

Expert Group on Conservation for Sha Lo Tung convenes first meeting (with photo)

The Expert Group on Conservation for Sha Lo Tung convened the first meeting today (June 14). The Expert Group focused the discussion on the priority tasks to conserve the ecology and biodiversity of Sha Lo Tung.

At the meeting, officers from the Countryside Conservation Office of the Environment and Ecology Bureau and the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department briefed the Expert Group on the implementation status of the past and current conservation work at Sha Lo Tung. The Expert Group focused the discussion on the priority tasks that need to be implemented to maintain and enhance the rich ecology of Sha Lo Tung, including restoring key wetland habitats through studies to improve the hydrological regime and conducting more comprehensive environmental and ecological baseline surveys. The Expert Group is of the opinion that these measures will be beneficial for enhancing the biodiversity of Sha Lo Tung.

The Convener of the Expert Group, Professor Lam Kin-che, said, "Sha Lo Tung has very high ecological value, ranking second among the 12 Priority Sites for Enhanced Conservation under the New Nature Conservation Policy. The Expert Group considered that proactive conservation measures are necessary to maintain the freshwater wetland habitats of Sha Lo Tung. The Expert Group will render full support to the Government in formulating and implementing the long-term strategies for conserving Sha Lo Tung."

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The Expert Group was established on March 1, 2024, to assist the Government in mapping out the long-term strategies for the conservation of ecology and biodiversity in Sha Lo Tung, advise the Government on measures to promote scientific research and eco-recreation in Sha Lo Tung, steer the implementation of conservation studies and projects carried out in Sha Lo Tung, etc. Members of the Expert Group include experts and scholars from fields of nature conservation or related sectors involved in promoting conservation work, as well as representatives of the relevant government bureau and department. The membership of the Expert Group is set out in the Annex.



[100 kindergartens from Guangdong and Hong Kong participate in sister kindergarten exchange programme and annual exchange activity \(with photos\)](#)

The Education Bureau (EDB) of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) and the Department of Education of Guangdong Province today (June 14) held the Guangdong-Hong Kong Sister Kindergarten Exchange Programme Signing Ceremony and Annual Exchange Activity. A total of 100 kindergartens from Guangdong Province and Hong Kong participated.

The Secretary for Education, Dr Choi Yuk-lin; Deputy Director-General of the Department of Education of Guangdong Province Mr Feng Wei; the First-level Inspector of the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the HKSAR, Mr Liu Maozhou; and Vice President of the Education University of Hong Kong (EdUHK) Ms Sarah Wong officiated at the Signing Ceremony and Annual Exchange Activity. Together with the Permanent Secretary for Education, Ms Michelle Li, Dr Choi and Mr Feng also witnessed the signing of the Agreement on the Guangdong-Hong Kong Sister Kindergarten Learning Circle by representatives of the kindergartens from Guangdong Province and Hong Kong.

Speaking at the ceremony, Dr Choi said President Xi Jinping had said that Chinese civilisation is extensive and profound, and has a long history stretching back to antiquity. It is the unique cultural identity of the Chinese nation and the foundation of the contemporary Chinese culture. Kindergarten education is an important stage of children's growth and a key period for cultivating their cultural literacy and sense of national identity. It helps children understand and appreciate Chinese culture from an early age, build a sense of belonging to and a pride of their country, and enhance their sense of national identity.

Following the signing ceremony, a professional seminar was held by the EDB of the Government of the HKSAR and the Department of Education of Guangdong Province in collaboration with the EdUHK to explore how to promote Chinese culture to kindergarten students in diversified modes such as music, languages and curriculum. Scholars from the EdUHK and kindergarten principals from Guangdong Province shared their research findings and exchanged practical experiences with the sector. Over 2 400 kindergarten principals, teachers, academics and experts from Hong Kong and different cities in Guangdong Province participated in person and online in parallel.

