

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

The Immigration Department (ImmD) mounted a series of territory-wide anti-illegal worker operations codenamed "Twilight" for two consecutive days from December 27 to yesterday (December 28). A total of 10 suspected illegal workers, one suspected employer, one suspected aider and abettor and one overstayer were arrested.

During the anti-illegal worker operations, ImmD Task Force officers raided nine target locations including a construction site, residential flats and restaurants. The arrested suspected illegal workers comprised five men and five women, aged 39 to 59. Among them, three men and four women were suspected of using and being in possession of forged Hong Kong identity cards. One man, aged 39, who was suspected of employing the illegal workers, was arrested. One woman, aged 58, who was suspected of aiding and abetting a person who breached the condition of stay in Hong Kong, was arrested. Furthermore, one female overstayer, aged 63, was 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. 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.



21 landlords of subdivided units under regulated tenancies convicted of

contravening relevant statutory requirements

Twenty-one landlords of subdivided units (SDUs) who contravened Part IVA of the Landlord and Tenant (Consolidation) Ordinance (Cap. 7) (the Ordinance) pleaded guilty and were fined a total of \$41,600 today (December 29) at the Eastern Magistrates' Courts. Since the Ordinance has come into force, a total of 79 SDU landlords have been convicted of contravening the Ordinance.

The offences of these landlords include (1) failing to submit a Notice of Tenancy (Form AR2) to the Commissioner of Rating and Valuation within 60 days after the term of the regulated tenancy commenced; (2) failing to produce copies of the bills and provide an account in writing when requiring the tenants to pay for the reimbursement of the apportioned water and/or electricity charges; and (3) requesting the tenant to pay money other than the types permitted under the Ordinance. One of the landlords who contravened a total of eight offences under (1) and (3) above was fined \$7,600.

The Rating and Valuation Department (RVD) earlier discovered that the landlords failed to comply with the relevant requirements under the Ordinance. Upon in-depth investigation and evidence collection, the RVD prosecuted against the landlords.

A spokesman for the RVD hopes that these convictions will send a strong message to SDU landlords that they must comply with the relevant requirements under the Ordinance, and also reminds SDU tenants of their rights under the Ordinance. He also stresses that the RVD will continue to take resolute enforcement action against any contraventions of the Ordinance. Apart from following up on reported cases, the RVD has been adopting a multipronged approach to proactively identify, investigate and follow up on cases concerning landlords who are suspected of contravening the Ordinance. In particular, the RVD has been requiring landlords of regulated tenancies to provide information and reference documents of their tenancies for checking whether the landlords concerned have complied with the requirements of the Ordinance. If a landlord, without reasonable excuse, refuses to provide the relevant information or neglects the RVD's request, the landlord commits an offence and is liable to a fine at level 3 (\$10,000) and to imprisonment for three months. Depending on the actual circumstances and having regard to the information and evidence collected, the RVD will take appropriate actions on individual cases, including instigating prosecutions against suspected contravention of the Ordinance.

The RVD spokesman appeals to members of the public to come forward and report to the RVD promptly any suspected cases of contravening the relevant requirements. This would help curb illegal acts as soon as possible. Reporting can be made through the telephone hotline (2150 8303), by email (enquiries@rvd.gov.hk), by fax (2116 4920), by post (15/F, Cheung Sha Wan Government Offices, 303 Cheung Sha Wan Road, Kowloon), or in person (visiting

the Tenancy Services Section office of the RVD at Room 3816-22, 38/F, Immigration Tower, 7 Gloucester Road, Wan Chai, Hong Kong, and please call 2150 8303 to make an appointment). Furthermore, the RVD has provided a form (Form AR4) (www.rvd.gov.hk/doc/en/forms/ar4.pdf) on its website to facilitate SDU tenants' reporting to the RVD.

