

CITY

COMMUNITY

Beaches shut after palm oil washed up

Smelly, congealed clumps from spill in mainland waters mar island beauty spots

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Nearly a dozen beaches across Hong Kong were closed to the public yesterday after congealed palm oil washed up on them, having spilled into the sea when two boats crashed in mainland waters.

Local residents noticed clumps of oil on the sand, and beach workers tried to contain the mess. A similar substance was also spotted in Victoria Harbour.

Hung Shing Yeh Beach and Lo So Shing Beach on Lamma Island, as well as Lantau Island's Pui O Beach, and Tong Fuk Beach were all affected. So were both Upper and Lower Cheung Sha Beach.

Beaches at Repulse Bay, Middle Bay, South Bay and Chung Hom Kok were also shut.

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department hoisted the red flag at all 10 beaches, warning people not to go in the water. Parts of Cheung Chau were also reportedly affected.

A spokesman for the department said the closures came after "white, oily" substances were found in the waters and "a white granular substance" washed up on beaches.

"Beach staff immediately deployed oil-absorbent felts and strips to prevent the spread of the oil," the spokesman said.

A Marine Department spokesman confirmed two ships collided somewhere in the Pearl River estuary, in mainland waters, on Thursday and said that had caused some of the vessel's cargo, palm oil, to leak into the sea.

Lamma resident Sheila McClelland spotted the oil clumps in the water and on the beach and said she noticed a "faintly chemical odour" as she inspected the solid lumps.

"I pressed it with my foot and it was solid. It was a bit like playdough but not as nice," she said.

"I've lived here for a couple of decades and I've seen many forms of pollution and unpleasant stuff from oil, syringes and of course the [2012] pellet spill. But nothing like this."

In July 2012, seven containers fell from cargo ship Yong Xin Jie 1 when Typhoon Vicente hit the city. Six were loaded with 150 tonnes of plastic pellets, which washed up on Hong Kong beaches, sparking concern for marine life.

Lamma resident Stanley Chan Kam-wai, a conservation manager for the Eco-Education and Resources Centre, said cleaning up yesterday's spill could be "as difficult as, if not more difficult than, cleaning up the mess" from the 2012 incident.

He said by late afternoon the smell was starting to turn rancid like the odours in alleyways behind fried snack shops.



Angeline Lo, Mary Wong Ho-yan, Stanley Ho Wai-hong, Chow Wang-kei and Marvin Kwan Siu-yin were awarded for their courage. Photo: David Wong

Cancer survivor honoured for resilience

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As a teen, Angeline Lo Oi-shan cheated death after enduring eight months of cancer treatment.

Now cancer-free for more than 20 years, she is able to share her experience with those going through similar challenges.

"While the treatment process can be difficult, there is hope, so don't give up," Lo, who was diagnosed at the age of 11 with a rare malignant tumour of fibrous tissue, said.

The 36-year-old was one of five winners of the third Outstanding

Little Life Warriors Award, who were honoured yesterday for their courage and resilience. The awards were organised by charity group Little Life Warrior Society.

Lo said her illness came without much warning. "There were no symptoms, but when my mother was helping me wash my hair, she noticed a bump on the back of my head," she said.

She then underwent surgery at Queen Mary Hospital, where doctors removed a fibrosarcoma tumour as big as a Chinese soup bowl, along with some bones in her head. After that, she went through two to three months of chemotherapy and had another

operation to put prosthetic bones into her head.

Lo said the experience was trying, as she had to deal with painful wounds from the surgical operations, a weak body and hair loss due to chemotherapy. She also missed about half a year of school.

But Lo did not let adversity defeat her. She was instead motivated to study to become a doctor.

"A lot of doctors and nurses put in effort to counsel... young patients and their parents," she said. "It showed how they really cared about every child there."

But she faced an obstacle to her dream job. She did not do well enough in

her A-levels, the examination taken by final-year secondary school pupils at the time, and did not get into either of the two medicine schools in the city.

