

[Hong Kong Customs seizes suspected smuggled goods worth about \\$1.8 million \(with photo\)](#)

Hong Kong Customs yesterday (March 20) mounted an anti-smuggling operation at the Lok Ma Chau Control Point and detected a suspected smuggling case involving a cross-boundary lorry. About 44 000 pieces of metal parts, about 32 000 pieces of computer parts, about 9 300 pieces of equipment parts, about 380 pieces of mobile phone parts, about 200 units of network equipment and about 200 pieces of clothing, with a total estimated market value of about \$1.8 million, were seized.

Customs officers yesterday intercepted an inbound lorry declared as carrying Bluetooth headsets at the Lok Ma Chau Control Point. Upon inspection, the batch of suspected smuggled goods was seized inside the cargo compartment of the lorry. A 54-year-old male driver was arrested and was put on bail pending further investigation.

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

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.

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).



Monthly gravidtrap index for Aedes albopictus mosquitoes of February remains at lowest level

The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) today (March 21) announced that the monthly gravidtrap index for Aedes albopictus mosquitoes in February dropped further to 0.2 per cent from 0.3 per cent in January. The index in February remained at the lowest Level 1, indicating that the distribution of Aedes albopictus mosquitoes in the areas surveyed was not extensive.

All the 64 survey areas were recorded with a gravidtrap index lower than the alert level of 20 per cent. Moreover, the monthly density index for Aedes albopictus in February remained at 1.1, which represented that an average of 1.1 Aedes albopictus adults were found in the Aedes-positive gravidtraps, indicating that the number of adult Aedes albopictus was not abundant in the survey areas. The gravidtrap and density indices for Aedes albopictus in different survey areas as well as information on mosquito prevention and control measures are available on the department website at www.fehd.gov.hk.

A spokesman for the FEHD said, "The Government is very concerned about mosquito infestation. The FEHD has continued to intensify the mosquito prevention and control work with relevant government departments in areas under their purview, including eliminating mosquito breeding places, applying larvicides, conducting fogging operations to eradicate adult mosquitoes, and placing mosquito trapping devices at suitable locations. The FEHD has also conducted site inspections with relevant departments, and provided them with professional advice and technical support to assist them in formulating and implementing effective anti-mosquito measures swiftly. At the same time, the FEHD has strengthened publicity and education. Under the concerted efforts and collaboration of various parties, the index in February dropped further. Although the index remains at a low level, the warm and humid weather of spring is favourable for mosquito breeding. The FEHD will continue to monitor the mosquito infestation in all districts, and will conduct prompt and effective mosquito prevention and control work. At the same time, members of the public are advised to continue the routine mosquito prevention and control work, especially the repair and maintenance of structures. Cracks and dents which may accumulate water and become potential breeding grounds should be filled and levelled so as to reduce the chance of mosquito breeding when the rainy season approaches."

The FEHD will conduct a three-phase Anti-mosquito Campaign this year. The first phase of the territory-wide campaign was launched on February 19 and just ended on March 17. During the period, the district offices of the FEHD targeted areas that have drawn particular concern, such as public markets, cooked food centres and hawker bazaars, single-block buildings, streets and back lanes, common parts of buildings, village houses, construction sites, vacant sites and road works sites, to remove accumulated

water and carry out mosquito prevention and control work. After the first phase of the campaign, the FEHD will conduct territory-wide thematic special operations on mosquito prevention and control, such as strengthening mosquito control at individual construction sites. To further enhance the effectiveness of mosquito control, the FEHD and relevant government departments will carry out phase one of the All-out Anti-mosquito Operations from March 26 to focus on eliminating potential mosquito breeding places, and called on property managements to arrange necessary repairs to their premises so as to minimise mosquito breeding places before the breeding season. Furthermore, intense adult control will follow by means of regular ultra-low volume fogging operations in the rainy season.

