

[Hong Kong Customs detects smuggling case involving about 1.2 tonnes of suspected scheduled dried shark fins by river trade vessel \(with photos\)](#)

Hong Kong Customs on February 27 mounted an anti-smuggling operation in the north-western waters of Hong Kong and detected a suspected case of using a river trade vessel to smuggle goods in the waters off Black Point. About 1.2 tonnes of suspected scheduled dried shark fins with an estimated market value of about \$6.4 million were seized.

During an anti-smuggling operation conducted in the above-mentioned waters on that day, Customs officers intercepted a river trade vessel heading towards Macao. After inspection, Customs officers found the batch of suspected scheduled dried shark fins deep within one of the containers on board the vessel.

An investigation is ongoing.

Under the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance, any person found guilty of importing or exporting an endangered species without a required licence is liable to a maximum fine of \$10 million and imprisonment for 10 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).



Interest rate of third interest payment for Silver Bond Series due 2025

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

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority, as representative of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government, announced today (February 29) the relevant per annum interest rate for the third interest payment of Silver Bond Series due 2025 (Issue Number 03GB2509R) (the Bonds) issued under the Retail Bond Issuance Programme of the Government Bond Programme.

According to the Issue Circular dated August 9, 2022, for the Bonds, the third interest payment of the Bonds is scheduled to be made on March 14, 2024, and the relevant interest rate is scheduled to be determined and announced on February 29, 2024, as the higher of the prevailing Floating Rate and Fixed Rate.

On February 29, 2024, the Floating Rate and Fixed Rate are as follows:

Floating Rate: +2.20 per cent (Annex)

Fixed Rate: +4.00 per cent

Based on the Floating Rate and Fixed Rate set out above, the relevant interest rate for the third interest payment is determined and announced as 4.00 per cent per annum.

“Report on the Survey on Information Technology Usage and Penetration in the Business Sector for 2023” published

The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) released today (February 29) the "Report on the Survey on Information Technology Usage and Penetration in the Business Sector for 2023".

The publication contains findings of the Survey on Information Technology Usage and Penetration in the Business Sector for 2023 conducted during March to December 2023. The survey collected information on various

topics, including business use of computers, smartphones and the Internet, web presence of business, electronic commerce, information technology security and business use of information and communication technology.

Findings of the survey revealed that 98% of the establishments in the business sector used computers and/or smartphones for business purposes and 48% had a web presence in 2023. The proportions of establishments using computers and/or smartphones for business purposes and those proportions with a web presence were relatively higher for large and medium establishments than small establishments. The proportion of establishments with a web presence was the highest in the information and communications sector (84%) and lowest in the construction sector (31%).

Detailed findings of the survey, together with survey methodology and definitions of key terms, are presented in the publication. Users can browse and download the publication at the website of the C&SD (www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/EIndexbySubject.html?pcode=B1110005&scode=590).

Enquiries about the survey findings can be directed to the Science and Technology Statistics Section of the C&SD (Tel: 3903 7291 or email: itsurvey@censtatd.gov.hk).

[Financial results for 10 months ended January 31, 2024](#)

The Government announced today (February 29) its financial results for the 10 months ended January 31, 2024.

There was a surplus of HK\$41.4 billion in the month of January. Expenditure for the 10-month period amounted to HK\$589.4 billion and revenue HK\$421.9 billion, with the cumulative year-to-date deficit at HK\$100.9 billion after taking into account the proceeds of HK\$66.6 billion received from issuance of green bonds under the Government Green Bond Programme (Green Bond).

The fiscal reserves stood at HK\$733.9 billion as at January 31, 2024.

Taking into account the forecast revenue and expenditure for the remaining two months, the deficit for the 2023-24 financial year is expected to be HK\$101.6 billion and the fiscal reserves are estimated to be HK\$733.2 billion as at the end of March 2024.

Detailed figures are shown in Tables 1 and 2.

TABLE 1. CONSOLIDATED ACCOUNT (Note 1)

	Month ended January 31, 2024 HK\$ million	10 months ended January 31, 2024 HK\$ million
Revenue	101,398.2	421,875.8
Expenditure	(59,962.4)	(589,372.0)
Surplus/(Deficit) before issuance of Green Bond	41,435.8	(167,496.2)
Proceeds received from issuance of Green Bond	–	66,632.0
Surplus/(Deficit) after issuance of Green Bond	41,435.8	(100,864.2)
Financing		
Domestic		
Banking Sector (Note 2)	(39,936.0)	98,065.0
Non-Banking Sector	(1,499.8)	2,799.2
External	–	–
Total	(41,435.8)	100,864.2

Government Debts as at January 31, 2024 (Note 3)