The RVD reminds that pursuant to the Ordinance, a regulated cycle of regulated tenancies is to comprise two consecutive regulated tenancies (i.e. the first-term tenancy and second-term tenancy) for an SDU, and the term of each regulated tenancy is two years. A tenant of a first-term tenancy for an SDU is entitled to be granted a second-term tenancy of the regulated cycle, thus enjoying a total of four years of security of tenure. Since the first batch of regulated tenancies is about to approach their second-term tenancies, the RVD has started a new round of publicity and education work in order to assist SDU landlords and tenants to understand the important matters pertaining to the second-term tenancy, and procedures that need to be followed about two months prior to the commencement of the purported second-term tenancy. In addition, RVD started to issue letters enclosing relevant information to the concerned landlords and tenants of regulated tenancies by batches, according to the expiry time of their first term tenancies, to remind them about their respective obligations and rights under the Ordinance. These landlords and tenants may also visit the dedicated page for the second-term tenancy on the RVD's website (www.rvd.gov.hk/en/tenancy_matters/second_term_tenancy.html) for the relevant information, including a concise guide, brochures, tutorial videos, frequently asked questions, etc. SDU landlords and tenants are also advised to familiarise themselves with the relevant statutory requirements and maintain close communication regarding the second-term tenancy for handling the matters properly and in a timely manner according to the Ordinance.

For enquiries related to regulated tenancies, please call the telephone hotline (2150 8303) or visit the RVD's webpage (www.rvd.gov.hk/en/our_services/part_iva.html) for the relevant information.

[Special traffic arrangements for New Year's Eve](#)

Police will implement special traffic arrangements on Hong Kong Island and in Kowloon between December 31, 2023 and January 1, 2024 to facilitate the New Year celebration.

Hong Kong Island

(1) Special traffic arrangements for fireworks display

A. Road closure

Phase I (before the fireworks display)

Central District

Tramway Lane outside Lower Peak Tram Station leading from Garden Road to the office of World Wild Fund for Nature Hong Kong will be closed from noon on December 31 to 1.30am of the following day, except for franchised buses.

Wan Chai North

Expo Drive East at the north of Expo Drive outside Golden Bauhinia Square including the pick-up and drop-off areas will be closed from 7pm on December 31 to 1.30am of the following day.

The following roads will be closed from 9.30pm on December 31:

Central District

- Man Kwong Street;
- Man Fai Street;
- Man Yiu Street between Man Kwong Street and Man Po Street;
- Man Yiu Street Public Transport Interchange;
- Loading and unloading area outside Central Ferry Piers 7, 8 and 9; and
- Unnamed Road near Lung Wo Road outside General Post Office metered parking spaces.

Central – Wan Chai Bypass

- The slip road linking eastbound Central – Wan Chai Bypass to Expo Drive;
- The slip road linking Lung Wo Road to eastbound Central – Wan Chai Bypass;
- and
- The slip road linking westbound Central – Wan Chai Bypass to Lung Wo Road.

Wan Chai North

- Eastbound Fenwick Pier Street;
- Lung King Street;
- Eastbound Harbour Road;
- Expo Drive;
- Expo Drive Central;
- Expo Drive East;
- Eastbound Lung Wo Road between Edinburgh Place and Fleming Road;
- Westbound Lung Wo Road between Legislative Council Road and Fleming Road;

- Southbound and northbound Lung Hop Street;
- Lung Tat Path;
- Convention Avenue;
- Fleming Road Flyover;
- Fleming Road between Expo Drive and Harbour Road;
- Exhibition Centre Station Public Transport Interchange;
- Northbound Tonnochy Road between eastbound Harbour Road and Hung Hing Road;
- Southbound Tonnochy Road between Hung Hing Road and Gloucester Road;
- Marsh Road between Gloucester Road and Hung Hing Road;
- Marsh Road Flyover;
- Marsh Road between Hennessy Road and Gloucester Road;
- Hung Hing Road;
- Hung Hing Road Flyover;
- Wan Shing Street;
- Wan Ying Street;
- The entrance on eastbound Victoria Park Road to Causeway Bay Promenade; and
- The first right lane of northbound Tin Lok Lane between Hennessy Road and Wan Chai Road.

Peak Area

- Northbound Peak Road beyond the car park entrance of Peak Galleria, except for residents' vehicles;
- Barker Road, except for residents' vehicles;
- All laybys along Stubbs Road between Peak Road and Stubbs Road roundabout; and
- All laybys along Magazine Gap Road between Peak Road and May Road.

Eastern District

- Watson Road;
- Glass Street;
- King Ming Road;
- Hing Fat Street northward of Whitfield Road; and
- Whitfield Road.

The following roads will be closed from 10.45pm on December 31:

Central District

- Eastbound and westbound Yiu Sing Street;
- Westbound Lung Wo Road between Yiu Sing Street and Tim Wa Avenue;
- Tim Wa Avenue;
- Legislative Council Road;
- Tim Mei Avenue;
- Lung Wui Road;
- Unnamed road between Harcourt Road and Performing Arts Avenue;
- Performing Arts Avenue; and

- Edinburgh Place.

