

Remarks by FS at media session (with photo/video)

Following are the remarks by the Financial Secretary, Mr Paul Chan, at a media session after attending an event today (September 6):

Reporter: The first one is about the Kai Tak sports hub which will open next year. Other than Coldplay, what other big names or artists or mega events is the Government working on attracting? And the second one is about SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises). As you know, a fitness chain, Physical, announced today that it will shut down their branches. How do you evaluate the SME situation and is there any outcome from your meeting with the SME task force, maybe any emergency measures to support the SMEs?

Financial Secretary: The Kai Tak Sports Park, opening in the first half of next year, will be a very significant sports infrastructure in recent decades. There have been a number of events being lined up for the launch of this particular facility and to make good use of it. The details will be announced in due course. But I should stress that it is not just a sports complex, but also a wonderful venue for entertainment and cultural events. It can seat up to 50 000 spectators. There will also be ancillary training and other facilities. The detailed programmes for the Park will be announced in due course.

As to the current situation of the SMEs in Hong Kong, we understand that given the higher for longer interest rate environment, economic growth not as strong as some expected, and changing spending patterns of local residents and incoming tourists, SMEs in some sectors are facing challenges. We are helping them on three fronts.

One is providing liquidity support. We met with the banks and the SME sector. My colleagues in the Hong Kong Monetary Authority in particular asked the banks to be accommodative and supportive, even in the case where the value of collaterals that their clients pledged to secure banking facilities came down in light of the asset market situation. If those companies can still service their loan, there is no reason to call for early repayment or early partial repayment, or reduction in facilities merely because of the fall in the collateral's value. This message had been communicated to banks loud and clear. We gather from the banks that they are supportive of this position, and they would ensure that this information and policy would be brought to their frontline colleagues in handling different cases.

Apart from providing liquidity support, we are also helping SMEs to expand their businesses, depending on their sectors. For example, there is funding support under the BUD Fund (Dedicated Fund on Branding, Upgrading and Domestic Sales) to support SMEs to explore new markets, including the Mainland, as well as the Middle East, ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and other economies that have signed free trade agreements with Hong Kong. We also have different schemes and marketing funds to facilitate them

to go out and do marketing. There has also been relaxation to other funding schemes, for example, supporting SMEs to participate not just in overseas exhibitions, but also local exhibitions. I should mention that we support SMEs to move with the times and take part in e-commerce, and upgrade their business models and use e-commerce platforms to do business, particularly in opening the Mainland market. There are funding support schemes in these areas.

Third, we are helping SMEs to expedite their digital transformation. That includes technology vouchers. Apart from that, Cyberport has been administering a scheme to assist the SMEs in the retail and catering sectors to adopt off-the-shelf software solutions to assist their digital transformation. In a nutshell, we offer assistance on multiple fronts. Thank you.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the remarks.)



Illegal worker jailed

A Vietnamese illegal worker, holding a recognisance form, was jailed by the Shatin Magistrates' Courts yesterday (September 5).

During a joint operation conducted by the Immigration Department (ImmD) and the Hong Kong Police Force codenamed "Powerplayer" on May 7, investigators raided a stall in a wet market of Wong Tai Sin District. A Vietnamese woman, aged 28, was arrested while working as an odd-job worker. Upon identity checking, she produced a recognisance form issued by the ImmD for inspection, which prohibits her from taking employment. Further investigation revealed that she was a non-refoulement claimant.

The illegal worker was charged at the Shatin Magistrates' Courts yesterday with taking employment while being a person who, having been given permission to land in Hong Kong, had remained in Hong Kong in breach of her limit of stay imposed in relation to the permission. After trial, she was sentenced to 22 months and two weeks' imprisonment.

The ImmD spokesman warned that, as stipulated in section 38AA of the Immigration Ordinance, an illegal immigrant, a person who is the subject of a removal order or a deportation order, an overstayer or a person who was refused permission to land is 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 spokesman reiterated that it is a serious offence to employ people who are not lawfully employable. Under the Immigration Ordinance, the maximum penalty for an employer employing a person who is not lawfully employable, i.e. an illegal immigrant, a person who is the subject of a removal order or a deportation order, an overstayer or a person who was refused permission to land, has been significantly increased from a fine of \$350,000 and three years' imprisonment to a fine of \$500,000 and 10 years' imprisonment to reflect the gravity of such offences. The director, manager, secretary, partner, etc, of the company concerned may also bear criminal liability. 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. Offenders are liable upon conviction to a maximum fine of \$150,000 and to imprisonment for one year. In that connection, the spokesman would like to remind all employers not to defy the law and employ illegal workers. The ImmD will continue to take resolute enforcement action to combat such offences.

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 immediately.

