

Hong Kong Customs steps up enforcement to combat illicit cigarette telephone-ordering activities and seizes suspected illicit cigarettes worth about \$10 million (with photo)

Hong Kong Customs mounted a territory-wide enforcement operation codenamed "Thunder" in the past three weeks to combat illicit cigarette telephone-ordering activities in public rental housing (PRH). A total of about 2.8 million suspected illicit cigarettes with an estimated market value of about \$10 million and a duty potential of about \$7 million were seized.

During the operation, Customs officers detected 44 illicit cigarette cases in different districts, including Kwun Tong, Wong Tai Sin, Sau Mau Ping, Kowloon Bay, Sham Shui Po, Yau Tong, Kowloon City, Tai Kok Tsui, Lam Tin, Choi Hung, To Kwa Wan, Tseung Kwan O, Tsuen Wan, Tuen Mun, Tin Shui Wai, Yuen Long, Sheung Shui, Ma On Shan, Kwai Chung, Tsing Yi and Tung Chung, resulting in the above-mentioned seizures of suspected illicit cigarettes. In those cases, Customs officers raided three suspected illicit cigarette storage centres, detained two vehicles suspected to be used for illicit cigarette distribution, and seized a batch of illicit cigarette leaflets.

In the above-mentioned cases, Customs arrested 39 men and six women, aged between 16 and 75. They include both illicit cigarette sellers and buyers. All the cases have been duly followed up.

Customs will continue to step up enforcement to vigorously combat illicit cigarette activities through risk assessment, intelligence analysis and interception at source. If PRH units are found to be involved in illicit cigarette activities, Customs will notify the Housing Department for follow-up action after the conclusion of court proceedings.

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Customs reminds young people, especially students, to never become involved in illicit cigarette activities or distribute illicit cigarette flyers, to avoid creating a criminal record that affects their future.

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).



LCQ20: Enhancing the harbourfront environment

Following is a question by the Hon Vincent Cheng and a written reply by the Secretary for Development, Ms Bernadette Linn, in the Legislative Council today (November 1):

Question:

It is learnt that in recent years, the Government has been actively promoting harbourfront enhancement work and committed to providing members of the public with harbourfront sites that are diversified, vibrant and accessible. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that the Development Bureau has earlier on proposed making use of a small amount of land along the boundary of the New Yaumatei Public Cargo Working Area (Working Area) to build a comfortable, convenient, safe and barrier-free pedestrian walkway, of the latest progress and the details of the proposal;

(2) apart from enhancing pedestrian walkway facilities, whether the authorities will consider enhancing the facilities in other harbourfront areas nearby without affecting the operation of the Working Area, such as adding pedestrian walkways and sightseeing bridges as well as beautifying breakwaters, so as to develop harbourfront areas in Yau Tsim Mong into new landmarks, and improving the accessibility of such harbourfront areas; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) as some members of the local community have relayed that the ancillary facilities of the Cheung Sha Wan Promenade are inadequate (such as a lack of water dispensers, seats and toilets), whether the authorities will consider providing more such facilities to bring a better harbourfront experience to members of the public; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

and

(4) whether the authorities will consider further enhancing the facilities of the Cheung Sha Wan Promenade, including adding installation art "check-in" spots, or beautifying the harbourfront area with a theme, in order to increase the attractiveness of the promenade; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Following the development along the waterfront areas of Kowloon West, the Government strives to provide more diversified harbourfront facilities for public enjoyment. After consulting the Civil Engineering and Development Department (CEDD), the Drainage Services Department (DSD) and the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD), the reply to the question is as follows:

(1) and (2) At present, the West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD) and the harbourfront of Tai Kok Tsui are mainly separated by the New Yau Ma Tei Public Cargo Working Area (NYPCWA). In order to improve the accessibility between the harbourfront of that area and to provide a more pleasant walking environment without affecting the operation of the NYPCWA, after discussions with departments including the CEDD, the Marine Department (MD), etc, and the NYPCWA operators, the Development Bureau (DEVB) has proposed the construction of a pedestrian walkway of about 950 metres in length along the inland boundary of the NYPCWA. The walkway will connect the existing public footpath at the entrance of the NYPCWA at Hoi Fai Road to the north, and the existing public footpath near the bus-bus-interchange at Western Harbour Crossing to the south, leading to the entrance of the WKCD. While the walkway will mainly occupy government land outside the NYPCWA, it will require a limited inland area of the NYPCWA in order to widen certain sections of the walkway to a more reasonable width. The DEVB and the CEDD briefed the Harbourfront Commission on the above proposal in April this year, and consulted the Public Cargo Working Area Committee and the Yau Tsim Mong District Council in May; and received support from these bodies.