Wan Chai North

- Tonnochy Road Flyover;
- Northbound Tonnochy Road between Gloucester Road and Harbour Road;
- Harbour Drive;
- Southbound Fleming Road between Gloucester Road and Harbour Road; and
- Northbound Fenwick Street between Gloucester Road and Harbour Road.

Phase II (during the fireworks display)

The following roads will be closed from 11.55pm on December 31:

Eastern District

- Westbound Central – Wan Chai Bypass, except for franchised buses;
- Westbound Island Eastern Corridor (IEC) between Victoria Park Road and Man Hong Street, except for franchised buses; and
- The slip roads leading to westbound IEC from Healthy Street Central and Tong Shui Road.

Phase III (after the fireworks display)

The following roads will be closed from 11.55pm on December 31:

Central District

- Man Yiu Street between Man Cheung Street and Man Po Street;
- Man Po Street; and
- Finance Street between Man Yiu Street and Man Po Street.

Wan Chai South

- Lockhart Road between Percival Street and Luard Road;
- Jaffe Road between Percival Street and Luard Road;
- Southbound Luard Road between Gloucester Road and Jaffe Road;
- O'Brien Road;
- Fleming Road between Gloucester Road and Hennessy Road;
- Stewart Road;
- Tonnochy Road between Gloucester Road and Hennessy Road;
- Marsh Road between Gloucester Road and Hennessy Road;
- Canal Road West between Gloucester Road and Hennessy Road;
- Canal Road East between Gloucester Road and Hennessy Road;
- If necessary, Percival Street between Lockhart Road and Gloucester Road;
- and
- If necessary, westbound Gloucester Road service road between Percival Street and Canal Road East.

B. Traffic diversions

In connection with the road closure as mentioned above, the following traffic diversions will be implemented:

From 9.30pm on December 31:

- Rumsey Street between Chung Kong Road and Connaught Road Central will be re-routed to one-way southbound; and
- All traffic along Peak Road towards Harlech Road, Lugard Road and Mount Austin Road will be diverted via the slip road beside the car park entrance at the Peak Galleria, except for residents' vehicles or vehicles with permits.

From 11.55pm on December 31:

- Traffic along westbound IEC will be diverted to Man Hong Street;
- Traffic along westbound IEC heading to Tong Shui Road slip road will be diverted to Wharf Road; and
- Traffic along eastbound Connaught Road West Flyover will be diverted to Finance Street.

C. Suspension of parking spaces

- All on-street metered, motorcycle and disabled parking spaces (meter no. 3186 to 3188, 3190 to 3193 and 3197) on Tramway Lane outside Lower Peak Tram Station will be suspended from 9am on December 31 to 1.30am of the following day;
- All on-street metered parking spaces at Victoria Peak Garden and on Mount Austin Road (meter no. 1515(A/B) to 1518(A/B), 1523(A/B) to 1526(A/B), 1519A, 1520A, 1521(A/B) and 1522B) will be suspended from 9am on December 31 to 1.30am of the following day;
- All on-street parking spaces on Expo Drive East at the north of Expo Drive outside Golden Bauhinia Square will be suspended from 2pm on December 31 to 1.30am of the following day;
- All parking spaces on Watson Road and Whitfield Road will be suspended from 5pm on December 31 to 1.30am of the following day; and
- All parking spaces at the following locations will be suspended from 5pm on December 31 to 1.30am of the following day:
 - Man Kwong Street;
 - Yiu Sing Street;
 - Lung Wo Road;
 - Lung Wui Road;
 - Lung Hop Street;
 - Hung Hing Road;
 - Expo Drive;
 - Expo Drive East;
 - Convention Avenue;
 - Gloucester Road service road;

- Stewart Road between Jaffe Road and Gloucester Road service road;
- Marsh Road between Hennessy Road and Lockhart Road;
- Jaffe Road between Percival Street and Luard Road; and
- Lockhart Road between Percival Street and Luard Road.

D. Suspension of car parks

Vehicles parked in car parks within the above closed areas in North Point, Wan Chai and Central will not be permitted to enter or leave the car parks during the road closure period.

If necessary, the car parks on westbound Gloucester Road between Paterson Street and Percival Street will be closed without prior notice.