"I was devastated," she said. But she persevered to become the only student that year to be transferred to Chinese University's faculty of medicine after a year in the institution's journalism programme.

Lo, now a specialist in gastroenterology and hepatology at Prince of Wales Hospital, urged those waiting for university placement results today to relax, adding that a loss might turn out to be a blessing in disguise.



CITY BEAT
TAMMY TAM

Look across border for future planning

Central government set to undergo reform, which will impact Hong Kong

President Xi Jinping is in summer retreat, along with other top Communist Party leaders, after inspecting a massive, combat-ready parade at a military base in Inner Mongolia to mark the 90th anniversary of the People's Liberation Army.

While the inspection was a high-profile event for the benefit of both domestic and global audiences, the annual retreat to the Beidaihe beach resort, near the capital, is shrouded in secrecy as an important prelude to the much-anticipated 19th Party Congress later this year.

Nothing on the agenda concerns Hong Kong, but it is by no means irrelevant to the city's future, especially this time as it will shed light on China's future reform direction by finalising the tone of the coming congress.

Major policies to be decided, especially economic strategy, will profoundly impact our city.

Back in Hong Kong, it's quite amazing to see that the talk of the town is almost obsessively focused on the joint checkpoint arrangement for the new high-speed railway to Guangzhou and the appointment of the new undersecretary for education who is under attack from the opposition camp over her "red" pro-Beijing credentials.

Of course, political controversies should not be trivialised, and these two issues in particular concern cross-border ties and building trust. But our politicians should not miss the bigger picture either, and that is the importance of the Beidaihe retreat and where China's reform is heading under Xi.

The gathering is more of a brainstorming session by the nation's top leaders than a formal meeting. Besides finalising the new leadership line-up for Xi's next term, it is also to decide strategy on how to transform China into a more "powerful" country. Xi is now widely seen as joining the ranks of Mao Zedong, who put China on its feet, and Deng Xiaoping, who made the nation rich by opening it up.

Xi is determined to make China more powerful by taking reform to a new height. So, what does it mean for Hong Kong? Naturally, all eyes are watching for any possible clue from Beidaihe in terms of leadership change, which is likely to see someone take over from Zhang Dejiang as Beijing's point man for Hong Kong. Zhang is expected to retire next March.

But the congress is not just about a top-level reshuffle. How to sustain China's economic growth amid the very complex environments at home and abroad is a tough challenge. Xi's quote about "making people have a sense of gain" has

not only become a popular slogan, but also a measurement to judge the performance of officials at all levels. This means a "powerful" country should be able to let its people feel the substantial benefits of reform, while in the international arena it needs to be more assertive in protecting its national interests.

It was against such a backdrop that Chief Executive Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor led a group of her top aides, including Financial Secretary Paul Chan Mo-po, to Beijing on her first mainland visit after taking up office. One main task was to meet various ministries in charge of economic planning and development to seek greater room for more cross-border cooperation in future.

Interestingly, the timing could be seen as both convenient and inconvenient: it gave Lam and her team a feel of the latest political and economic pulse up north ahead of the party congress; but major mainland policies may be due for further adjustments after the Beidaihe meeting, and later the congress.

But there is one reality for Hong Kong: the need for officials and politicians to look across the border for future planning.

EDUCATION

HOTEL AS CLASSROOM DELIVERS IN RANKINGS

University dean reveals how aspiring hospitality professionals take up frontline staff roles to build empathy and innovate to serve visitors and city

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Learning how to make fresh salad and serving dishes as a waiter or waitress are among ways a local university trains its hospitality and tourism students to better understand the industry.

A unique educational approach and innovating to stay competitive have propelled Polytechnic University's School of Hotel and Tourism Management atop the world rankings.

The school was recently rated No 1 globally by Shanghai Ranking, which assesses universities around the world. It also took the top spot in the Centre for World University Rankings, while finishing among the first three in other lists such as the QS World University rankings.

