

Hong Kong Customs detects largest methamphetamine trafficking case in nearly 10 years (with photos)

Hong Kong Customs seized about 110 kilograms of suspected methamphetamine with an estimated market value of about \$77 million at Hong Kong International Airport on December 5. This is the largest methamphetamine trafficking case detected by Customs since 2010, as well as a record seizure of suspected methamphetamine seized by Customs at boundary control points.

Acting on an intelligence exchange with overseas counterparts, Customs officers inspected an air consignment arriving in Hong Kong from Mexico via the United States on December 5. From three cartons of goods declared as plastic resin, the batch of suspected methamphetamine was found concealed inside 120 plastic boxes wrapped by plastic wrap and vacuum bags, and placed under a batch of plastic resin as a cover.

An investigation is ongoing.

Customs attaches great importance to combating drug trafficking activities. Between January and November this year, Customs seized about 100kg of suspected methamphetamine, representing a 19 per cent drop compared with the same period in 2018. This reflects the department's effectiveness in combating drug trafficking.

With the Christmas and New Year holidays approaching, there is a possibility that crime syndicates may increase drug trafficking in order to meet the keen demand during long holidays. Customs will further step up enforcement action to combat drug trafficking activities before the long holidays.

Under the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance, trafficking in a dangerous drug is a serious offence. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$5 million and life imprisonment.

Members of the public may report any suspected drug trafficking activities to Customs' 24-hour hotline 2545 6182 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk).



[Man fined for operating unlicensed guesthouse](#)

A man was fined \$4,500 at the Eastern Magistrates' Courts today (December 17) for contravening the Hotel and Guesthouse Accommodation Ordinance.

The courts heard that in June this year, officers of the Office of the Licensing Authority (OLA), Home Affairs Department, inspected a suspected unlicensed guesthouse on Pok Fu Lam Road in Sai Ying Pun. During the inspection, the OLA officers posed as lodgers and successfully rented a room in the guesthouse on a daily basis.

According to the OLA's records, the guesthouse did not possess a licence under the Ordinance on the day of inspection. The man responsible for operating the premises was charged with contravening section 5(1) of the Ordinance.

A department spokesman stressed that operating or managing an unlicensed guesthouse is a criminal offence and can lead to a criminal record. Upon conviction, the offender is liable to a maximum fine of \$200,000 and two years' imprisonment.

The spokesman appealed to anyone with information about suspected unlicensed guesthouses to report it to the OLA through the hotline (Tel: 2881 7498), by email (hadlaeng@had.gov.hk), by fax (2504 5805) using the report form downloaded from the OLA website (www.hadla.gov.hk), or through the mobile application "Hong Kong Licensed Hotels and Guesthouses".

TAC briefed on measures by MTRCL to cope with large-scale public order events

The following is issued on behalf of the Transport Advisory Committee:

The Transport Advisory Committee (TAC) was briefed today (December 17) on the measures and train service arrangements implemented by the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) to cope with large-scale public order events since June this year.

The Government regulates the MTRCL to provide safe railway services. Relevant government departments and the MTRCL have been closely monitoring public order events and conducted comprehensive and thorough risk assessment. In response to recent and continuous vandalism of station facilities, which has disrupted normal train operation and threatened the safety of MTRCL staff and passengers, the MTRCL has to take appropriate measures to ensure the safety of passengers, staff and the railway. Moreover, in response to recent public order events, the MTRCL has strengthened its related manpower and installed and strengthened various facilities at stations in order to enhance station security.

To ensure the safety of the railway, the relevant government departments have been in close communication with the MTRCL and have requested the MTRCL to take all necessary corresponding actions, including conducting safety risk assessments of railway stations, facilities and operations; reviewing existing designs, procedures and arrangements for handling emergencies; and making necessary improvements and conducting drills to address possible situations and minimise the possible impact on the safety of railway operations due to public order events.

The TAC Chairman, Professor Stephen Cheung, said, "Members noted the major principles governing train service arrangements during large-scale public order events, and learnt that the relevant government departments and the MTRCL would, with safety being the top priority, continue to assess the risk of upcoming public order events, make suitable operating arrangements and provide safe services to the public as far as practicable. Members welcomed the measures taken by the MTRCL to enhance station security in order to protect the safety of passengers and MTR staff, and expressed views on such measures."

Volume and price statistics of external merchandise trade in October 2019

Further to the external merchandise trade statistics in value terms for October 2019 released earlier on, the Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) released today (December 17) the volume and price statistics of external merchandise trade for that month.

In October 2019, the volume of Hong Kong's total exports of goods decreased by 9.0% over October 2018. Concurrently, the volume of imports of goods decreased by 11.6%.

Comparing the first ten months of 2019 with the same period in 2018, the volume of Hong Kong's total exports of goods decreased by 6.2%. Concurrently, the volume of imports of goods decreased by 8.3%.

Comparing the three-month period ending October 2019 with the preceding three months on a seasonally adjusted basis, the volume of total exports of goods increased by 0.7%. On the other hand, the volume of imports of goods decreased by 1.4%.

Changes in volume of external merchandise trade are derived from changes in external merchandise trade value with the effect of price changes discounted.

Comparing October 2019 with October 2018, the prices of total exports of goods decreased by 0.1%. On the other hand, the prices of imports of goods increased by 0.1%.

As regards price changes in the first ten months of 2019 over the same period in 2018, the prices of total exports of goods increased by 1.4%. Concurrently, the prices of imports of goods increased by 1.5%.

Price changes in external merchandise trade are reflected by changes in unit value indices of external merchandise trade, which are compiled based on average unit values or, for certain commodities, specific price data.

