

[Hong Kong Customs seizes suspected smuggled computer RAM units \(with photo\)](#)

Hong Kong Customs yesterday (December 13) mounted an anti-smuggling operation at the Shenzhen Bay Control Point and detected a suspected smuggling case involving a cross-boundary private car and seized 25,840 suspected smuggled computer RAM units with a total estimated market value of about \$3.87 million.

Through risk assessment, Customs officers yesterday intercepted an outbound private car which was claimed to have nothing to declare at the Shenzhen Bay Control Point, and seized the batch of suspected smuggled computer RAM units inside the vehicle.

A 40-year-old male driver was arrested and charged with one count of attempting to export unmanifested cargo.

Smuggling is a serious offence. Under the Import and Export Ordinance, any person found guilty of importing or exporting unmanifested cargo is liable to a maximum fine of \$2 million and imprisonment for seven years.

Customs will continue to combat smuggling activities by use of cross-boundary private cars with firm enforcement action based on risk assessment and intelligence analysis.

Members of the public may report any suspected smuggling 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).



[HKMA's Response to US Fed's Interest Rate Decision](#)

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

The Federal Open Market Committee of the United States Federal Reserve (the Fed) announced early today (Hong Kong time) after its two-day meeting that it had decided to keep the target range for the federal funds rate unchanged at 5.25-5.5 per cent.

The market generally interpreted the Fed's rate decision as interest rates nearing the peak, with a slightly larger extent of rate cuts next year than previously expected. Nevertheless, the Fed's future interest rate decisions will continue to be dependent on the latest economic data and the impact of continual rate hikes on the economy during the past year or so. There remains uncertainty in the interest rate path and the high interest rate environment may last for some time.

The financial and monetary markets of Hong Kong continue to operate in a smooth and orderly manner. The Hong Kong dollar exchange rate remains stable, and the Hong Kong dollar interbank rates might remain high for some time. The public should carefully assess and manage the relevant risks when making property purchase, mortgage or other borrowing decisions. The HKMA will continue to closely monitor market developments and maintain monetary and financial stability.

[Hong Kong's booming gaming market draws Japanese amusement facility operator to city \(with photos\)](#)

Invest Hong Kong (InvestHK) announced today (December 14) that it has supported a Japanese company, TAITO CORPORATION (TAITO), which has over 40 years of experience in running amusement facilities, to open its first franchised outlet, TAITO STATION, in Hong Kong.

InvestHK, the department that is tasked to assist Mainland and foreign companies setting up or expanding in Hong Kong, welcomed the company joining the city's dynamic entertainment industry. The Associate Director-General of Investment Promotion, Dr Jimmy Chiang, said that it shows a vote of

confidence in Hong Kong as an ideal destination for doing business.

Dr Chiang said, "We are happy to see another Japanese premium brand secure its foothold in Hong Kong. It brings not only the newest gaming expertise from Japan but also creates partnership opportunities for local companies. We wish it every success and beyond."

Established in 1953, TAITO is a Tokyo-based amusement facility operator with 158 outlets in Japan. To mark its 70th anniversary, the company decided to extend its reach to Hong Kong, according to the General Manager of Franchise and Entertainment Rental Business Division at TAITO, Mr Hiroshi Kunimatsu.

He said, "We believe that Hong Kong is a very attractive market with great potential for growth in the future. Hong Kong customers' spending power is very high and they love Japanese animation. There are many Japanese brands and businesses that have already set up their presence in the city. We want to seize the opportunities to raise the awareness of the TAITO STATION brand in Hong Kong and the region so that our customers can enjoy our quality services in Hong Kong, and when they visit Japan in the future, they will play and have fun at our amusement centres in Japan as well."

The first Hong Kong outlet is located in a landmark shopping mall in Tsuen Wan and occupies around 3 500 square feet. Mr Kunimatsu said that it offers more than 40 game machines with prizes featuring characters from popular animation and games, bringing happiness and joy to children and families in the city.

To get a copy of the photos, please visit www.flickr.com/photos/investhk/albums/72177720313318414.

For more information about TAITO, please visit www.taito.co.jp/en.



Ombudsman announces results of direct investigation into repairs and maintenance of outdoor recreational and sports facilities under Leisure and Cultural Services Department (with photo)

The following is issued on behalf of the Office of The Ombudsman:

The Ombudsman, Ms Winnie Chiu, today (December 14) announced the completion of a direct investigation into the repairs and maintenance of outdoor recreational and sports facilities under the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD).