(2) Special traffic arrangements for the New Year countdown in Lan Kwai Fong

A. Road closure

The following roads will be closed from 2pm on December 31 to 5am of the following day:

- D'Aguilar Street between Wyndham Street and Wellington Street;
- Lan Kwai Fong;
- Wing Wah Lane;
- Wo On Lane;
- Wellington Street between Wyndham Street and D'Aguilar Street; and
- On Lan Street.

Depending on the crowd situation, the following roads may be closed:

- Stanley Street between D'Aguilar Street and Cochrane Street;
- Wyndham Street between Glenealy and Queen's Road Central;
- D'Aguilar Street between Queen's Road Central and Wellington Street;
- Wellington Street between D'Aguilar Street and Cochrane Street;
- Cochrane Street between Wellington Street and Stanley Street;
- Lyndhurst Terrace; and
- Queen's Road Central between Pedder Street and Pottinger Street.

Upon completion of traffic diversions, the crowd will be directed to queue up along Queen's Road Central, D'Aguilar Street, Stanley Street, Cochrane Street and Wellington Street. The whole section of D'Aguilar Street will be closed to vehicular traffic.

B. Suspension of on-street parking spaces

All on-street parking spaces on the following streets will be suspended from 1pm on December 31 to 5am of the following day:

- Stanley Street near D'Aguilar Street;
- On Lan Street; and
- Wyndham Street between Arbuthnot Road and D'Aguilar Street.

(3) Special traffic arrangement for Midnight Mass at St. Joseph's Church

In order to facilitate the dispersal of worshippers from St. Joseph's Church after the Midnight Mass, the rightmost lane of Garden Road between Kennedy Road and Upper Albert Road will be coned off for pedestrian use anytime after the Midnight Mass, depending on the crowd conditions.

(4) Special traffic arrangement for the Jardines Midnight Gun Ceremony

In order to facilitate the Jardines Midnight Gun Ceremony at Causeway Bay Typhoon Shelter, the layby on Victoria Park Road outside Causeway Bay Typhoon Shelter will be suspended from 9.30pm on December 31 until the end of the ceremony.

Kowloon

A. Road closure and traffic diversions

Phase I (from 6pm on December 31)

The following roads will be closed:

- Eastbound and westbound Hung Hom Bypass between Salisbury Road and Hung Hom Road;
- Southbound and northbound Hung Hom Bypass between Salisbury Road and Metropolis Drive;
- Southbound Salisbury Road between Hong Chong Road and Hung Hom Bypass;
- Eastbound and westbound Salisbury Road between Science Museum Road and Kowloon Park Drive, including Salisbury Road's eastbound and westbound underpass;
- The U-turn slip road of Salisbury Road leading from eastbound Salisbury Road U-turn to westbound Salisbury Road;
- Hong Wan Path;
- Mody Lane;
- Mody Road;
- Mody Square;
- Granville Square;
- Granville Road between Chatham Road South and Science Museum Road, except for franchised buses and green minibuses (GMBs);
- Southbound Chatham Road South between Cheong Wan Road and Salisbury Road;
- Southbound Chatham Road South between Cheong Wan Road and Granville Road, except for franchised buses and GMBs;
- Northbound Chatham Road South between Granville Road and Salisbury Road;
- Southbound and northbound Carnarvon Road between Granville Road and Nathan Road;
- Hau Fook Street;
- Cameron Lane;
- Cameron Road;
- Humphreys Avenue;

- Prat Avenue;
- Hart Avenue;
- Hanoi Road;
- Bristol Avenue;
- Minden Row;
- Minden Avenue;
- Blenheim Avenue;
- Middle Road;
- Northbound Nathan Road between Austin Road and Salisbury Road;
- Southbound Nathan Road between Granville Road and Salisbury Road;
- Southbound Kowloon Park Drive between Canton Road and Salisbury Road;
- Southbound Canton Road between Kowloon Park Drive and Salisbury Road;
- China Hong Kong City Public Transport Interchange;
- Ashley Road;
- Hankow Road;
- Lock Road;
- Haiphong Road;
- Ichang Street;
- Peking Road;
- Museum Drive; and
- Cultural Drive.