Inspection of aquatic products imported from Japan

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

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

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

From noon on September 5 to noon today (September 6), the CFS conducted tests on the radiological levels of 226 food samples imported from Japan, which were of the "aquatic and related products, seaweeds and sea salt" category. No sample was found to have exceeded the safety limit. Details can be found on the CFS's thematic website titled "Control Measures on Foods Imported from Japan" (www.cfs.gov.hk/english/programme/programme_rafs/programme_rafs_fc_01_30_Nuclear_Event_and_Food_Safety.html).

In parallel, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) has also tested 52 samples of local catch for radiological levels. All the samples passed the tests. Details can be found on the AFCD's website (www.afcd.gov.hk/english/fisheries/Radiological_testing/Radiological_Test.html).

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

From August 24, 2023, to noon today, the CFS and the AFCD have conducted tests on the radiological levels of 82 170 samples of food imported from Japan (including 52 578 samples of aquatic and related products, seaweeds and sea salt) and 18 854 samples of local catch respectively. All the samples passed the tests.

12 persons arrested during anti-illegal worker operations (with photo)

The Immigration Department (ImmD) mounted territory-wide anti-illegal worker operations codenamed "Greenlane" and "Twilight", and joint operations with the Hong Kong Police Force codenamed "Windsand" for four consecutive days from September 2 to yesterday (September 5). A total of 10 suspected illegal workers and two suspected employers were arrested.

During the anti-illegal worker operations, ImmD Task Force officers raided 24 target locations including premises under renovation, residential buildings, restaurants and a shopping mall. Ten suspected illegal workers and two suspected employers were arrested. The arrested suspected illegal workers comprised two men and eight women, aged 22 to 64. Among the arrested persons, one man and two women were holders of recognisance forms, which prohibit them from taking any employment. In addition, one man and one woman were suspected of using and being in possession of forged Hong Kong identity cards. Two men, aged 33 and 43, were suspected of employing the illegal workers and were also arrested.

An ImmD spokesman said, "Any person who contravenes a condition of stay in force in respect of him or her 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."

The spokesman warned, "As stipulated in section 38AA of the Immigration Ordinance, an illegal immigrant, a person who is the subject of a removal order or a deportation order, an overstayer or a person who was refused permission to land is 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. Under the prevailing laws, it is an offence to use or possess a forged Hong Kong identity card or a Hong Kong identity card related to another person, or to transfer an identity card to another person without lawful authority or reasonable excuse. Offenders are liable to prosecution and upon conviction face a maximum fine of \$100,000 and up to 10 years' imprisonment."

The spokesman reiterated that it is a serious offence to employ people who are not lawfully employable. Under the Immigration Ordinance, the maximum penalty for an employer employing a person who is not lawfully employable, i.e. an illegal immigrant, a person who is the subject of a removal order or a deportation order, an overstayer or a person who was refused permission to land, has been significantly increased from a fine of \$350,000 and three

years' imprisonment to a fine of \$500,000 and 10 years' imprisonment to reflect the gravity of such offences. The director, manager, secretary, partner, etc, of the company concerned may also bear criminal liability. 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. Offenders are liable upon conviction to a maximum fine of \$150,000 and to imprisonment for one year. In that connection, the spokesman would like to remind all employers not to defy the law by employing illegal workers. The ImmD will continue to take resolute enforcement action to combat such offences.

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 ImmD 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 or temporary accommodation and other supporting services. The ImmD calls on TIP victims to report crimes to the relevant departments immediately.



SITI to attend opening ceremony of 2024 China Cybersecurity Week in Guangzhou

The Secretary for Innovation, Technology and Industry, Professor Sun Dong, will depart for Nansha, Guangzhou, tomorrow (September 7) to attend the opening ceremony of 2024 China Cybersecurity Week and deliver an opening speech.

The 2024 China Cybersecurity Week, with the theme "Cybersecurity for the People, Cybersecurity relies on the People", is hosted by the Cyberspace Administration of China. Guangzhou is the main venue for this year's Cybersecurity Week and will host a series of activities, including the opening ceremony, the Cybersecurity Technology Summit cum Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Cybersecurity Conference, and the Cybersecurity Expo, to focus on the topic of jointly fostering a safer defense line for cybersecurity. Experts and representatives of relevant government departments, higher-education institutions and enterprises from the Mainland, the Government of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) and the Government of the Macao SAR will be invited to give keynote speeches.

The Commissioner for Digital Policy, Mr Tony Wong, will also attend the activities of Cybersecurity Week.

Professor Sun will return to Hong Kong in the afternoon on September 8. During his absence, the Under Secretary for Innovation, Technology and Industry, Ms Lillian Cheong, will be the Acting Secretary for Innovation, Technology and Industry.