The investigation by the Office of The Ombudsman revealed that the LCSD had formulated guidelines regarding its outdoor recreational and sports facilities for instructing frontline staff to regularly inspect the facilities and submit reports on damage as soon as possible so that repairs can be arranged. Nevertheless, between 2017 and 2021, it took the LCSD on average two-and-a-half to three months from the day of receiving a damage report to confirm the completion of repairs of the facility in question. Between 2018 and 2022, about a quarter to half of the repair works completed by LCSD contractors involved their failure to complete the repairs by the expected works completion date. Delay in repair works was rather serious.

"As the management authority for a huge number of outdoor recreational and sports facilities, the LCSD has a duty to ensure that the facilities are in good condition and arrange for their timely repairs and maintenance so that they can be used by the public safely for a sustained period. The Office's investigation found that some LCSD frontline staff had failed to discover during day-to-day inspections some prolonged or serious damage in facilities and report them in a timely manner. Furthermore, there are inadequacies and therefore room for improvement in the LCSD's procedures for arranging repairs for facilities and monitoring contractors' performance," Ms Chiu noted.

The Office has made 11 recommendations for improvement to the LCSD. For example, it should formulate practice guides and improve the current routine inspection form to assist frontline staff to inspect facilities thoroughly and judge accurately the damage spotted; strengthen facility inspection training for frontline staff to heighten their awareness about implementing temporary safety measures for damaged facilities or cordoning off those facilities; follow up closely on the development of the computer system designed for facility inspection and repair records so that in the future,

staff can inspect in real time the relevant records and follow up on the repairs for facilities in a timely manner; review the current term contract arrangement and in the long run explore options that allow more flexible arrangements for facility repairs by contractors; and consider making use of smart technology to facilitate reports of damaged facilities by the public.

The LCSD has in general accepted the Office's recommendations.

The full investigation report has been uploaded to the website of the Office of The Ombudsman at www.ombudsman.hk for public inspection.



Office of The Ombudsman announces results of direct investigation into Food and Environmental Hygiene Department's regulation over sale of food in hot/cold holding and non-prepackaged beverages by means of vending machine

The following is issued on behalf of the Office of The Ombudsman:

The Ombudsman, Ms Winnie Chiu, today (December 14) announced the completion of a direct investigation into the regulation by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) over the sale of food in hot/cold holding and non-prepackaged beverages by means of vending machine, and made 10 recommendations for improvement to the FEHD.

In recent years, more and a wider variety of vending machines selling food in hot/cold holding and non-prepackaged beverages are emerging on the market. As at the end of September 2023, there were 489 vending machines in Hong Kong with a vending machine permit (VM Permit) issued by the FEHD under the Food Business Regulation to sell the above-mentioned types of food. The investigation by the Office of The Ombudsman reveals that some permit holders have not complied stringently with the licensing requirements and conditions imposed by the FEHD, and there is room for improvement on the part of the FEHD in its regulatory work when approving applications for VM Permits and monitoring licensed vending machines.

Ms Chiu said, "The FEHD issues permits to operators of vending machines for the purpose of protecting food safety and public health. This Office considers that the FEHD should act pre-emptively to ensure the effectiveness of its regulatory measures amid the growth of this business mode. Summing up our findings, we urge the FEHD to improve the record keeping for approval of VM Permits, step up monitoring of licensed vending machines, and enhance public awareness of the regulation over vending machines through publicity, thereby protecting food safety and public health."

The Office's recommendations made to the FEHD are:

- require VM Permit applicants to submit information about the devices and operation of vending machines and keep it in the case files;
- update existing guidelines with instructions to staff on how to compile specific records of pre-approval inspection;
- beef up the licensing conditions with clear and specific details on temperature control, machine cleansing and sterilisation, and record keeping;
- explore stepping up random checks on permit holders' records of temperature control and machine cleansing and sterilisation as part of its monitoring work;
- explore the feasibility of more proactive bacteriological testing of food and beverages sold by means of vending machine, thereby reinforcing licensing control;
- step up publicity to raise public awareness of licensed vending machines and relevant licensing conditions;
- revise licensing requirements such that permit holders shall display the VM Permit or its copy on the outside of machines, and disseminate information about the licensing requirements/conditions imposed on vending machines to facilitate public monitoring of their compliance;
- require all vending machines of food under temperature control to be fitted with an externally readable thermometer or to provide relevant information;
- review the List of Permitted Premises available on the FEHD website to ensure that the addresses listed thereon are sufficient for the public to locate the vending machines; and
- from the perspective of food safety, provide organisations dispensing free food by self-service machines with important information and good practices for safeguarding public hygiene and health.

The FEHD has accepted all of the improvement recommendations.

The full investigation report is available on the website of the Office of The Ombudsman at www.ombudsman.hk for public viewing.