The CEDD will prepare for gazettal for the construction of the walkway; and the MD will co-ordinate with the industry for slightly adjusting the boundary of the NYPCWA. The Government expects that the construction works will commence within 2024, and targets to open the concerned pedestrian walkway to the public in 2026.

Apart from the aforementioned construction of the walkway, other construction works for enhancing the harbourfront of the area include:

- to the east of Hoi Fai Road Promenade, the DSD will, along with the construction of its project, develop a public open space under the theme of "fun city" so as to provide various types of play equipment for children. This public open space is expected to be opened within this

year;

- to the west of Hoi Fai Road Promenade, the Hoi Fai Road open space under the LCSD's purview is currently under construction and is expected to be opened in 2024.

(3) and (4) The Cheung Sha Wan Promenade, which was raised in the question, was fully opened in July this year under the management of the LCSD. With about 1.04 hectares, it consists of a waterfront promenade and public open space including landscaped areas and lawns, and also serves as an Inclusive Park for Pets. The venue provides a water dispenser, multiple sets of arbours and seating decks, making it a pleasant and relaxing leisure space for public enjoyment. Although toilet facilities cannot be provided at the venue because of space constraints, there are toilet facilities nearby (e.g. at Hoi Ying Estate) for use by the public.

The LCSD will carry out beautification of the Cheung Sha Wan Promenade, including placing decorations and planting special plants, and the process is expected to be completed by the end of 2023. Besides, the LCSD will also consider providing decorations and art installations at the venue during festive periods to attract more visitors. The LCSD will continue to take into account public opinions. Where feasible in the actual environment, appropriate additional facilities will be provided with a view to providing a better harbourfront experience to the public.

On the other hand, the harbourfront promenade of the hotel development project in Lai Ying Street will be opened in 2024. It is located adjacent to the Cheung Sha Wan Promenade and is constructed by a private developer. The feature of this development project includes the conversion of a disused pier into a multi-purpose open space, forming part of the harbourfront promenade. Facilities such as tables and chairs, a viewing deck and specially designed shading shelters will be provided. Besides, there will be two sets of landing steps to not only increase the vibrancy of the harbourfront, but also make it easier for the public to get closer to water. Lawns, benches, retail shops, food and beverage facilities, etc, will be provided under the development project to enhance visitors' harbourfront experience.

LCQ11: Public transport services under adverse weather conditions

Following is a question by the Hon Benson Luk and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Lam Sai-hung, in the Legislative Council today (November 1):

Question:

It has been reported that during the time when the Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No. 8 and No. 9 were in force as Typhoon Koinu hit Hong Kong earlier, the operation of public transport services, including buses, taxis and the open sections of the railway system, had nearly come to a complete halt. As a result, over 10 000 travellers arriving in Hong Kong had been stranded at the airport for several hours, many members of the public had to spend as long as six hours waiting for public transport services, and some taxi drivers demanded a surcharge of over \$1,000 from passengers. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) on the premise of technical and operational safety being the prime consideration, whether it will request the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) to maintain train service (i) between the airport and downtown and (ii) in core districts (e.g. at a train frequency of one trip per hour) during extremely adverse weather conditions; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) in the long term, whether the Government will consider enacting legislation to set a uniform surcharge for taxi service offered by taxis with comprehensive insurance cover under extremely adverse weather conditions, with a view to curbing the act of overcharging of taxi fares; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) whether it has plans to request MTRCL to continue to provide limited railway service for one to two hours after the issuance of the Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No. 9; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(4) whether it has explored with the sectors concerned improvements to the operation hours of petrol filling stations and gas filling stations as well as fuel supply arrangements under extremely adverse weather conditions; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(5) in the short term, whether the Government will make prior arrangement for a certain number of minibuses or single-deck buses to be on standby whenever extremely adverse weather conditions are forecasted for Hong Kong, with a view to instantly facilitating the flow of travellers arriving in Hong Kong at the airport if necessary; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

My consolidated reply to the question raised by the Hon Benson Luk is as follows:

Under adverse weather conditions (for example, when Tropical Cyclone (TC) Warning Signal No. 8 or higher is in force, or when the Government makes an "extreme conditions" announcement (Note 1)), ensuring the safety of

members of the public and visitors is our top priority. During such weather conditions, members of the public and visitors should remain indoors temporarily as far as possible for their safety. While public transport services are provided to the extent feasible, public transport operators have to weigh the risks of driving and operating during adverse weather, so as to ensure the safety of passengers, drivers and other staff members, as well as that of the rescue personnel.

