

Red flags hoisted at some beaches

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 (March 14) that due to big waves, red flags have been hoisted at Stanley Main Beach and Big Wave Bay Beach in Southern District, Hong Kong Island; and Silverstrand Beach and Clear Water Bay Second Beach in Sai Kung District. Beachgoers are advised not to swim at these beaches.

Judiciary holds eighth Judicial Seminar on Commercial Litigation

The following is issued on behalf of the Judiciary:

The Judiciary of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) is cohosting the eighth Judicial Seminar on Commercial Litigation with the Supreme Court of New South Wales of Australia and the Supreme Court of Singapore in Hong Kong today (March 14) and tomorrow (March 15).

This year's Seminar is attended by four Chief Justices and 30 other senior judges from 10 jurisdictions throughout Asia and the Pacific region. Apart from the hosting jurisdictions, senior judges from the Federal Court of Australia and the Supreme People's Court of Mainland China, as well as other jurisdictions including Brunei Darussalam, New Zealand, Japan and Malaysia, also participate in the Seminar.

The Seminar this year focuses on legal issues associated with cross-border insolvency, cryptocurrency, illegality, and other topical aspects of commercial litigation. The Seminar also examines different ways in which courts of different jurisdictions may enhance procedural justice and efficiency.

In his opening address delivered at the Seminar today, Chief Justice Andrew Cheung Kui-ning, Chief Justice of the Court of Final Appeal of the HKSAR, extended his warmest welcome to all participants, saying that the Judiciary of the HKSAR was honoured to have the Seminar held in Hong Kong.

Chief Justice Cheung said, with the framework of commercial law in place, rights are protected, relationships are established, conduct is

regulated, risk is predictable and minimised, disputes can be resolved, business can grow, consumers can be protected and fair competition is promoted. On the international level, this is crucial for ensuring growth and economic integration.

The two-day Seminar provides a convenient forum for senior judges of the participating jurisdictions to exchange views and share experiences in relation to best practices in the management of commercial and corporate litigation, and facilitates mutual understanding of matters relating to cross-border commercial activities. It also helps strengthen ties among the participants and build up their legal expertise in meeting new challenges that commercial disputes continue to present to them.

The Judicial Seminar on Commercial Litigation is an event convened jointly by the courts of the HKSAR, Singapore and New South Wales generally every two to three years. The three jurisdictions take turns to hold the Seminar. It is the third time for Hong Kong to hold the Seminar, with two previous editions in 2010 and 2016. The last Seminar was held virtually by the Supreme Court of Singapore in 2022.

HKSAR Government strongly condemns deliberate smearing and divisive act by anti-China organisation “Hong Kong Watch” on Basic Law Article 23 legislation

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government on March 13 expressed its strongest condemnation against the statement by anti-China organisation "Hong Kong Watch" together with 16 co-signatories, which deliberately misled the public and smeared the requirement on "disclosure of commission by others of offence of treason" in the Basic Law Article 23 legislation that it targets religions, attempting to provoke discontent among religious personnel and followers against the legislation.

A spokesman for the Government said, "The offences of treason and misprision of treason, no matter in Hong Kong or in other common law jurisdictions, have existed for a long time. They do not target religious personnel or followers, and have nothing to do with freedom of religion. In any case, freedom of religion is not for protecting anyone who has committed serious offences from legal sanctions. Besides, 'Hong Kong Watch' has omitted to mention an important fact, i.e. Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (which was based on Article 18 of the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights) clearly stipulates that freedom of religion may be subject to limitations to protect public safety, order, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

"The HKSAR Government has proposed to codify the offence of misprision of treason under the common law as the requirement on 'disclosure of commission by others of offence of treason' with appropriate enhancement. However, anti-China organisation 'Hong Kong Watch' and the co-signatories forcibly linked the relevant requirement to freedom of religion to, on one hand, smear the legislative work using religion as a pretext and, on the other hand, attempt to provoke the repulsion of the religious personnel and followers against the HKSAR Government. They even made demagogic and exaggerated remarks in an attempt to mislead the international community into believing that the proposal by the HKSAR Government runs contrary to the international standard, thereby creating a negative impression of the Basic Law Article 23 legislation, demonstrating their malicious intention. It is necessary for the HKSAR Government to express its strongest condemnation.

"First, ordinary citizens, regardless of whether they are religious personnel or followers or not, would absolutely not commit treason. Treason is an extremely serious and very rare offence endangering national security, which will only be violated in extreme conditions, including levying war against China, or instigating a foreign country to invade China with force. If a person really conducts such acts and activities, it would be absolutely reasonable, necessary and justified to request the Chinese citizen who knows about the acts to disclose the commission of the offence to the law enforcement agencies of the HKSAR, so that the law enforcement agencies can take timely enforcement actions in accordance with the law to protect the lives and property of the community.