The FEHD appeals to members of the public to work together to carry out mosquito prevention and control measures early, including inspecting their homes and surroundings to remove potential breeding grounds, changing water in vases and scrubbing their inner surfaces, removing water in saucers under potted plants at least once a week, properly disposing of containers such as soft drink cans and lunch boxes, and drilling large holes in unused tyres. The FEHD also advises members of the public and estate management bodies to keep drains free of blockage and level all defective ground surfaces to prevent the accumulation of water. They should also scrub all drains and surface sewers with an alkaline detergent at least once a week to remove any mosquito eggs.

Aedes albopictus is a kind of mosquito that can transmit dengue fever (DF). DF is commonly found in tropical and subtropical regions of the world, and has become endemic in many countries in Southeast Asia. The dengue activity in neighbouring areas has remained high and Hong Kong has recorded 10 imported DF cases so far this year. Members of the public should stay vigilant and continue to carry out effective mosquito prevention and control measures.

[Director of Hong Kong Observatory highlights HKO's latest developments \(with photo\)](#)

The Director of the Hong Kong Observatory (HKO), Dr Chan Pak-wai, hosted a press briefing today (March 21) to recap the weather in 2023 and elaborate on the weather outlook for Hong Kong this year as well as the HKO's latest developments.

Dr Chan pointed out that 2023 was the warmest year on record globally according to the assessment of the World Meteorological Organisation. The past nine years (2015 to 2023) were also the nine warmest years on record. In

2023, the global mean sea level reached an all-time high on satellite records, reflecting continued ocean warming as well as the melting of glaciers and ice sheets.

Under climate change, different parts of the world were ravaged by various extreme weather events in 2023. Locally, with all 12 months warmer than usual, 2023 was one of the second warmest years since records began in 1884. The annual mean temperature reached 24.5 degrees, 1.0 degree above the 1991-2020 normal. The annual mean minimum temperature of 22.6 degrees and annual mean maximum temperature of 27.2 degrees were one of the highest and one of the second highest on record respectively. The total number of 54 Very Hot Days (with a daily maximum temperature of 33.0 degrees or above) ranked as one of the highest on record. In addition, the number of Hot Nights (with a daily minimum temperature of 28.0 degrees or above) was 56 days, making it the second highest on record.

Looking ahead in 2024, the tropical cyclone season in Hong Kong is expected to start in June or later and cease in October or later. There will likely be about five to eight tropical cyclones coming within 500 kilometres of Hong Kong during the year, which is normal to above normal. With ongoing climate warming, the annual mean temperature in Hong Kong is expected to be above normal this year, with a high chance of reaching the top 10 on record. The annual rainfall is expected to be near normal, ranging from 2 100 millimetres to 2 700mm. However, Hong Kong may still be affected by heavy rain. Members of the public are reminded to be prepared for the rain and tropical cyclone seasons.

Dr Chan also highlighted the continual enhancement of the HKO's various services. Seizing the opportunity made possible by the developments in artificial intelligence (AI), the HKO started piloting AI-powered weather prediction models in mid-2023 for reference in preparing weather forecasts and predicting tropical cyclone tracks. In order to enable the general public to have knowledge of future weather changes at an early stage, the HKO launched products using the "Pangu" AI weather prediction model on the "Earth Weather" webpage in October 2023, and extended the forecast range to 15 days. The HKO plans to further enhance the computer model forecast information on the "Earth Weather" webpage with forecast products of more computer models as well as weather forecast charts for the upper air. In addition, the HKO will launch monthly forecasts in the second half of this year to enhance climate forecast services. The forecast elements include monthly average temperature and total rainfall in tercile categories.

With the rainy season approaching, the HKO will further enhance the dissemination of information on severe weather situations. When the Black Rainstorm Signal is in force, the HKO will conduct hourly briefings to provide the public with the latest weather information. In addition, the HKO has just replaced the weather radar at Tai Mo Shan, and the new equipment is about to come into operation to monitor various inclement weather including thunderstorms, rainstorms and tropical cyclones.