When TC Warning Signal No. 8 is hoisted by the Hong Kong Observatory (HKO), both local road transport, including franchised buses and green minibuses, and public water transport are generally suspended for safety considerations, and the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) provides limited railway services only. When the HKO raises the TC Warning Signal to No. 9 or above, the MTRCL has to suspend the service on all open sections of the railway for safety reasons, while maintaining limited service on underground sections. At present, the suspension of MTR service on all open sections of the railway under TC Warning Signal No. 9 is a mechanism developed through comprehensive studies and deliberations, having regard to safety considerations of railway system design and experience gained from previous incidents happened during typhoons, with a view to preventing trains, overhead lines and tracks from being affected by strong winds and external objects that may lead to incidents and jeopardise the safety of passengers and railways.

As land transport was suspended due to the hoisting of TC Warning Signal No. 9 during the strike of Typhoon Koinu earlier, some passengers had to stay at the airport. We consider that a more effective direction of improvement is to enhance crowd management at the airport during adverse weather. The aspects of such enhancement will include exploring ways to inform passengers of the typhoon and road traffic conditions as soon as possible, and making better arrangements for them to wait for the resumption of transport services at the airport terminal in a safe and comfortable manner. In this regard, as some passengers may still opt for taxis during typhoons, the Airport Authority Hong Kong will, in the future, allocate chips when there are a large number of passengers waiting for taxis, so that they may take rest elsewhere at the airport and check their waiting status through mobile phones without having to queue up in person. The Government has also requested the MTRCL to study thoroughly and cautiously the arrangements for the suspension of Airport Express under TC Warning Signal No. 9, explore the feasibility of optimising information dissemination, and review the relevant contingency plans, with a view to minimising the impact on members of the public and visitors under the premise of safety.

As for taxis, under the Road Traffic (Public Service Vehicles) Regulations (Cap. 374D) (the Regulations), the fare for the hiring of taxis should generally be calculated in accordance with the scale of fares specified in Schedule 5 to the Regulations (i.e. the fare as shown on the taximeter). If a taxi picks up passengers directly on the street or at a taxi stand on a non-booked basis, the taxi driver should charge the meter fare, and no surcharge should be charged on the passengers. Besides, under Regulation 38 of the Regulations, a registered taxi owner may also hire the

taxi to a hirer on a hire-as-a-whole basis.

If taxis or other vehicles for carriage of passengers (such as coaches) continue to provide services under adverse weather conditions, regardless of whether such vehicles are covered by valid comprehensive motor insurance policies, the risk of travelling in adverse weather conditions must also be balanced to ensure the safety of the drivers and passengers.

During adverse weather, while petrol filling stations suspend services in accordance with safety policy of operators, the 12 dedicated liquefied petroleum gas filling stations (dedicated stations) across the city maintain their services where safety permits. During recent strike of Typhoon Koinu when TC Warning Signals No. 8 and No. 9 were hoisted, at least six dedicated stations maintained their refilling services at different times. The Government and the operators will review the relevant arrangements from time to time.

Note 1: In the case where a Super Typhoon or other natural disasters of a substantial scale seriously affects the working public to resume work or bring safety concern for a prolonged period, such as large-scale power outage, extensive fallen windows from high-rises leading to dangerous streetscape, major landslides, extensive flooding, widespread serious obstruction of public transport services, if situation warrants, the Government will decide whether it is necessary to make a territory-wide "extreme conditions" announcement.

LCQ14: Promoting synergistic development of Shenzhen and Hong Kong in science and technology innovation

Following is a question by the Hon Martin Liao and a written reply by the Secretary for Innovation, Technology and Industry, Professor Sun Dong, in the Legislative Council today (November 1):

Question:

The Development Plan for Shenzhen Park of Hetao Shenzhen-Hong Kong Science and Technology Innovation Co-operation Zone (the Plan) published by the State Council proposes to adhere to the synergistic development of the Shenzhen Innovation and Technology Zone and the Hong Kong-Shenzhen Innovation and Technology Park, with an objective of basically establishing a highly efficient Shenzhen-Hong Kong science and technology innovation synergistic mechanism by 2025. In addition, it is learnt that the first batch of innovation and technology institutions have set up their operations in the

