

Territory-wide flag day today

The Society of Rehabilitation and Crime Prevention, Hong Kong has been issued a Public Subscription Permit to hold a territory-wide flag sale from 7am to 12.30pm today (August 19), a spokesman for the Social Welfare Department (SWD) said.

Details of the charitable fund-raising activities, including any updated information, covered by the issued Public Subscription Permits have been published on the GovHK website (www.gov.hk/en/theme/fundraising/search). Permits for flag days containing information on contact methods of the flag-selling organisations and the approved flag-selling activities have also been uploaded to the SWD's website (www.swd.gov.hk/en/index/site_pubsvc/page_controlofc/sub_flagdays) for reference. For enquiries, please call the SWD's hotline at 2343 2255, or the designated hotline of the 1823 Call Centre at 3142 2678.

In the case of suspected fraudulent flag day activities, people should not make any donation and should immediately report the matter to the Police, the spokesman added.

HKSAR Government strongly disapproves of and firmly rejects annual report of European Commission

The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) on August 18 strongly disapproved of and firmly rejected the groundless attacks, slanders and smears targeting the HKSAR's safeguarding of national security, human rights, etc, in the so-called annual report about Hong Kong by the European Commission and also remarks about the city by the High Representative of the European Union (EU) for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission.

A spokesman for the HKSAR Government stressed, "The HKSAR is an inalienable part of the People's Republic of China. It is a local administrative region that enjoys a high degree of autonomy under 'one country, two systems' and comes directly under the Central People's Government. The legal basis for implementing 'one country, two systems' comprises the Constitution and the Basic Law, which provide constitutional guarantee for fundamental rights and freedoms, including the right to equality before the law, and is buttressed by the rule of law and independent judicial power."

The spokesman reiterated, "The HKSAR steadfastly safeguards national sovereignty, security and development interests, and fully and faithfully lives up to this top priority of the 'one country, two systems' principle. The HKSAR Government will resolutely, fully and faithfully implement the Hong Kong National Security Law (NSL) and further strengthen the HKSAR's legal system and enforcement mechanisms for safeguarding national security to effectively prevent, suppress and punish in accordance with the law acts and activities that endanger national security. At the same time, it will safeguard the rights and freedoms enjoyed by Hong Kong people in accordance with the law. Its overarching goal is to ensure the steadfast and successful implementation of 'one country, two systems'. The HKSAR Government strongly urges the EU to discern facts from fallacies, respect the international law and basic norms governing international relations, and immediately stop interfering in Hong Kong matters, which are purely China's internal affairs."

Safeguarding National Security

The HKSAR Government spokesman said, "National security is a matter within the purview of the Central Authorities. It is the responsibility and right of every country to safeguard its national security. The HKSAR Government firmly opposes the EU's malicious slanders against the NSL again by the so-called report, and strongly disapproves of the EU turning a blind eye to the fact that the implementation of the NSL has enabled the livelihood and economic activities of the Hong Kong community at large to resume as normal and the business environment to be restored. The successful promulgation and implementation of the NSL have restored the enjoyment of rights and freedoms which many Hong Kong people were unable to enjoy during the period of serious violence and Hong Kong version of 'colour revolution' between June 2019 and early 2020, and have swiftly and effectively restored stability and security in Hong Kong. It is incontrovertible that people living, and businesses operating, in Hong Kong have experienced the major transition from chaos to order.

"All law enforcement actions taken by law enforcement agencies of the HKSAR under the NSL, or indeed any local laws, are based on evidence, strictly according to the law and for the acts of the people, institutions or organisations concerned, and have nothing to do with their political stance, background or occupation.

"As regards the sedition offence under the Crimes Ordinance, the courts of the HKSAR have ruled in different cases that the provisions relating to sedition are consistent with the relevant provisions of the Basic Law and the Hong Kong Bill of Rights on the protection of human rights, and that a proportionate and reasonable balance has been struck between safeguarding national security and protection of the freedom of speech. It should be reiterated that the offence is not meant to silence expression of any opinion that is only genuine criticisms against the Government based on objective facts.

"Apart from providing that the principle of the rule of law shall be adhered to, Article 5 of the NSL also provides for the presumption of innocence, the prohibition of double jeopardy, and the right to defend

oneself and other rights in judicial proceedings that a criminal suspect, defendant and other parties in judicial proceedings are entitled to under the law. Moreover, trial by a panel of three judges instead of by a jury under specified circumstances in accordance with Article 46 of the NSL seeks to safeguard rather than undermine the defendants' right to a fair trial, and judges will deliver the reasons for the verdicts to ensure open justice.

"In terms of the scope of application, the NSL fully aligns with the principles of international law, international practice and common practice adopted in various countries and regions. Such practice is both necessary and legitimate. The national security laws of various countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and the Member States of the EU, also have extraterritorial effect under the principles of 'personality' and 'protective jurisdiction'."