As well, the HKO plans to enhance the service on the "MyObservatory"

mobile application and add weather information for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area in the second half of this year to enable users travelling in the region to receive the latest local weather information. Meanwhile, the "Dr. Tin" chatbot service will be upgraded to support voice functions on the "MyObservatory", making it more convenient for users to enquire about weather information.

Regarding international co-operation, the HKO will set up a virtual Meteorological Training Centre for Belt and Road Countries by the end of this year to provide online and in-person training for meteorological personnel from Belt and Road regions, enhancing their capabilities to respond to hazardous weather and extreme weather events, as well as tackle natural disasters and strengthen resilience. The first planned training will be a workshop on aviation meteorology science and service development to be held at the end of 2024. It is believed that the project can consolidate Hong Kong's position as a regional centre for meteorological advancements, and strengthen exchanges and co-operation among Belt and Road regions.

The HKO's open day will be conducted on March 23 and 24 (Saturday and Sunday) with the World Meteorological Day theme "At the frontline of climate action". It aims to raise public awareness on climate change and extreme weather, as well as encourage concrete action to combat climate change. Apart from participating in person with a valid admission ticket, members of the public can also visit the virtual tour on the Hong Kong Observatory Open Day 2024 webpage, which will be launched on March 23, to learn more about the HKO's work and services.

Dr Chan's speech at the press briefing is available on the HKO's website at www.hko.gov.hk/en/dhkovoice/files/speech20240321e.pdf.



[Employment and vacancies statistics for December 2023](#)

According to the figures released today (March 21) by the Census and Statistics Department (C&SD), total employment in the private sector surveyed

increased by 0.8% or 20 800 persons in December 2023 compared with a year earlier. The total number of vacancies was 73 070, which was similar to that a year earlier.

Employment statistics

In December 2023, the selected industries as a whole employed 2 722 800 persons. The import and export trade engaged 362 600 persons, followed by professional and business services (excluding cleaning and similar services) engaging 310 400 persons, retail trade 245 700 persons, financing and insurance 231 700 persons, and food and beverage services 224 500 persons.

Employment increased in many surveyed industries when compared with a year earlier. Increases were mainly observed in the industries of construction sites (manual workers only) (12.0% or 12 900 persons), arts, entertainment, recreation and other services (5.1% or 5 900 persons), residential care and social work services (5.0% or 3 400 persons), and education (3.5% or 7 500 persons). On the other hand, employment decreased mainly in the industries of wholesale (-6.2% or -3 200 persons), and import and export trade (-4.6% or -17 400 persons). Employment figures for selected major industries are shown in Table 1.

Vacancies statistics

Among the 73 070 private sector vacancies in December 2023, 7 920 were from the industry of education, 6 410 from human health services, 6 150 from professional and business services (excluding cleaning and similar services), 6 100 from food and beverage services, and 5 500 from residential care and social work services.

Movements in the vacancies in different surveyed industries varied when compared with a year earlier. Decreases in vacancies were mainly recorded in the industries of transportation, storage, postal and courier services (-2 020 or -27%), import and export trade (-890 or -25%), financing and insurance (-760 or -12%), and retail trade (-590 or -10%). On the other hand, vacancies increased mainly in the industries of construction sites (manual workers only) (1 860 or 347%), and arts, entertainment, recreation and other services (780 or 17%). Job vacancies figures for selected major industries are shown in Table 2.

Analysed by major occupation category, private sector vacancies were observed mainly in the categories of service and sales workers (26 200 vacancies), professionals (12 760 vacancies), and associate professionals (10 440 vacancies). Job vacancies figures by major occupation category are shown in Table 3.

Seasonally adjusted statistics

For discerning the latest trend in employment and vacancies in the private sector, it is useful to look at changes over a three-month period in the respective seasonally adjusted figures. Compared with September 2023, the

seasonally adjusted total employment and total vacancies in the surveyed industries decreased by 0.7% and 2.7% respectively in December 2023. The changes over three-month periods in the seasonally adjusted series of employment and vacancies are shown in Table 4.

