

[Hong Kong's latest foreign currency reserve assets figures released](#)

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

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) announced today (January 7) that the official foreign currency reserve assets of Hong Kong amounted to US\$496.8 billion as at the end of December 2021 (end-November 2021: US\$499.4 billion) (Annex).

There were no unsettled foreign exchange contracts at end-December 2021 (end-November 2021: US\$1.0 billion).

The total foreign currency reserve assets of US\$496.8 billion represent over six times the currency in circulation or about 48 per cent of Hong Kong dollar M3.

At present, four press releases relating to the Exchange Fund's data are issued by the HKMA each month. Three of these releases are issued to disseminate monetary data in accordance with the International Monetary Fund's Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS). The fourth press release, on the Exchange Fund's Abridged Balance Sheet and Currency Board Account, is made in accordance with the HKMA's policy of maintaining a high level of transparency. For the month of January 2022, the scheduled dates for issuing the press releases are as follows:

January 7	SDDS International Reserves (Hong Kong's Latest Foreign Currency Reserve Assets Figures)
January 14	SDDS Analytical Accounts of the Central Bank (Analytical Accounts of the Exchange Fund)
January 31	SDDS Template on International Reserves and Foreign Currency Liquidity
January 31	Exchange Fund Abridged Balance Sheet and Currency Board Account

[Appointment of Chairman of Air Transport Licensing Authority](#)

The Government announced today (January 7) the appointment of Mr Eugene

Fung Ting-sek as the Chairman of the Air Transport Licensing Authority with effect from January 8, 2022, till July 31, 2024.

The Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, said, "We are confident that under Mr Fung's chairmanship, the team of serving members, with their expertise and backgrounds in different sectors, will continue to make valuable contributions to the work of the Authority in facilitating the development of air services in Hong Kong.

"The Government is most grateful to the incumbent Chairman, Mr Ambrose Ho, for his capable leadership and invaluable contribution to the Authority in the past four years. His term of service will expire today."

The Authority is an independent statutory body established under the Air Transport (Licensing of Air Services) Regulations (Cap. 448A). It is responsible for considering applications from airlines of Hong Kong for licences to operate scheduled services to and from Hong Kong in accordance with the provisions of the said regulations.

[Twenty-four persons arrested during anti-illegal worker operations \(with photo\)](#)

The Immigration Department (ImmD) mounted territory-wide anti-illegal worker operations codenamed "Twilight" for four consecutive days (January 3 to 6). A total of 19 suspected illegal workers and five suspected employers were arrested.

During the "Twilight" operations, ImmD Task Force officers raided 20 target locations including factories, an industrial building, premises under renovation, a residential building, restaurants, a retail shop and a warehouse. A total of 19 suspected illegal workers and five suspected employers were arrested. The arrested suspected illegal workers comprised nine men and 10 women, aged 25 to 54. Among them, eight men and six women were holders of recognisance forms, which prohibit them from taking any employment. Furthermore, three men and two women, aged 35 to 53, were suspected of employing the 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, 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 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 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, temporary accommodation and other supporting services. The ImmD calls on TIP victims to report crimes to the relevant departments immediately.



Grading of beach water quality released

The Environmental Protection Department (EPD) today (January 7) released the latest grading of water quality for four gazetted beaches that are open all year round for swimming (see Note).

Four beaches were rated as Good (Grade 1).

Grade 1 beaches are:

Clear Water Bay Second Beach	Golden Beach
Deep Water Bay Beach	Silverstrand Beach

Under the present grading system, beaches are classified into four grades, namely Good (Grade 1), Fair (Grade 2), Poor (Grade 3) and Very Poor (Grade 4), according to the level of E. coli in the water. Grades are calculated on the basis of the geometric mean of the E. coli counts on the five most recent sampling occasions.

A summary of beach grades is published weekly before the weekend. The latest beach grades based on the most current data may be obtained from the EPD's website on Beach Water Quality (www.epd.gov.hk/epd/beach) or the beach hotline, 2511 6666.

Note: In view of the latest situation of COVID-19, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department has announced that lifeguard services at these beaches are suspended from January 7 for 14 days until midnight on January 20.

Effective Exchange Rate Index

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Friday, January 7, 2022 is 95.4 (down 0.1 against yesterday's index).