During the above road closure period, the following traffic diversions will be implemented:

- Traffic along southbound Hung Hom Road will be directed from Hung Hom Bypass to Cheong Tung Road South roundabout;
- Traffic along eastbound Metropolis Drive cannot turn right to southbound Hung Hom Bypass;
- Traffic along southbound Hung Hom Bypass must turn right to westbound Metropolis Drive;
- Traffic along westbound Cheong Wan Road leading to Chatham Road South must turn right to northbound Chatham Road South or go straight to westbound Austin Road, except for franchised buses and GMBs;
- Franchised buses and GMBs along southbound Chatham Road South must turn left to eastbound Granville Road;
- Franchised buses along southbound Nathan Road must turn right to westbound Public Square Street or westbound Jordan Road;
- Traffic along westbound Jordan Road cannot turn left to southbound Canton Road. Vehicles must go straight to Nga Cheung Road direction or turn left to southbound Wui Man Road;
- Traffic along southbound Canton Road must make a U-turn to northbound Canton Road outside China Hong Kong City;
- Traffic along northbound Kowloon Park Drive cannot turn left to southbound Canton Road;
- Traffic along eastbound Salisbury Road must turn left to northbound Kowloon Park Drive;
- Traffic along northbound Kowloon Park Drive cannot turn right to Peking Road;
- Westbound Granville Road between Nathan Road and Carnarvon Road will turn to eastbound contraflow. Traffic along southbound Nathan Road will be

instructed to turn left to eastbound Granville Road;

– Traffic along Science Museum Road cannot turn to Mody Road and Granville Road;

– Traffic along southbound Salisbury Road near Hong Chong Road will be diverted to Tsim Sha Tsui East; and

– Traffic along eastbound Granville Road near Chatham Road South must turn left to northbound Chatham Road South.

Phase II (from 6.30pm on December 31)

The following roads will be closed:

– Northbound Kowloon Park Drive between Canton Road and Salisbury Road;

– Eastbound and westbound Salisbury Road between Canton Road and Kowloon Park Drive; and

– Star Ferry Bus Terminus.

Phase III (from 11.45pm on December 31)

The following roads will be closed:

– Southbound and northbound Nathan Road between Jordan Road and Austin Road;

– Eastbound Bowring Street between Pilkem Street and Nathan Road;

– Eastbound Tak Shing Street between Tak Hing Street and Nathan Road;

– Southbound Nathan Road between Austin Road and Granville Road;

– Pine Tree Hill Road;

– Hillwood Road;

– Carnarvon Road between Kimberley Road and Granville Road;

– Shun Yee Street;

– Granville Circuit;

– Northbound Chatham Road South between Observatory Road and Granville Road;

– Kimberley Road between Nathan Road and Observatory Road;

– Kimberley Street;

– Granville Road between Nathan Road and Chatham Road South;

– Southbound and northbound Canton Road between Austin Road and Kowloon Park Drive;

– The U-turn slip road of Austin Road West leading from westbound Austin Road West U-turn to eastbound Austin Road West;

– The first lane of Austin Road West leading to Austin Road West roundabout;

– Austin Road West roundabout between the entrance of Austin Road West and the exit and entrance of Museum Drive;

– Southbound and northbound Nga Cheung Road between Jordan Road and Austin Road West; and

– The U-turn slip road of Austin Road West leading from eastbound Austin Road West U-turn to westbound Austin Road West.

During the above road closure period, the following traffic diversions will be implemented:

– Traffic along southbound Nathan Road must turn right to westbound Jordan Road;

- Traffic along westbound Jordan Road cannot turn left to southbound Nathan Road;
- Traffic along westbound Austin Road and southbound Cox's Road cannot turn to Pine Tree Hill Road;
- Traffic along Observatory Road cannot enter westbound Kimberley Street;
- Traffic along northbound Pilkem Street cannot turn right to eastbound Bowring Street;
- Traffic along eastbound Bowring Street must turn left to northbound Pilkem Street;
- Traffic along southbound Canton Road cannot go straight. Vehicles must turn left to eastbound Austin Road or turn right to westbound Austin Road West;
- Traffic along eastbound Austin Road West cannot turn right. Vehicles must turn left to northbound Canton Road or go straight to eastbound Austin Road;
- Traffic along eastbound and westbound Austin Road West cannot enter the slip roads of Austin Road West;
- Traffic along westbound Jordan Road must turn to the Kowloon Station Public Transport Interchange after turning left to southbound Nga Cheung Road;
- Traffic along westbound Austin Road West must go straight to Nga Cheung Road elevated road; and
- Traffic along southbound Nga Cheung Road entering Austin Road West roundabout must turn left to eastbound Austin Road West.