Other information

The above employment and vacancies statistics were obtained from the Quarterly Survey of Employment and Vacancies and the Quarterly Employment Survey of Construction Sites conducted by the C&SD. In the former survey, some economic activities (e.g. those dominated by self-employment, including taxi operators and hawkers) are not covered. Therefore, the respective employment and vacancies figures relate only to those selected industries included in the survey. In the latter survey on construction sites, employment and vacancies figures relate to manual workers only.

A detailed breakdown of the above statistics is published in the following reports:

"Quarterly Report of Employment and Vacancies Statistics, December 2023"
(www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/EIndexbySubject.html?pcode=B1050003&scode=452)

"Quarterly Report of Employment and Vacancies at Construction Sites, December 2023"
(www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/EIndexbySubject.html?pcode=B1050004&scode=452)

Users can browse and download these publications at the website of the C&SD.

Enquiries on more detailed employment and vacancies statistics can be directed to the Employment Statistics and Central Register of Establishments Section of the C&SD (Tel: 2582 5076 or email: employment@censtatd.gov.hk).

Hong Kong's Balance of Payments and International Investment Position statistics for fourth quarter of 2023 and whole year of 2023

The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) released today (March 21) the preliminary Balance of Payments (BoP) and International Investment Position (IIP) statistics of Hong Kong for the fourth quarter of 2023 and the whole year of 2023. This release also included the preliminary External Debt (ED) statistics of Hong Kong for the same period.

I. Balance of Payments

Hong Kong recorded a BoP deficit of \$9.1 billion (1.1% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP)) in the fourth quarter of 2023. Reserve assets correspondingly decreased by the same amount. This was against a BoP surplus of \$16.1 billion (2.1% of GDP) in the third quarter of 2023.

For 2023 as a whole, there was a BoP deficit of \$79.9 billion (2.7% of GDP), compared with a deficit of \$367.2 billion (13.1% of GDP) in 2022.

Current account

The current account recorded a surplus of \$71.2 billion (9.0% of GDP) in the fourth quarter of 2023. This reflects that Hong Kong's savings was greater than its investment, enabling Hong Kong to accumulate external financial assets (such as equity securities or debt securities) as a buffer against global financial volatilities. Compared with the current account surplus of \$55.9 billion (7.6% of GDP) in the fourth quarter of 2022, the increase in surplus was mainly due to the increase in net inflow of primary income, partly offset by the switch in goods balance from surplus to deficit.

The goods account recorded a deficit of \$6.8 billion in the fourth quarter of 2023, as against a surplus of \$2.8 billion in the same quarter of 2022. Over the same period, the services surplus decreased slightly from \$27.4 billion to \$27.3 billion. The primary income inflow and outflow amounted to \$475.2 billion and \$420.3 billion respectively, thus yielding a net inflow of \$55.0 billion in the fourth quarter of 2023, compared with a net inflow of \$29.4 billion in the same quarter of 2022.

For 2023 as a whole, the current account surplus was \$276.8 billion (9.3% of GDP), smaller than that of \$286.1 billion (10.2% of GDP) in 2022, mainly due to the increase in goods deficit, largely offset by the increase in net inflow of primary income.

Financial account

An overall increase in financial non-reserve assets amounting to \$46.5 billion (5.9% of GDP) was recorded in the fourth quarter of 2023, compared with an overall increase of \$127.4 billion (16.6% of GDP) in the third quarter of 2023. The overall increase recorded in the fourth quarter of 2023 was due to the net increases in other investment and direct investment, partly offset by the net decreases in portfolio investment and financial derivatives.

In the fourth quarter of 2023, reserve assets decreased by \$9.1 billion, as against an increase of \$16.1 billion in the third quarter of 2023.

