

Head of Chief Executive's Policy Unit to lead delegation to Beijing for study and exchange

The Head of the Chief Executive's Policy Unit (CEPU), Dr Stephen Wong, will lead a delegation comprising 19 professional management and research colleagues of the CEPU to Beijing tomorrow (November 30) to participate in a study programme on "Enhancing Strategic Planning and Policy Research Capabilities" organised by Peking University, and the delegation will call on the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council. Dr Wong will also call on the departments and organisations of the central ministries responsible for strategic planning and policy research to exchange views on strategic research topics in different areas.

The objective of this event is to enhance the understanding of strategic paradigms and policy research capability of the CEPU through studies and exchanges, based on the strategic planning of the country's development and in line with the Central Government's call for a strong culture of conducting researches and studies. Heavyweight experts and scholars are invited to share and exchange insights on strategic issues such as Chinese-style modernisation, furthering efforts on reform and opening up, global technology and innovation.

Dr Wong said, "This study and exchange programme is closely related to the work of the CEPU and also meets the Chief Executive's expectations of the unit. I hope that our colleagues will seize this opportunity to actively engage in in-depth exchanges with the experts and professional organisations, and gain a deeper understanding of our country's strategic and systemic thinking in various areas. I also expect that our participants will make use of what they have gained to discharge their duties in future with a view to assisting Hong Kong to better integrate into the overall development of our country and giving full play to Hong Kong's unique position and advantages of enjoying strong support of the motherland and being closely connected to the world, as our country embarks on the journey towards high-quality development."

The delegation and Dr Wong will return to Hong Kong on next Tuesday (December 5) and next Thursday (December 7) respectively.

Hong Kong Customs steps up enforcement

actions against seaborne illicit cigarette smuggling activities with seizures worth about \$100 million (with photo)

Hong Kong Customs mounted a special operation over the past two weeks to combat illicit cigarette smuggling activities by sea and detected four large-scale illicit cigarette smuggling cases involving seaborne containers. A total of about 28 million suspected illicit cigarettes with an estimated market value of about \$100 million and a duty potential of about \$69 million were seized.

In the first case, through risk assessment and intelligence analysis, Customs selected and inspected a 40-foot container, declared as carrying plastic boards and arriving in Hong Kong from Taiwan, on November 15 at the Kwai Chung Customhouse Cargo Examination Compound. Upon inspection, Customs officers seized about 9.3 million suspected illicit cigarettes inside the container.

On the same day, Customs detected another case at the Tuen Mun River Trade Terminal Customs Cargo Examination Compound where officers inspected a 40-foot container, declared as carrying flower pots and decoration lighting and arriving in Hong Kong from Nansha, Guangdong. About 1.6 million suspected illicit cigarettes were seized therein.

After a follow-up investigation, Customs officers targeted two 40-foot containers, both declared as carrying washbowls and arriving in Hong Kong from Nansha, Guangdong, for inspection on November 22. A total of about 5.5 million suspected illicit cigarettes were seized inside the two containers, leading to the successful detection of the third case.

In the fourth case, through risk assessment, Customs officers selected a 40-foot container, declared to contain electronic parts and arriving in Hong Kong from Thailand, for inspection at the Kwai Chung Customhouse Cargo Examination Compound on November 27. About 11 million suspected illicit cigarettes were seized inside the container.

During the operation, seven men aged between 34 and 63, suspected to be connected with the case, were arrested and the five containers suspected to be involved with the cases were detained.

All the above-mentioned cases have been duly followed up. While believing that some of the suspected illicit cigarettes would have been re-exported to overseas regions, Customs will continue to trace the source and flow of the illicit cigarettes. The likelihood of further arrests is not ruled out.

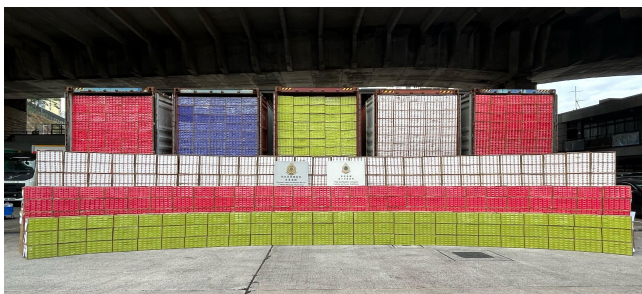
Customs noticed that illicit cigarette syndicates would conceal the illicit cigarettes by mixing them with daily products, such as flower pots, plastic washbowls or Christmas decorations, in order to evade customs inspection and increase the difficulty of customs enforcement.

