Value Facilities Ordinance:

"Float" means the stored value remaining on the facility but does not include any SVF deposit; and

"SVF deposit" means a deposit placed with the licensee, or another person on behalf of the licensee, for enabling the facility to be used.