The terms of trade index is derived from the ratio of price index of total exports of goods to that of imports of goods. Compared with the same periods in 2018, the index decreased by 0.1% in October 2019, whereas it remained virtually unchanged in the first ten months of 2019.

Changes in the unit value and volume of total exports of goods by main destination are shown in Table 1.

Comparing October 2019 with October 2018, double-digit declines were recorded for the total export volume to the USA (-20.6%), Japan (-10.5%) and India (-10.2%). Concurrently, the total export volume to the mainland of

China (the Mainland) also decreased by 8.0%. On the other hand, the total export volume to Taiwan increased by 17.7%.

Over the same period of comparison, the total export prices to India (-0.9%), the USA (-0.1%) and Taiwan (-0.1%) decreased. On the other hand, the total export prices to Japan (0.5%) and the Mainland (0.8%) increased.

Changes in the unit value and volume of imports of goods by main supplier are shown in Table 2.

Comparing October 2019 with October 2018, double-digit declines were recorded for the import volume from Korea (-22.9%) and the Mainland (-14.9%). Concurrently, the import volume from Singapore (-5.6%) and Japan (-5.4%) also decreased. On the other hand, the import volume from Taiwan increased by 6.2%.

Over the same period of comparison, the import prices from Japan (0.6%) and the Mainland (0.5%) increased. On the other hand, the import prices from Singapore (-1.5%), Korea (-2.6%) and Taiwan (-2.9%) decreased.

Further information

Details of the above statistics are published in the October 2019 issue of "Hong Kong Merchandise Trade Index Numbers". Users can download the publication free of charge at the website of the C&SD (www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp230.jsp?productCode=B1020006).

Enquiries on merchandise trade indices may be directed to the Trade Analysis Section (1) of the C&SD (Tel: 2582 4918).

Unemployment and underemployment statistics for September – November 2019

According to the latest labour force statistics (i.e. provisional figures for September – November 2019) released today (December 17) by the Census and Statistics Department (C&SD), the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate increased from 3.1% in August – October 2019 to 3.2% in September – November 2019. The underemployment rate remained unchanged at 1.2% in the two periods.

Comparing September – November 2019 with August – October 2019, movements in the unemployment rate (not seasonally adjusted) in different industry sectors varied. Increase in the unemployment rate (not seasonally adjusted) was mainly seen in the retail sector. As to the underemployment

rate, increases were mainly seen in the decoration, repair and maintenance for buildings sector and food and beverage service activities sector, while a decrease was mainly observed in the repair, laundry, domestic and other personal service activities sector.

Total employment decreased by around 13 200 from 3 843 800 in August – October 2019 to 3 830 600 in September – November 2019. Over the same period, the labour force also decreased by around 13 300 from 3 969 300 to 3 956 000.

The number of unemployed persons (not seasonally adjusted) in September – November 2019 was 125 400, the same as that in August – October 2019 (125 400). The number of underemployed persons increased by around 1 000 from 45 900 from August – October to 46 900 in September – November 2019.

Commentary

Commenting on the latest unemployment figures, the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong said, "The labour market eased further as economic conditions continued to worsen. The seasonally adjusted unemployment rate rose by 0.1 percentage point in September – November 2019 to 3.2%, while the underemployment rate remained unchanged at 1.2%. The year-on-year decline in total employment widened further."

"Hard hit by local social incidents, the unemployment rate of the consumption- and tourism-related segment (viz. retail, accommodation and food services sectors as a whole) rose further to a three-year high of 5.2%. In particular, the unemployment rate of the food and beverage service activities sector increased to 6.2%, the highest level in more than eight years. The unemployment rates of many other sectors also recorded increases."

Looking ahead, Dr Law said, "The labour market will be under even more pressure in the near term if the overall economy continues to weaken. The Government will monitor the developments closely."

He noted that the Labour Department (LD) will assist young people in entering the labour market through enhancing the Youth Employment and Training Programme. These enhancement measures include increasing the quota under "Career Kick-start" and the subsidy payable to participating non-governmental organisations; raising the workplace attachment allowance payable to trainees; and proactively canvassing on-the-job training vacancies and collaborating with employers in organising thematic job fairs.

On large-scale job fairs, the LD will organise the North District Recruitment and Training Expo 2020 on January 3, 2020 at Po Wing Road Sports Centre in Sheung Shui. More than 60 employers would participate, offering a large number of job vacancies from various industries. In addition, industry-based or district-based job fairs are regularly organised at the LD's industry-based recruitment centres and job centres located across the territory.

Further information

The unemployment and underemployment statistics were compiled from the findings of the continuous General Household Survey.

The survey for September – November 2019 covered a sample of some 26 000 households or 74 000 persons, selected in accordance with a scientifically designed sampling scheme to represent the population of Hong Kong.

Data on labour force characteristics were obtained from the survey by interviewing each member aged 15 or over in the sampled households.

In the survey, the definitions used in measuring unemployment and underemployment follow closely those recommended by the International Labour Organization.

Detailed analysis of labour force characteristics is given in the "Quarterly Report on General Household Survey" which is published four times a year. The latest issue of the publication contains statistics for the quarter July – September 2019 while the next issue covering the quarter October – December 2019 will be available by end-February 2020. Users can download this publication free of charge at the website of the C&SD (www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp200.jsp?productCode=B1050001).

For enquiries about labour force statistics, please contact the Household Statistics Analysis Section of the C&SD (Tel: 2887 5508 or email: ghs@censtatd.gov.hk).