HK\$187,800 million

Debts Guaranteed by Government as at January 31, 2024 (Note 4)

HK\$146,844 million

TABLE 2. FISCAL RESERVES

	Month ended January 31, 2024 HK\$ million	10 months ended January 31, 2024 HK\$ million
Fiscal Reserves at start of period	692,489.8	834,789.8
Consolidated Surplus/(Deficit) after issuance of Green Bond	41,435.8	(100,864.2)

Fiscal Reserves at end of period (Note 5)	733,925.6	733,925.6

Notes:

1. This Account consolidates the General Revenue Account and the following eight Funds: Capital Works Reserve Fund, Capital Investment Fund, Civil Service Pension Reserve Fund, Disaster Relief Fund, Innovation and Technology Fund, Land Fund, Loan Fund and Lotteries Fund. It excludes the Bond Fund, the balance of which is not part of the fiscal reserves. The Bond Fund balance as at January 31, 2024, was HK\$294,646 million.

2. Includes transactions with the Exchange Fund and resident banks.

3. These were the Green Bonds (equivalent to HK\$187,800 million as at January 31, 2024) issued under the Government Green Bond Programme. They were denominated in US dollars (US\$9,750 million with maturity from May 2024 to January 2053), euros (4,500 million euros with maturity from January 2025 to November 2041), Renminbi (RMB30,000 million with maturity from November 2024 to June 2033) and Hong Kong dollars (HK\$40,800 million with maturity from February 2024 to October 2026). They do not include the outstanding bonds with nominal value of HK\$245,034 million and alternative bonds with nominal value of US\$1,000 million (equivalent to HK\$7,817 million as at January 31, 2024) issued under the Government Bond Programme (with proceeds credited to the Bond Fund). Of these bonds under the Government Bond Programme (including Silver Bonds with nominal value of HK\$125,034 million, which may be redeemed before maturity upon request from bond holders), bonds with nominal value of HK\$1,500 million were repaid upon maturity on February 16, 2024; bonds with nominal value of HK\$69,083 million will mature within the period from March 2024 to January 2025 and the rest within the period from February 2025 to May 2042.

4. Includes guarantees provided under the SME Loan Guarantee Scheme launched in 2001, the Special Loan Guarantee Scheme launched in 2008, the SME Financing Guarantee Scheme launched in 2012 and a commercial loan of the Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation.

5. Includes HK\$307,713 million, being the balance of the Land Fund held in the name of "Future Fund", for long-term investments up to December 31, 2030. The Future Fund also includes HK\$4,800 million, being one-third of the actual surplus in 2015-16 as top-up.

Exchange Fund Abridged Balance Sheet and Currency Board Account

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

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) announced today (February 29) that the total assets of the Exchange Fund amounted to HK\$4,046.5 billion as at January 31, 2024, HK\$28.7 billion higher than that at the end of December 2023. Foreign currency assets increased by HK\$37.3 billion while Hong Kong dollar assets decreased by HK\$8.6 billion.

The rise in foreign currency assets was mainly due to an increase in the month-end balances of unsettled purchase of securities. The decline in Hong Kong dollar assets was mainly due to mark-to-market revaluation of Hong Kong equities.

The Currency Board Account shows that the Monetary Base at the end of January 2024 was HK\$1,910.6 billion, increased by HK\$14.4 billion, or 0.8 per cent, from the end of December 2023. The increase was mainly due to increases in the outstanding amount of Certificates of Indebtedness and the market value of Exchange Fund Bills and Notes outstanding.

The amount of Backing Assets increased by HK\$20.0 billion, or 1.0 per cent, to HK\$2,119.7 billion at the end of January 2024. The increase was mainly attributable to the issuance of Certificates of Indebtedness and the interest from investments. The Backing Ratio increased from 110.73 per cent at the end of December 2023 to 110.94 per cent at the end of January 2024.

At present, four press releases relating to the Exchange Fund's data are issued by the HKMA each month. Three of these releases are issued to disseminate monetary data in accordance with the International Monetary Fund's Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS). The fourth press release, on the Exchange Fund's Abridged Balance Sheet and Currency Board Account, is made in accordance with the HKMA's policy of maintaining a high level of transparency. For the month of February 2024, the scheduled dates for issuing the press releases are as follows:

February 7 (Issued)	SDDS International Reserves (Hong Kong's Latest Foreign Currency Reserve Assets Figures)
February 15 (Issued)	SDDS Analytical Accounts of the Central Bank (Analytical Accounts of the Exchange Fund)
February 29	SDDS Template on International Reserves and Foreign Currency Liquidity
February 29	Exchange Fund Abridged Balance Sheet and Currency Board Account