

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

The Immigration Department (ImmD) mounted territory-wide anti-illegal worker operations codenamed "Contribute", "Lightshadow", "Twilight" and joint operations with the Hong Kong Police Force codenamed "Windsand" for four consecutive days from August 5 to yesterday (August 8). A total of nine suspected illegal workers and four suspected employers were arrested.

During the anti-illegal worker operations, ImmD Task Force officers raided 58 target locations including an industrial building, premises under renovation and restaurants. Nine suspected illegal workers and four suspected employers were arrested. The arrested suspected illegal workers comprised three men and six women, aged 25 to 64. Among them, two women were holders of recognisance forms, which prohibit them from taking any employment. In addition, two men and three women were suspected of using and being in possession of a forged Hong Kong identity card respectively. Two men and two women, aged 38 to 56, 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.



# Results of monthly survey on business situation of small and medium-sized enterprises for July 2024

The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) released today (August 9) the results of the Monthly Survey on Business Situation of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) for July 2024.

The current diffusion index (DI) on business receipts amongst SMEs increased from 41.4 in June 2024 in the contractionary zone to 41.8 in July 2024, whereas the one-month's ahead (i.e. August 2024) outlook DI on business receipts was 45.4. Analysed by sector, the current DIs on business receipts, despite below the 50-mark, rose in July 2024 as compared with previous month for some surveyed sectors, particularly for the business services (from 44.5 to 48.2) and import and export trades (from 42.9 to 45.1).

The current DI on new orders for the import and export trades increased from 44.1 in June 2024 to 44.8 in July 2024, whereas the outlook DI on new orders in one month's time (i.e. August 2024) was 46.5.

## Commentary

A Government spokesman said that overall business sentiment among SMEs showed some improvement in July, though performance of different sectors varied. Meanwhile, the overall expectations on the business situation in one month's time weakened. The overall employment situation softened.

The spokesman added that while uncertainties surrounding the global economy would affect business sentiment, the Central Government's various measures that benefit Hong Kong and continued growth of the local economy should provide support. The Government will monitor the situation closely.

## Further information

The Monthly Survey on Business Situation of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises aims to provide a quick reference, with minimum time lag, for assessing the short-term business situation faced by SMEs. SMEs covered in this survey refer to establishments with fewer than 50 persons engaged. Respondents were asked to exclude seasonal fluctuations in reporting their views. Based on the views collected from the survey, a set of diffusion indices (including current and outlook diffusion indices) is compiled. A reading above 50 indicates that the business condition is generally favourable, whereas that below 50 indicates otherwise. As for statistics on the business prospects of prominent establishments in Hong Kong, users may refer to the publication entitled "Report on Quarterly Business Tendency Survey" released by the C&SD.

The results of the survey should be interpreted with care. The survey

solicits feedback from a panel sample of about 600 SMEs each month and the survey findings are thus subject to sample size constraint. Views collected from the survey refer only to those of respondents on their own establishments rather than those on the respective sectors they are engaged in. Besides, in this type of opinion survey on expected business situation, the views collected in the survey are affected by the events in the community occurring around the time of enumeration, and it is difficult to establish precisely the extent to which respondents' perception of the business situation accords with the underlying trends. For this survey, main bulk of the data were collected around the last week of the reference month.

More detailed statistics are given in the "Report on Monthly Survey on the Business Situation of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises". Users can browse and download the publication at the website of the C&SD ([www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/EIndexbySubject.html?pcode=B1080015&scode=300](http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/EIndexbySubject.html?pcode=B1080015&scode=300)).

Users who have enquiries about the survey results may contact Industrial Production Statistics Section of the C&SD (Tel: 3903 7246; email: [sme-survey@censtatd.gov.hk](mailto:sme-survey@censtatd.gov.hk)).

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## **Government announces release of site of North Lantau Hospital Hong Kong Infection Control Centre**

The Government announced today (August 9) that the site of the North Lantau Hospital Hong Kong Infection Control Centre (HKICC) will be released to facilitate the Airport Authority Hong Kong to commence the expansion works of AsiaWorld-Expo (AWE).

The Government will transfer facilities at the site to other suitable locations for reconfiguration and reuse in an orderly manner in order to implement the principle of making good use of facilities constructed with the support of the Central Government. The detailed arrangements are as follows:

1. The medical equipment, ancillary equipment, furniture and consumables in the HKICC will be allocated to the public hospitals in various hospital clusters of the Hospital Authority (HA) for their use;
2. The electrical and mechanical (E&M) equipment in the HKICC will be reused by phases in hospitals and healthcare facilities locally; and
3. The modular units of isolation wards constructed by the Modular Integrated Construction method will serve as site offices, rest rooms for site staff, material storage rooms and more in works projects of the Government and

public organisations.

The medical equipment, ancillary equipment, furniture and consumables in the HKICC will be transferred shortly, while the E&M equipment and modular units of isolation wards will be relocated for reuse to facilitate the construction works of the AWE Phase 2 project scheduled for the first quarter of next year.

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government expressed gratitude to the Central Government for its support in the construction of the HKICC during the epidemic. Since its commissioning in February 2021, the HKICC has been giving full play to its functions, with a peak of over 650 patients receiving treatment in the HKICC simultaneously during the fifth wave of the epidemic. With the subsiding epidemic situation and gradual resumption of normalcy in Hong Kong starting from early 2023, the HA made arrangements for patients with other infectious diseases of high transmissibility to undergo isolation and receive corresponding respective treatment in the HKICC in order to make full use of its isolation facilities. The HKICC was later put into standby mode in November 2023. During the entire operation period, the HKICC received more than 20 700 patients.

Up till now, the Government has announced the use of a number of community isolation and treatment facilities, and implemented the arrangements. Details are provided in the Annex.

It is the Government's goal to maintain the city's capacity to respond to changes in an epidemic situation, while taking into account Hong Kong's economic, livelihood and social needs. The Government will continue to make subsequent arrangements for other community isolation and treatment facilities, releasing the sites in phases or utilising the facilities for other purposes. Announcements will be made and the implementation of related work will be carried out in a timely and orderly manner.

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## **Postal services to Chile return to normal**

Hongkong Post announced today (August 9) that, as advised by the postal administration of Chile, mail delivery services previously impacted by severe weather have returned to normal.

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Hongkong Post announced today (August 9) that, as advised by the postal administration of Iceland, mail delivery services previously impacted by severe weather have returned to normal.