

## Financial Leaders Forum convenes seventh meeting

The Financial Leaders Forum (FLF), chaired by the Financial Secretary, Mr Paul Chan, held its seventh meeting today (March 29).

Members first discussed the latest developments of the bond market in Hong Kong. They noted the steady expansion of the bond market over the past decade and the recent fast-growing green bond market, as well as the Government's efforts in boosting their development. These include enhancing market infrastructure to ensure a safe and secure environment for trading and settlement; stimulating diversified growth through government issuances; and incentivising market development through an array of supporting measures such as grants for bond issuance and tax concessions for trading. Members welcomed the Government's plan to issue inaugural government green bonds, and offered views to broaden and deepen the bond market by leveraging on its strong fundamentals.

Members were also briefed by the Securities and Futures Commission on the strategy to further develop Hong Kong's capital markets. Members agreed that Hong Kong is well positioned to capitalise on the opportunities arising from the deepening reform and opening up of the Mainland's capital markets, as well as the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

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## CS visits Transport Department

The Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, visited the Transport Department this afternoon (March 29) to learn about the department's work in effective traffic management in preparation for the upcoming typhoon season.

Accompanied by the Commissioner for Transport, Ms Mable Chan, Mr Cheung was given a briefing on the work of the Emergency Transport Co-ordination Centre (ETCC), the operation of the Traffic Control and Surveillance Systems (TCSS) and the Area Traffic Control System (ATCS), and especially how the Department maintained effective traffic management and close co-ordination with public transport operators during typhoons.

In 2018, ETCC handled some 5 300 traffic and transport related incidents. During the process, the Centre exercised immediate and appropriate co-ordination and contingency plans, and disseminated information on incidents in a timely manner.

He also observed a demonstration of the operation of the TCSS for the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge and how the ATCS could co-ordinate traffic in the area of the Central – Wan Chai Bypass.

The ATCS is a computerised system that integrates the control and operation of traffic signals within a district to assist motorists and pedestrians to cross roads and junctions safely and efficiently. For effective traffic management, the TCSS is equipped with various installations including CCTV cameras, automatic incident detectors, lane control signals, variable speed limit signs and variable message signs.

Mr Cheung was pleased with the good work of the ETCC and encouraged them to continue to co-ordinate public transport measures during typhoons while working closely with other government departments and public transport operators to respond to incidents appropriately.

He encouraged colleagues to rise to challenges with dedication and professionalism, and do their utmost to resume the city's traffic in an orderly and timely manner after typhoons.

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## **Immigration Department and Mainland authorities smash cross-boundary human smuggling syndicate (with photo)**

Following months of intelligence analysis and in-depth investigation, the Immigration Department (ImmD), working with the Guangdong Provincial Public Security Department and the Division of Exit-entry Administration of the Shenzhen Municipal Public Security Bureau (SZPSB), smashed a human smuggling syndicate in a joint operation conducted in Guangdong Province and Hong Kong on March 27.

Through continuous intelligence collection and exchange, the above-mentioned authorities detected an active cross-boundary human smuggling syndicate that specialised in arranging for Vietnamese nationals to seek illegal entry into Hong Kong via the land border.

When the syndicate was planning to smuggle illegal immigrants from Shenzhen into Hong Kong by boat on March 27, SZPSB officers took immediate action and arrested five core syndicate members, all of them Mainland residents, and two Vietnamese illegal immigrants who were about to sneak into Hong Kong. Meanwhile, acting on intelligence, ImmD officers raided 15 target locations in the territory including restaurants, food factories, residential buildings, a barbecue site and nail polish shop. A total of 17 illegal workers and seven employers were arrested. The illegal workers comprised 12

men and five women, aged 22 to 58. Among them, one man and three women were holders of recognisance forms, which prohibit them from taking any employment. Also, three of the arrestees were suspected of using and being in possession of forged Hong Kong identity cards. Three men and four women, aged 34 to 58, were suspected of employing the illegal workers.

"Any person who contravenes a condition of stay in force in respect of him 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," an ImmD spokesman said.