Safeguarding Due Administration of Justice and Rule of Law

The HKSAR Government spokesman pointed out, "Hong Kong is a society underpinned by the rule of law and has always adhered to the principle that laws must be obeyed and lawbreakers be held accountable. Hong Kong's judicial system has always been highly regarded by international communities. Article 85 of the Basic Law clearly stipulates that the Judiciary shall exercise judicial power independently in accordance with the law, free from any interference. As guaranteed by the Basic Law and the Hong Kong Bill of Rights, everyone charged with a criminal offence has the right to a fair hearing.

"Pursuant to Article 63 of the Basic Law, the Department of Justice controls criminal prosecutions, free from any interference. The prosecutors act strictly in accordance with a longstanding international practice that the decision to prosecute will only take into consideration the applicable laws and the admissible evidence to justify instituting proceedings. Cases will never be handled any differently owing to the political beliefs or backgrounds of the persons involved.

"The Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPCSC) exercises the power of interpretation in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China and the NSL, which is a fundamental aspect of the 'one country, two systems' principle, and a manifestation of the principle of the rule of law. The legislative interpretation of the NSL given by the NPCSC last year did not directly deal with specific judicial proceedings. Rather, it clarified the meaning of the relevant legal provisions and the basis for application of the law. It did not in any way impair the independent judicial power and the power of final adjudication of the Hong Kong courts as guaranteed by the Basic Law. Through the interpretation of Articles 14 and 47 of the NSL, the NPCSC provided clear guidance for the HKSAR to resolve by itself the controversial question of whether overseas lawyers who are not qualified to practise generally in Hong Kong may be admitted on an ad hoc basis to participate in cases concerning national security.

"The interpretation did not confer additional power on the Chief

Executive, and only clarified that Article 47 of the NSL is applicable in handling the controversy concerning overseas lawyers. Owing to the inherent nature of matters concerning national security, the executive authority is in a far better position than the courts to make appropriate judgements. Hence, the courts will afford deference to the judgements made by the executive authority regarding national security matters. This principle is also a general rule for safeguarding national security practised by different places in the world. It must be stressed that the certificate issued by the Chief Executive only provides binding certification to the court on the questions stipulated in Article 47 of the NSL. It does not usurp the function of the court in deciding on other issues of the legal proceedings or the adjudication of the case."

Safeguarding Rights and Freedoms

The HKSAR Government spokesman said, "Hong Kong residents enjoy the rights and freedoms under the Basic Law, the Hong Kong Bill of Rights Ordinance and other relevant laws. The NSL clearly stipulates that human rights shall be respected and protected in safeguarding national security in the HKSAR and the rights and freedoms that Hong Kong residents enjoy under the Basic Law, and the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as applied to Hong Kong, including the freedom of speech, freedom of the press, etc., shall be protected in accordance with the law. However, such rights and freedoms are not absolute. The exercise of such rights may be subject to restrictions that are provided by law and are necessary for pursuing legitimate aims such as the protection of national security or public order.

"Since the implementation of the NSL, the media landscape in Hong Kong has remained vibrant. As always, the media can exercise their freedom of the press in accordance with the law. Their freedom of commenting on and criticising government policies remains uninhibited as long as this is not in violation of the law.

"As regards the baseless remarks that smear the Personal Data (Privacy) (Amendment) Ordinance 2021 and Copyright (Amendment) Ordinance 2022 as laws threatening internet freedom, the HKSAR Government reiterated that the only objective of the former ordinance is to combat doxxing acts that intrude into personal data privacy. Through regular media statements, the Office of the Privacy Commissioner for Personal Data has conveyed to the public its anti-doxxing operations. Every arrest is supported by reasonable and solid evidence, with a sole aim of protecting personal data privacy. The latter ordinance aims to update Hong Kong's copyright regime to strengthen copyright protection in the digital environment, safeguarding the business environment for Hong Kong's creative and technology industries."

Improving Electoral System

The HKSAR Government spokesman said, "The improved electoral system of the HKSAR puts in place legal safeguards to ensure full implementation of 'patriots administering Hong Kong'. Keeping political power in the hands of

patriots is a political rule commonly adopted in the world. No one in any country or region in the world will ever allow political power to fall into the hands of forces or individuals who do not love, or even sell out or betray, their own country. Regardless of one's background, whoever meets the requirements and criteria of patriots can participate in elections in accordance with the law and serve the Hong Kong public by entering into the governance structure of the HKSAR after getting successfully elected.