In addition, delegates of the Department of Education of Guangdong Province and representatives from kindergartens of Guangdong Province visited five local kindergartens in groups this morning to conduct in-depth exchanges

on learning and teaching with Hong Kong kindergarten principals and teachers.

The EDB of the Government of the HKSAR and the Department of Education of Guangdong Province have been running the Guangdong-Hong Kong Sister Kindergarten Exchange Programme since this school year to strengthen connection between the Mainland and Hong Kong in early childhood education, with a focus on fostering professional exchanges and collaboration between teachers from the two places, and enhancing the quality of kindergarten education. Participating kindergartens will form a Guangdong-Hong Kong sister kindergarten learning circle and launch various professional exchange activities through different channels and in diversified modes to further raise the professionalism of teachers in both places.



[Women Empowerment Fund invites 2024-25 first-round applications](#)

The Women Empowerment Fund is open for the first round of applications this year starting from today (June 14) until July 15. The Fund subsidises projects that support women in juggling their jobs and family life, bring awareness to women's physical and mental health, and unleash their potential.

Set up in June 2023, the Fund aims to empower women, regardless of their age, occupation and background, to unlock their full potential in their

respective roles, ultimately achieving the goal of promoting women's development in Hong Kong.

The Fund is divided into general and thematic projects. The funding cap of each one-year and two-year general project is \$400,000 and \$800,000 respectively. Starting from this year, the Fund has regularised the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Exchange Programme under the thematic project. Each exchange programme shall be completed within one year and the funding cap is \$120,000.

In addition, a new thematic project, the Programme on Women's Participation in Community Services, will be launched this year. It aims to encourage women to make use of their own strengths to plan and launch community service projects, thereby promoting care and inclusion. Each community services programme shall be completed within one year and the funding cap is \$400,000.

The Fund accepts two rounds of applications each year. The Guide to Application and the application form have been uploaded to the Fund's website (www.wef.gov.hk). Interested eligible women's groups and non-governmental organisations may submit an electronic or paper application.

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

The Immigration Department (ImmD) mounted a series of territory-wide anti-illegal worker operations codenamed "Contribute" and "Twilight", and joint operations with the Hong Kong Police Force codenamed "Champion" and "Windsand", for three consecutive days from June 11 to yesterday (June 13). A total of five suspected illegal workers and four suspected employers were arrested.

During the anti-illegal worker operations, ImmD Task Force officers raided 101 target locations including premises under renovation, residential buildings and restaurants. Four suspected illegal workers and four suspected employers were arrested. The arrested suspected illegal workers comprised three men and one woman, aged 38 to 54. The arrested woman was also suspected of using and being in possession of a forged Hong Kong identity card. Three men and one woman, aged 44 to 61, were suspected of employing the illegal workers and were also arrested.

During operation "Champion", enforcement officers raided 16 target locations in the Central district. One suspected illegal female worker, aged 59, was arrested. The arrested woman was also suspected of using and being in possession of a forged Hong Kong identity card.

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.



[Technical Adjustment to Mortgage Insurance Programme](#)

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

In light of the technical adjustments made by the Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) today (June 14) to the countercyclical macroprudential measures announced on February 28, 2024, and other related supervisory requirements, HKMC Insurance Limited (HKMCI) announces that the applicability of the current eligibility criteria (Note) of the Mortgage Insurance Programme (MIP) will be correspondingly broadened to all mortgage insurance applications for owner-occupied residential properties in the primary market, irrespective of the execution dates of the relevant provisional sale and purchase agreements. The adjustment takes immediate effect.

This technical adjustment to the MIP can assist buyers with home ownership needs but in genuine hardship (including some homebuyers who bought residential properties under construction in recent years and opted for stage payment plans) to take out mortgage loans at higher loan-to-value ratios.

For public enquiries, please call the MIP Hotline at 2536 0136.

Note: This refers to the eligibility criteria of the MIP as amended by the HKMCI on July 7 and September 22, 2023.