The spokesman warned that, as stipulated in section 38AA of the Immigration Ordinance, illegal immigrants or people who are the subject of a removal order or a deportation order are 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. The Court of Appeal has issued a guideline ruling that a sentence of 15 months' imprisonment should be applied in such cases. A person using or possessing a forged Hong Kong identity card also commits an offence. Offenders are liable to prosecution and upon conviction to a maximum fine of \$100,000 and imprisonment for 10 years.

The spokesman reiterated that it is a serious offence to employ people who are not lawfully employable. The maximum penalty is imprisonment for three years and a fine of \$350,000. 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. The maximum penalty for failing to inspect such a document is imprisonment for one year and a fine of \$150,000.

Under the laws of Hong Kong, it is an offence for any person to seek illegal entry into Hong Kong and remain without the authority of the Director of Immigration. Offenders are liable to prosecution and upon conviction to a maximum fine of \$25,000 and imprisonment for three years. Those aiding and abetting in such crimes are liable to the same penalty. Moreover, it is an offence to arrange and assist the passage to Hong Kong of a person who is an unauthorised entrant. Offenders are liable to prosecution and upon conviction to a maximum fine of \$5 million and imprisonment for 14 years.

Under the existing mechanism, the ImmD will, as a standard procedure,

conduct 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 officers will conduct a full debriefing and identification by using a standardised checklist to ascertain the presence of TIP elements, such as threat 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 interference, medical services, counselling, shelter, temporary accommodation and other supporting services. The ImmD calls on TIP victims to report crimes to the relevant departments.



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## [Voluntary Health Insurance Scheme to be fully implemented next Monday](#)

The Voluntary Health Insurance Scheme (VHIS) will be fully implemented on April 1 for consumers to "Choose with Confidence". From that day onwards, consumers may choose to purchase Certified Plans as offered by the participating insurance companies.

At the launch ceremony of the VHIS, the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, said that the VHIS will provide individual indemnity hospital insurance. To tie in with the publicity slogan "Choose with Confidence", all Certified Plans under the VHIS must meet the benefit standard prescribed by the scheme, including standardised policy terms and conditions, benefit coverage and benefit amounts. The benchmarking of the VHIS requirements should help consumers choose insurance plans suitable for themselves and their family members with confidence.

The scheme is a policy initiative to be implemented by the Food and Health Bureau to regulate indemnity hospital insurance plans offered to

individuals, with voluntary participation by insurance companies and consumers.

Certified Plans under the VHIS have a number of standard features for increasing consumers' confidence in purchasing hospital insurance, thereby facilitating their use of private healthcare services when needed. The features of Certified Plans include:

- (a) guaranteed renewal up to the age of 100 regardless of change in the health conditions of the insured persons (without reunderwriting);
- (b) no limit on "lifetime benefit";
- (c) coverage extended to cover unknown pre-existing conditions and day case surgical procedures (including endoscopy), etc;
- (d) tax deduction for taxpayers who purchase Certified Plans for themselves and/or specified relatives and pay the premium on or after April 1, 2019; and
- (e) transparency on the premiums of Certified Plans. The premium schedules are accessible on the VHIS website.

The VHIS Office will continue work on the registration of participating insurers, vetting of individual indemnity hospital insurance plans for certification of compliance status, enforcement of scheme regulations, etc. To facilitate smarter consumer choice, information on the products and premiums of Certified Plans is available on the VHIS website ([www.vhis.gov.hk](http://www.vhis.gov.hk)) and the websites of the insurance companies concerned.

Before making a decision to purchase a Certified Plan or migrate from an existing policy to a Certified Plan, consumers should consider their needs and budget, and compare products and premiums. Consumers should also study the terms and conditions carefully, and understand their rights and responsibilities.

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## [Flag-lowering ceremony cancelled](#)

Owing to the thunderstorm warning, the flag-lowering ceremony to be conducted at Golden Bauhinia Square, Wan Chai at 6pm today (March 29) will be cancelled.