"In accordance with the improved electoral system, the sixth-term Chief Executive Election was successfully held by the HKSAR Government on May 8, 2022. The improved electoral system has broadened the representation in the electorate for the Chief Executive Election through expanding the Election Committee from 1 200 members from four sectors to 1 500 members from five sectors. Those from newly included subsectors who are eligible to elect the Chief Executive come from grassroots organisations, district groups, small and medium-sized enterprises and Hong Kong members of relevant national organisations, showcasing the broad representation and balanced participation of the improved electoral system. Also, the 2022 Legislative Council Election Committee constituency by-election was held successfully on December 18, 2022. Both elections were held strictly in accordance with the electoral laws of the HKSAR in an open, fair and honest manner."

Maintaining Long-term Prosperity and Stability

The HKSAR Government spokesman stressed, "Since the return of Hong Kong to the motherland, the HKSAR Government has been fully, faithfully and resolutely implementing the principles of 'one country, two systems', 'Hong Kong people administering Hong Kong' and a high degree of autonomy in accordance with the Constitution and the Basic Law to ensure the long-term prosperity and stability of Hong Kong. Hong Kong has entered a new stage of advancing from stability to prosperity. Under 'one country, two systems', Hong Kong has the distinctive advantage of enjoying strong support of the motherland and being closely connected to the world. With the unparalleled connectivity to the Mainland and the rest of the world, the prospects of Hong Kong's development are promising. As the centre of economic gravity in the world is shifting eastward, the Mainland, along with other fast-growing economies in the region, will be a major engine of global economic growth and a source of ample economic opportunities. Hong Kong will continue to play its unique role as a gateway and intermediary, with a view to reaping the enormous benefits of this trend and seizing the abundant development opportunities ahead. With the motherland's strong support, and the wide room for development brought about by national strategies including the National 14th Five-Year Plan, the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area development and the high-quality development of the Belt and Road Initiative, Hong Kong will be presented with unlimited business opportunities."

The spokesman reiterated, "Any attempt by foreign countries or external forces to undermine Hong Kong's prosperity and stability by slandering the city's situation will only expose their own weakness and faulty arguments and be doomed to fail. The HKSAR Government will continue to discharge its duty to steadfastly ensure the successful implementation of the principles of 'one country, two systems', 'Hong Kong people administering Hong Kong' and a high

degree of autonomy. It will continue to create strong impetus for growth at full steam, forge a better integration of a capable government and an efficient market, and proactively compete for enterprises and talent to strengthen the city's competitiveness. It will take the city's economic development to new heights, better serving Hong Kong citizens and fostering the city's development."

CHP investigates two confirmed Mpox cases

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) said today (August 18) that it is investigating two confirmed Mpox (also known as Monkeypox) cases, and urged the public to heighten vigilance and avoid close physical contact with persons suspected of contracting Mpox. Meanwhile, high-risk target groups are advised to receive Mpox vaccination.

The first case involves a 44-year-old male patient with good past health. He had developed vesicles, oral ulcer and headache since August 13. He visited a private doctor on August 16 and visited the Yau Ma Tei Male Social Hygiene Clinic of the DH yesterday (August 17).

The other case involves a 31-year-old male patient with underlying illness. He had presented with localised skin ulcer and lymphadenopathy since August 14. He visited the Yau Ma Tei Male Social Hygiene Clinic of the DH on August 16.

They were arranged to be admitted to Princess Margaret Hospital and are now in stable conditions. An initial investigation revealed that they had high-risk exposures in Hong Kong during the incubation period.

The CHP has not yet identified epidemiological linkages between these two patients. No epidemiological linkages between these two cases and other confirmed cases recorded in Hong Kong earlier have been found so far either. The CHP's epidemiological investigations of the cases are ongoing, including contact tracing and infection source investigations. The CHP will report the cases to the World Health Organization.

The CHP had earlier set up an Mpox telephone hotline (2125 2373). The hotline operates from Monday to Friday (excluding public holidays) from 9am to 5pm, which enables those who suspect or are concerned they have had high-risk contact with confirmed patients, in particular men who have sex with men or those who have sexual practices with strangers, to make enquiries and receive relevant health advice. Meanwhile, the CHP reminds the public, especially those subject to high risks of exposure, to take precautions and avoid close physical contact with persons or animals suspected of infection. They should seek medical attention as soon as possible if they experience

relevant symptoms, including rash, fever, chills, swollen lymph nodes, exhaustion, muscle pain, and severe headaches.

The CHP reminds members of the public that Mpox is not transmitted through respiratory droplets or aerosols in general, and transmission would not occur through social contact. Proper personal and hand hygiene can help prevent getting infected via contact.

The Government has activated the Alert level of the preparedness and response plan for the disease in September last year and will continue to assess the risk in view of the latest scientific evidence and situation, and implement corresponding control measures.