The school currently has about 1,800 students from 48 countries, spanning Switzerland to Singapore, in doctoral, master's and bachelor's studies.

Professor Kaye Chon, a Korean national who has headed the school for 17 years, said the breakthrough came when the school built its own property called Hotel Icon for HK\$1.3 billion in 2011.

The hotel doubles as a complex that includes the school and other amenities. The set-up encourages innovation.

While serving as a real-life classroom for students, the hotel is run commercially and stands as a role model for the industry, Chon said.

"With our own hotel, the school was able to innovate in a way that was impossible if it was sending its students to practise in other hotels," he told the *Post* in an exclusive interview.

"But it took me seven years to turn the idea into Hotel Icon."

While the school teaches leadership courses in financial management and marketing, it ensures that students pick up frontline skills to empathise with operational staff and customers.

"I also know how to cut up carrots and make a salad," Chon said.

He described a student from Sri Lanka whose family owns a hotel. At the Icon, however, she works as a waitress.

"She wants to specialise in catering management and is gaining experience in our restaurant," he said. "But when she returns home, she will be a hotelier."

Chon believed it was important to understand needs on the ground, especially from tourists.

"We want to help Hong Kong. If tourists can stay longer, it will be better, so we need to give them more reasons to stay longer," he said.

The school also works closely with its advisory board, headed by Dr Jennifer Cronin, president of Wharf Hotels, to stay in touch with the industry and informed of its developments and trends.

With our own hotel, the school was able to innovate

KAYE CHON, POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY

For Chon, innovation is key to the school's value. One idea he came up with tackles a common problem facing travellers who arrive in the city on early flights and cannot check into hotels because their rooms are not ready.

"We have introduced a free lounge so that our guests can sleep, take a shower and enjoy some free refreshments like coffee," he said, noting he took inspiration from airport VIP lounges.

Other hotel features include free bars and printer services in rooms. Even if visitors do not use the perks, Chon said, he expected them to leave the experience with a good impression.

The dean recalled a student asking him if he feared his ideas would be copied.

"But that's exactly why we are innovating, so our industry will improve," Chon said.



Kaye Chon has led the school at PolyU since 2000. Photo: Edmond So

POLITICS

Time is now to change Legco rules: Ho

Pro-Beijing member wants his camp to exploit new numerical advantage

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Outspoken lawmaker Junius Ho Kwan-yiu urged his pro-establishment colleagues to seize their new-found numerical advantage to push through changes to meeting rules to end pan-democrats' delaying tactics.

Ho, a member of the Legislative Council committee on rules of procedure, said the next seven months would be the "golden time" to act, ahead of by-elections to replace six opposition lawmakers disqualified for improper oath-taking.

"I hope we, the pro-establishment members, can join forces to come up with something. Otherwise, I think I would do it on my own to propose amending the rules of procedures," said Ho, referring to media reports that Chan

Kin-por, who chairs the Finance Committee, was considering pushing for changes in the meeting rules of the committee to restrict pan-democrats.

Ho said it was the perfect time to act because the pan-democrats had "gone overboard" and the public was becoming more supportive of his camp.



Junius Ho marked a 'golden time' for his camp to act. Photo: Sam Tsang

The filibustering was in protest against the disqualification of their colleagues over their oath-taking antics, but seemed to backfire, drawing public criticism.

Common delaying tactics used by the pan-democrats include calling for quorum counts, raising non-binding motions and requesting adjournments.

Changing the rules requires majority support in both the geographic and functional constituencies, which are now both dominated by the pro-government camp after the disqualifications of the six - Lau Siu-lai, Nathan Law Kwun-chung, Leung Kwok-hung, Edward Yiu Chung-yim, Sixtus Baggio Leung Chung-hang and Yau Wai-ching - in two court rulings.

Ho said he wanted requests for adjournments of Finance Committee meetings to be limited to one each meeting - there is no cap under present rules - and no more than two quorum calls at one full council meeting.

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