Contingency plan

If necessary, the following roads will be closed:

- Hung Luen Road between Wa Shun Street and Hung Lok Road;
- Oi King Street; and
- Kin Wan Street.

During the above road closure period, the following traffic diversions will be implemented:

- Traffic along westbound Hung Luen Road must turn left to Wa Shun Street;
- Traffic along Wa Shun Street must turn right to eastbound Hung Luen Road;
- Traffic along southbound Hung Lok Road cannot turn left to eastbound Hung Luen Road; and
- Traffic along eastbound Hung Luen Road must turn left to northbound Hung Lok Road.

B. Suspension of on-street parking spaces

All on-street parking spaces in the southern area of Tsim Sha Tsui (i.e. south of Austin Road) will be suspended from noon on December 31 to 3am of the following day.

C. Suspension of car parks

All car parks within the above closed road area will be suspended until the road closure is lifted.

All vehicles parked illegally during the implementation of the above special traffic arrangements will be towed away without prior warning, and may be subject to multiple ticketing.

Actual implementation of traffic arrangements will be made depending on traffic and crowd conditions in the areas. Members of the public are advised to exercise tolerance and patience and take heed of instructions of the Police on site.

CHP announces one new confirmed melioidosis infection case over past week

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (December 29) said that one new confirmed melioidosis infection case had been recorded in the past week (December 22 to 28).

The case involves a 94-year-old female with underlying illnesses who lives in Sai Wan Ho. She started to feel unwell since December 17. She was sent to the Accident and Emergency Department of Pamela Youde Nethersole Eastern Hospital on December 20 due to decreased blood oxygen saturation and was admitted on the same day. She is in stable condition. Her clinical 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 17 melioidosis infection cases have been recorded in Hong Kong 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 reminded members of the public that melioidosis can be spread by contaminated soil and water during and after typhoons and storms. Where practicable, they should stay indoor during typhoons and storms, avoid travelling to areas with potential flooding, and do not wade or have contact with muddy water and soil. In addition, high-risk individuals should avoid

paths near stormwater drains where aerosols may be generated from contaminated water.

Members of the public should also take the following preventive measures against infection:

- Avoid contact with contaminated soil;
- Wear appropriate protective clothing or footwear when participating in activities with possible contact with soil or water, e.g. using gloves and wearing boots. High-risk individuals may consider to wear a surgical mask in addition;
- Wash or shower after exposure to contaminated water or soil;
- Always clean any wounds as soon as possible and cover any cuts or grazes with waterproof dressings;
- Wash hands with liquid soap and water after handling soil or gardening;
- Observe food hygiene and avoid drinking raw water; and
- Travellers can contract the disease through outdoor water sports. Risk of infection can be minimised by avoiding exposure to water sources (such as rivers, ponds or lakes) that might be contaminated.

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.

[Hong Kong Customs introduces Virtual Customs Ambassador XiaoHui](#)

Under the Smart Customs Blueprint, Hong Kong Customs has developed the Smart Customs Interactive Response System and introduced today (December 29) the Virtual Customs Ambassador, XiaoHui.

Combined with artificial intelligence (AI) technology, natural language processing, machine learning, etc, XiaoHui will handle general enquiries in relation to Customs work in real time from members of the public and travellers, and provide them with information on control points. In the first phase, XiaoHui will be in service at Hong Kong International Airport, the Heung Yuen Wai Control Point, the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge Hong Kong Port and the West Kowloon Station of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link. In the meantime, XiaoHui is also providing services on the Customs Homepage.

"Travellers can choose to make enquiries verbally to XiaoHui in Cantonese, Putonghua or English. The system will then analyse the gist of the questions using AI technology, natural language processing, etc, and provide an instant and appropriate response. In addition, the system will also make use of machine learning to enhance the comprehension capability for enquiries with a view to raising the overall performance," said the Assistant Staff Officer of the Information Systems Development Division of the Office of Information Technology of Customs, Mr Ng Wai-ming.

"Hong Kong Customs is working on extending the service to other control points by the end of 2024, as well as various social media platforms of Customs, such as WeChat, to help travellers from the Mainland and around the world," he added.

With a view to enhancing the law enforcement capability and service standard, Hong Kong Customs will continue to optimise the use of technology with the latest and most appropriate techniques to cope with the development of the department.