The Mpox vaccination programme for high-risk groups commenced on October 5 last year. Under the programme, the following high-risk target groups can receive Mpox vaccination on a voluntary basis:

1. Individuals with high-risk sexual practices, e.g. having multiple sexual partners, sex workers, or having a history of sexually transmitted infection within the past 12 months;
2. Healthcare workers responsible for caring of patients with confirmed Mpox;
3. Laboratory personnel working with zoonotic pox viruses; and
4. Animal care personnel with high risk of exposure in case of Mpox occurrence in animals in Hong Kong.

High-risk target groups can receive Mpox vaccination at the designated Mpox vaccination centre (situated at 2/F, CHP building, 147C Argyle Street, Mong Kok) by appointment through email (mpv_booking@dh.gov.hk) or telephone booking line (2547 1900) during office hours. They can also receive Mpox walk-in vaccinations at all of the DH's Social Hygiene Service Clinics (SoCHS) (namely Chai Wan SoCHS, Wan Chai Male SoCHS, Wan Chai Female SoCHS, Yau Ma Tei Male SoCHS, Yau Ma Tei Female SoCHS, Yung Fung Shee SoCHS, Fanling SoCHS and Tuen Mun SoCHS). Further information of the clinics including their locations is available at www.dh.gov.hk/english/tele/tele_chc/tele_chc_shcf.html and www.dh.gov.hk/english/tele/tele_chc/tele_chc_shcm.html.

Meanwhile, the DH's Integrated Treatment Centre in Kowloon Bay, and the Hospital Authority's Special Medical Clinics at Queen Elizabeth Hospital and Princess Margaret Hospital will continue to provide Mpox vaccination services for their clients.

For more details, please visit the CHP's page on [Mpox](#).

CHP investigates suspected food poisoning case related to calcium oxalate raphide

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health is today (August 18) investigating a case of suspected food poisoning and reminded the public not to pick or consume wild plants, and to beware of vegetables containing calcium oxalate raphide to avoid food poisoning due to accidental consumption of giant alocasia.

The female patient, aged 69, developed oral numbness, a burning sensation of the mouth and shortness of breath shortly after consuming a wild taro brought from the Mainland as a gift from a friend in Tai Po yesterday (August 17). She visited a private doctor on the same day. She attended the Accident and Emergency Department of North District Hospital today and was admitted for further treatment on the same day. She is now in stable condition. The clinical diagnosis was suspected calcium oxalate raphide poisoning.

The CHP's investigation is ongoing.

Taro is a popular ingredient used to prepare various dishes and desserts. However, some plants look like taro (e.g. giant alocasia) but contain toxins which can cause food poisoning. Consuming plants containing calcium oxalate raphide (a needle-shaped crystal of the chemical) can injure the skin and mucous membranes and cause irritation, such as numbness and burning sensation of the tongue, mouth and lips, and swelling of the tongue and lips. Consumption of vegetables accidentally mixed with calcium oxalate raphide-containing plants may also cause food poisoning.

Members of the public should take heed of the following when consuming vegetables:

- Do not pick or consume wild plants;
- Purchase vegetables from reliable suppliers; and
- Remove any plants mixed with edible vegetables and wash them thoroughly before cooking and consumption.

The public may visit the pages on [Food Poisoning Related to the Giant Alocasia](#) and [Calcium Oxalate Food Poisoning](#) of the Centre for Food Safety of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department for more information and health advice.

CHP announces one new confirmed melioidosis infection case over past week

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (August 18) said that one new confirmed melioidosis infection case had been recorded in the past week (August 12 to 18).

The case involves a 55-year-old male with good past health who lives in Wan Chai. The patient visited Cambodia and Spain during July 19 to August 7. He had presented with fever and respiratory tract infection symptoms since July 30. After his return to Hong Kong, he developed shortness of breath and a decreased general condition on August 12, and attended the Accident and Emergency Department of Ruttonjee Hospital. He was admitted on the same day and is now in critical condition. His blood sample was confirmed positive for *Burkholderia pseudomallei* upon testing.

The CHP is investigating the infection source of the case. Epidemiological investigations are ongoing. A total of eight melioidosis infection cases have been recorded in Hong Kong so far this year. In 2022, 46 melioidosis infection cases were recorded.

A spokesman for the CHP reiterated that person-to-person transmission and animal-to-human transmission are rare, but melioidosis bacteria can survive in the local environment. Melioidosis is an endemic disease in Hong Kong and melioidosis cases have been recorded in Hong Kong each year. According to literature, infection cases are more common after typhoons or storms. The bacterium *Burkholderia pseudomallei* of melioidosis in soil and muddy water may become exposed to the ground after typhoons or storms, and the bacteria could spread more easily with strong winds or storms. As such, the number of melioidosis cases may increase.

The CHP appealed to members of the public to seek medical advice if they develop symptoms, in particular people with diabetes or other immunocompromised conditions, in order to receive appropriate medical diagnosis and treatment. For more information on melioidosis, please visit the website of the CHP at www.chp.gov.hk/en/healthtopics/content/24/101110.html.