For 2023 as a whole, financial non-reserve assets recorded an overall increase of \$353.7 billion (11.8% of GDP), compared with an overall increase of \$644.0 billion (22.9% of GDP) in 2022. The overall increase recorded in 2023 was due to the net increases in portfolio investment and other investment, partly offset by the net decreases in financial derivatives and direct investment.

In 2023, reserve assets decreased by \$79.9 billion, compared with a

decrease of \$367.2 billion in 2022.

II. International Investment Position

At the end of the fourth quarter of 2023, both Hong Kong's external financial assets and liabilities stood at a very high level, amounting to \$48,301.7 billion (16.1 times of GDP) and \$34,362.3 billion (11.5 times of GDP) respectively, a typical feature of a prominent international financial centre.

Hong Kong's net external financial assets (i.e. assets minus liabilities) amounted to \$13,939.4 billion (4.7 times of GDP) at the end of the fourth quarter of 2023, compared with \$13,324.6 billion (4.5 times of GDP) at the end of the third quarter of 2023. Hong Kong's net external financial assets to GDP ratio is one of the largest in the world, which provides the economy with a strong cushion against sudden external shocks.

III. External Debt

At the end of the fourth quarter of 2023, Hong Kong's gross ED amounted to \$14,362.4 billion (4.8 times of GDP). Compared with \$14,402.4 billion (4.9 times of GDP) at the end of the third quarter of 2023, gross ED decreased by \$40.0 billion. This was mainly attributable to the decrease in debt liabilities in direct investment (intercompany lending), partly offset by the increase in ED of the banking sector.

As one of the world's major financial centres, Hong Kong has a significant amount of ED held against the local banking sector arising through normal banking businesses. At the end of the fourth quarter of 2023, 56.3% of Hong Kong's ED was attributable to the banking sector. Other ED mainly consisted of ED of other sectors (26.5%) and debt liabilities in direct investment (intercompany lending) (16.2%).

Further information

BoP is a statistical statement that systematically summarises, for a specific time period (typically a year or a quarter), the economic transactions of an economy with the rest of the world (i.e. between residents and non-residents).

IIP is a balance sheet showing the stock of external financial assets and liabilities of an economy at a particular time point. The difference between the external financial assets and liabilities is the net IIP of the economy, which represents either its net claim on or net liability to the rest of the world.

Gross ED, at a particular time point, is the outstanding amount of those actual current, and not contingent, liabilities that are owed to non-residents by residents of an economy and that require payment of principals and/or interests by the debtors at some time points in the future.

Table 1 presents Hong Kong's BoP. Table 2 presents the detailed current account and capital account, while Table 3 presents the detailed financial

account. Table 4 shows Hong Kong's IIP, and Table 5 shows Hong Kong's ED.

Statistics on BoP, IIP and ED for the fourth quarter of 2023 and the whole year of 2023 are preliminary figures, which are subject to revision upon the availability of more data.

A new sign convention has been adopted for BoP statistics since June 2023. From then on: (i) debit entries in the current account and the capital account are switched from negative to positive figures; (ii) increases in assets and liabilities in the financial account are both indicated by positive figures; and (iii) the capital account and the financial account are no longer presented as a combined account. This sign convention complies with the international standards set out in the Sixth Edition of the Balance of Payments and International Investment Position Manual. It ensures consistency with national accounts and IIP statistics, and provides a simpler interpretation for BoP statistics.

The latest statistical tables of BoP (including seasonally adjusted current account), IIP and ED can be downloaded at the website of the C&SD (www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/scode260.html). Analysis of the statistics, together with the conceptual and methodological details, are presented in the publication Balance of Payments, International Investment Position and External Debt Statistics of Hong Kong, Fourth Quarter 2023 published by the C&SD. Users can download the publication at the website of the C&SD (www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/EIndexbySubject.html?pcode=B1040001&scode=260).

For enquiries about the BoP, IIP and ED statistics, please contact the Balance of Payments Section of the C&SD (Tel: 3903 6979 or email: bop@censtatd.gov.hk).