With the Christmas holidays approaching, Customs will continue to step up enforcement to vigorously combat illicit cigarette activities through risk assessment, intelligence analysis and interception at source.

Smuggling is a serious offence. Under the Import and Export Ordinance, any person found guilty of importing or exporting unmanifested cargo is liable to a maximum fine of \$2 million and imprisonment for seven years.

Customs stresses 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).



[FSD adjusts entry requirements from December 1](#)

The Fire Services Department (FSD) announced today (November 29) that the eyesight test and physical fitness test requirements for entry to four grades will be adjusted to attract more applicants with different backgrounds or abilities.

With effect from December 1, the entry requirements for Station Officer (Operational), Ambulance Officer, Fireman/Firewoman (Operational/Marine) and Ambulanceman/Ambulancewoman will be adjusted as follows:

- the eyesight test requirement will be revised to allow candidates to

choose to wear spectacles during the test (only applicable to Station Officer (Operational) and Fireman/Firewoman (Operational/Marine));

- the passing mark for test items in the physical fitness test will be revised and the time limit for test items will be extended; and
- inclined chin-ups will be introduced as an optional test item for candidates in the physical fitness test.

A spokesperson for the FSD said, "The FSD has always upheld the principle of meritocracy and reviews its recruitment policy from time to time to ensure that it aligns with the times, with a view to selecting candidates of the highest calibre to join the department. Upon review, the department considers that there is room for adjusting the eyesight test and physical fitness test requirements for entry to help attract a greater number of capable applicants."

The spokesperson stated that successful candidates must undergo 26 weeks of rigorous foundation training and meet the physical fitness standards required by the department. These standards will remain unchanged. Hence, making such adjustments to the entry requirements will not affect rescue work in future.

The FSD will continue to organise various activities to step up publicity efforts for recruitment, such as career talks, recruitment workshops and exhibitions, as well as diversifying the FSD Recruitment Connect Campaign, including setting up the University Connect, the Mainland Connect, the Athlete Connect and the Ethnic Minority Connect, and publicise the adjusted eyesight test and physical fitness test requirements for entry.

Please visit the following website for details of the adjusted eyesight test and physical fitness test requirements for entry:

www.hkfsd.gov.hk/eng/recruitment/recruit/.

CAD search and rescue exercise completed successfully

The Civil Aviation Department (CAD) successfully completed a joint short-range search and rescue exercise (SAREX) today (November 29) at Port Shelter, Sai Kung.

Nine government departments and search and rescue (SAR) units participated in the exercise, which included the CAD, the Chinese People's Liberation Army Hong Kong Garrison (the Hong Kong Garrison), the Government Flying Service (GFS), the Hong Kong Police (HKP), the Fire Services Department (FSD), the Marine Department (MD), the Civil Aid Service, the Auxiliary Medical Service and the Hong Kong Observatory (HKO).

"The exercise is held regularly by the CAD to strengthen co-operation and co-ordination among the SAR units in SAR operations, so as to ensure a timely and effective response in an emergency. It also enhances training for air traffic controllers, aircrew and other related units likely to be involved to get them familiarised with SAR techniques," a spokesperson for the Department said.

The SAREX comprises two parts: a short-range exercise at Port Shelter, Sai Kung, today, and a long-range exercise tomorrow (November 30) at about 50 nautical miles east of Hong Kong in the South China Sea. For the long-range exercise tomorrow, participating units include departments of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government, namely the CAD, the GFS, the HKO and the MD, as well as the Hong Kong Garrison, the Nanhai Rescue Bureau of the Ministry of Transport of the People's Republic of China, and the Guangdong Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre.

Today's exercise simulated a scenario of a helicopter crash at Port Shelter, Sai Kung. The Hong Kong Garrison, the GFS, the HKP and the FSD deployed their helicopters and vessels to assist in the rescue. Through the collaboration of all parties, all four people on board were rescued. The exercise was completed within one hour, with around 250 members from the participating SAR units mobilised.

"In accordance with Annex 12 to the Convention on International Civil Aviation, the CAD organises SAREX regularly to further strengthen its search and rescue capability as well as to enable SAR experts in the region to exchange views and share the latest technologies," the spokesperson said.

Effective Exchange Rate Index

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Wednesday, November 29, 2023 is 104.2 (down 0.5 against yesterday's index).