

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 February 15 to noon today (February 16), the CFS conducted tests on the radiological levels of 116 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).

The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) has also tested 50 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 to noon today, the CFS and the AFCD have conducted tests on the radiological levels of 30 819 samples of food imported from Japan (including 20 660 samples of aquatic and related products, seaweeds and sea salt) and 8 672 samples of local catch respectively. All the samples passed the tests.

12 building plans approved in December

The Buildings Department approved 12 building plans in December, with six on Hong Kong Island, one in Kowloon and five in the New Territories.

Of the approved plans, seven were for apartment and apartment/commercial developments, two were for commercial developments, and three were for community services development.

In the same month, consent was given for works to start on 11 building projects which, when completed, will provide 66 519 square metres of gross floor area for domestic use involving 1 767 units, and 68 176 sq m of gross floor area for non-domestic use. The department has received notification of commencement of superstructure works for six building projects.

The department also issued 20 occupation permits, with three on Hong Kong Island, seven in Kowloon and 10 in the New Territories.

Of the buildings certified for occupation, the gross floor area for domestic use was 5 450 sq m involving 128 units, and 55 480 sq m was for non-domestic use.

The declared cost of new buildings completed in December totalled about \$2 billion.

In addition, seven demolition consents involving seven building structures were issued.

The department received 2 431 reports about unauthorised building works (UBWs) in December and issued 923 removal orders on UBWs.

The full version of the Monthly Digest for December can be viewed on the Buildings Department's homepage (www.bd.gov.hk).

Hong Kong Customs detects largest money laundering case on record involving about \$14 billion

â€‹Hong Kong Customs mounted an enforcement operation codenamed "Daybreak" on January 30 and successfully dismantled a large-scale transnational money laundering syndicate which had laundered about \$14

billion through transnational trade activities, as well as a money laundering operation centre. A total of seven persons suspected to be connected with the case were arrested and about \$165 million worth of assets under the names of the arrested individuals have been frozen during the operation. This is the largest money laundering case shut down by Customs to date in terms of the amount of tainted money involved.

Acting upon intelligence, Customs officers identified a suspected money laundering syndicate and initiated a financial investigation. Customs discovered that the money laundering syndicate was family owned. It not only opened multiple companies and bank accounts in Hong Kong, but also recruited local persons through an intermediary to open shell companies and stooge accounts for dealing with a total of about \$14 billion of suspected crime proceeds.

The investigation also revealed that some of the tainted money originated from the proceeds of mobile application scams in India. On a pretence of exporting jewellery and diamonds to India, the money laundering syndicate turned the fraudulent proceeds into payments of goods so as to transfer the illicit gains from India to local corporate bank accounts under its control.

After in-depth investigations, Customs officers conducted the enforcement operation on January 30, and raided 11 premises across different districts in Hong Kong. Four Chinese persons and three non-ethnic Chinese persons, aged between 23 and 74, were arrested for a suspected conspiracy to "deal with property known or reasonably believed to represent proceeds of an indictable offence" (commonly known as money laundering) under the Organized and Serious Crimes Ordinance (OSCO). They were believed to be the mastermind, core and grassroots members of the syndicate, and the intermediary who recruited the stooge account holders.

At the same time, Customs officers successfully cracked down on a money laundering operation centre at a commercial premises and seized a large quantity of suspected synthetic gemstones, a number of mobile phones, computers, company chops, cheque books, bank cards, bank documents and trading documents inside the arrestees' residential and various commercial premises.

An investigation is ongoing. The seven arrested persons have been released on bail pending further investigation, and the likelihood of further arrests is not ruled out.

Under the OSCO, a person commits an offence if he or she deals with any property knowing or having reasonable grounds to believe that such property, in whole or in part, directly or indirectly, represents any person's proceeds of an indictable offence. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$5 million and imprisonment for 14 years, while the crime proceeds are also subject to confiscation.

Members of the public may report any suspected money laundering activities to Customs' 24-hour hotline 2545 6182 or its dedicated crime-

reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk) or online form (eform.cefs.gov.hk/form/ced002).

[Red flag hoisted at Clear Water Bay Second Beach](#)

Attention TV/radio announcers:

Please broadcast the following as soon as possible:

Here is an item of interest to swimmers.

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department announced today (February 16) that due to big waves, the red flag has been hoisted at Clear Water Bay Second Beach in Sai Kung District. Beachgoers are advised not to swim at the beach.

[HKETO New York celebrates Year of Dragon \(with photos\)](#)

The Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in New York (HKETONY) hosted its spring reception in New York on February 15 (New York time) to celebrate the Year of the Dragon.

In welcoming some 400 guests from the city's political, business, finance, academic, as well as art and culture communities, the Director of the HKETONY, Ms Maisie Ho, noted the symbolic significance of the dragon, a mythical creature in Chinese culture.

"The dragon represents strength, wisdom, and good fortune, symbolising power, excellence, and noble aspirations. The dragon is thought to bring positive energy and blessings for the year ahead. As we welcome the Year of the Dragon, Hong Kong is also nurturing fresh vitality and prosperity," Ms Ho said.

"As the events capital of Asia for the world, Hong Kong is a compact and globally connected city that is a magnet for world-class mega events. In the first half of 2024 alone, more than 80 mega events would take place in Hong Kong, with notable ones such as the LIV Golf Hong Kong Tournament , Art Basel

Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Sevens and much more. We welcome the world to join us in embracing the alluring metropolitan charm that cannot be found in any other place than Hong Kong," she added.

Ms Ho also remarked on the series of remarkable achievements and collaborations between New York and Hong Kong in the past year – from business and finance seminars and luncheons, to the New Year's Eve countdown celebration at New York Times Square and cultural events such as the New York Asian Film Festival and the Hong Kong Dragon Boat Festival.

Looking ahead, she said that the HKETONY is more committed than ever to establishing and strengthening the friendship between the people on the East Coast of the United States (US) and Hong Kong.

"Our long-standing bilateral trade relations with the US remain strong despite geopolitical tensions and economic headwinds. The US is Hong Kong's third largest trading partner, whereas Hong Kong is the second largest trading partner economy with which the US enjoys trade surplus. At last count, there are close to 1 300 US firms in Hong Kong with about half of them regional in scope. Our office will continue to work towards nurturing and rekindling old and new relationships, and strive for positive collaborations and understandings to foster a bond that transcends borders," she said.

Ms Ho went on to introduce and thank the "Hong Kong family" in New York – Invest Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Monetary Authority, the Hong Kong Trade Development Council, the Hong Kong Tourism Board and the Hong Kong Association of New York – for their unwavering partnership throughout the years in working towards the common goal of building closer ties between the two places.

Supported by the Hong Kong Tourism Board, a special neon light display that resembles the unique dynamic night vibe of Hong Kong was featured at the reception. Suona artist Andrew Chan from Hong Kong was invited by the HKETONY to perform the renowned traditional Chinese piece "A Hundred Birds Paying Homage to the Phoenix". A touch of Hong Kong magic was also added to the evening's celebration when a cocktail inspired by the famous Hong Kong dessert mango pomelo sago, and another using an award-winning craft gin distilled in Hong Kong, were served.