"We must also point out that, misprision of treason remains a common law offence in the United Kingdom; while countries with a common law system, including the United States, Canada and Singapore, have codified the offence of misprision of treason, and the above-mentioned countries have not specify relevant exceptions. 'Hong Kong Watch' and the co-signatories have not mentioned the relevant provisions in the countries concerned before groundlessly attacking under the guise of religious matters the HKSAR Government's legislative work on safeguarding national security. It is a blatant, shameless and barbaric intervention, and is also a typical example of double standards.

"Not only is 'Hong Kong Watch' an anti-China organisation, many of its members are also anti-China and destabilising forces in the front line, who have called for so-called 'sanctions' by foreign countries against officials of the Central People's Government and the HKSAR Government repeatedly. Members of the public in Hong Kong, the religious sector and the international community should see the organisation in its true colours and not to be misled by its erroneous remarks with ulterior motives."

HKETO Jakarta celebrates Year of the Dragon in Manila

The Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office, Jakarta (HKETO Jakarta) hosted a Chinese New Year dinner in Manila, the Philippines, today (March 13) to welcome the Year of the Dragon. Some 180 guests from the local government, business, academic, cultural and media sectors attended.

In her welcoming speech, the Director-General of the HKETO Jakarta, Miss Libera Cheng, said that the Philippines is one of Hong Kong's top five trading partners in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Bilateral trade in goods amounted to US\$13.8 billion last year, posting positive growth vis-à-vis the 2019 level, despite the impact of the pandemic, demonstrating the resilience of the economic and trade ties between the two places.

"Following the full entry into force of the Free Trade Agreement between Hong Kong and ASEAN (FTA) in 2021, Hong Kong has signed the First Protocol to Amend the FTA (the Protocol) in January this year to update the Product Specific Rules of origin under the FTA by enhancing their coverage to almost 600 categories of products. We are glad that the Secretary of Trade and Industry of the Philippines also signed the Protocol last month, thereby injecting new impetus to Hong Kong's economic and trade ties with the Philippines and ASEAN as a whole.

"The Philippines is Hong Kong's largest source of tourism in ASEAN. We received some 86 000 tourists from the Philippines in January this year, representing a remarkable increase of 25 per cent vis-à-vis the same period in 2019. The Financial Secretary has introduced a series of measures in the latest Budget to further enrich tourists' experiences and build the Hong Kong brand," she added.

Dignitaries joining the dinner included the Undersecretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines, Mr Jesus Domingo; the Undersecretary of the Department of Trade and Industry of the Philippines, Mr Allan Gepty; the Chinese Ambassador to the Philippines, Mr Huang Xilian; the Director of Singapore of the Hong Kong Trade Development Council, Ms Vivienne Chee, and senior representatives from major business chambers in the Philippines.

With the support of the Airport Authority Hong Kong and airlines, the HKETO Jakarta also arranged a lucky draw session during the dinner to give out round-trip air tickets between Manila and Hong Kong.

The HKETO Jakarta will be hosting another event in Cebu, the Philippines, next Monday (March 18) to celebrate the Chinese New Year.

Hong Kong Customs raids two suspected illicit cigarette storage centres (with photos)

Hong Kong Customs today (March 13) conducted anti-illicit cigarette operations in Sham Shui Po and Kwun Tong respectively, and shut down two suspected illicit cigarette storage centres. A total of about 210 000 suspected illicit cigarettes, with a total estimated market value of about \$1 million and a duty potential of about \$700,000, were seized.

In the first case, Customs officers seized about 40 000 suspected illicit cigarettes from a unit of a subdivided flat in Tai Nan Street, Sham Shui Po, this morning. A 89-year-old man who claimed to be unemployed and is suspected to be connected with the case was arrested.

In the second case, Customs officers in the same morning further seized about 170 000 suspected illicit cigarettes from a residential unit of a tenement building in Shung Yan Street, Kwun Tong. A 58-year-old woman who claimed to be unemployed and is suspected to be connected with the case was arrested.

The two arrested persons have been charged with "dealing with goods to which the Dutiable Commodities Ordinance applies". The 89-year-old man and the 58-year-old woman will appear at the West Kowloon Magistrates' Courts on March 27 and the Kwun Tong Magistrates' Courts on April 18 respectively.

Customs reminds members of the public that it is an offence to buy or sell illicit cigarettes. Under the Dutiable Commodities Ordinance, anyone involved in dealing with, possession of, selling or buying illicit cigarettes commits an offence. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$1 million and imprisonment for two years.

Members of the public may report any suspected illicit cigarette 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/).