Hong Kong Science Park Shenzhen Branch. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that as the Plan permits cross-boundary remittance of scientific research capital to fund scientific research projects in Shenzhen and Hong Kong, whether the Government has compiled statistics on the amount of scientific research capital granted by Mainland authorities and remitted to Hong Kong, as well as the details of the approved projects, including the number of such projects, the technology fields involved, the national projects undertaken and the research achievements, etc, as at the end of last month; if so, of the details;

(2) whether the Government knows the details of attracting strategic enterprises by the Hong Kong Science Park Shenzhen Branch, including the number, fields of development and operational status, etc, of such enterprises; and

(3) as regards the formulation of a unified scientific research and capital management system to realise the synergistic development of Shenzhen and Hong Kong in science and technology innovation, whether the Government has looked into the difficulties and pain points in establishing such system; if so, of the details; of the progress of establishing such system?

Reply:

President:

The "Outline of the 14th Five Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China and the Long-Range Objectives Through the Year 2035" has indicated clear support for Hong Kong's development into an international innovation and technology (I&T) centre, and included the Shenzhen-Hong Kong Loop as one of the four major platforms of co-operation in the Greater Bay Area (GBA). The Hetao Shenzhen-Hong Kong Science and Technology Innovation Co-operation Zone (Co-operation Zone) located at the two sides of Shenzhen River is developed under the "one river, two banks" and "one zone, two parks" vision. It consists of the Shenzhen Park of about 300 hectares, and the Hong Kong Park (i.e. Hong Kong-Shenzhen I&T Park, or HSITP) of 87 hectares.

In August this year, the Central Government promulgated the Development Plan for Shenzhen Park of Hetao Shenzhen-Hong Kong Science and Technology Innovation Co-operation Zone (Development Plan for Shenzhen Park) which sets out the development positioning of the Shenzhen Park. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government will render its full support and work with the Shenzhen Municipal Government to foster the synergistic development of the Hong Kong Park and the Shenzhen Park and explore innovative measures.

Having consulted the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau, the reply to various parts of the question raised by the Hon Martin Liao is as follows:

(1) and (3) Since 2019, the Ministry of Science and Technology, the National Natural Science Foundation of China and some Mainland provinces and cities have successively opened their science and technology schemes to Hong Kong's universities and research and development (R&D) institutions to apply as leading units or co-operative units. As at end of June 2023, Mainland central ministries as well as provinces and cities have approved cross-boundary R&D funding of about RMB 800 million for universities and R&D institutions in Hong Kong, covering about 530 projects on various technical areas, including life and health technology, artificial intelligence and data science, semiconductor, advanced manufacturing and new energy technology, etc.

The Development Plan for Shenzhen Park proposes the establishment of a scientific research management system that will fully align with that in Hong Kong and internationally. In this regard, the Government of the HKSAR and the Guangdong Provincial Government launched the "Guangdong-Hong Kong Technology Cooperation Funding Scheme" in 2004 to encourage co-operation between universities, research institutions and technology enterprises in Guangdong and Hong Kong, and promote work on high technology and the transformation of scientific and technological achievements, with a view to enhancing the productivity and competitiveness of enterprises in both places. The Shenzhen Municipal Government joined the scheme the following year. Under the funding scheme, the two sides will solicit proposals for Guangdong/Hong Kong and Shenzhen/Hong Kong R&D co-operation projects in technology areas of mutual interest to both sides, including a number of topics that cater to the latest technology trends and industrial development needs of the two places, and provide joint funding support for projects mutually supported by the two sides. As at end of June 2023, 210 projects have been mutually supported by both sides.

On the aforementioned basis of co-operation, the HKSAR Government will continue to share its experience in scientific research management with central ministries and relevant units in Guangdong Province and Shenzhen Municipality, with a view to facilitating cross-boundary capital flow within the Co-operation Zone, and strengthening the alignment of I&T development planning, thereby promoting the sustainable development of I&T co-operation between the two places, enabling the Co-operation Zone to become a world-class innovation platform and contributing to the development of an international I&T centre in the GBA.

(2) The Shenzhen Branch of the Hong Kong Science Park (HKSP) aims to enable organisations and enterprises interested in conducting scientific research and business in the GBA to establish a presence in the Shenzhen Park of the Co-operation Zone before the completion of the first batch of the HSITP. Since June 2023, the first batch of tenants of the HKSP Shenzhen Branch started to move in. As at September 2023, a total of 18 enterprises and R&D centres have been admitted to the HKSP Shenzhen Branch in areas such as microelectronics, medical technology, big data and artificial intelligence, financial technology, robotics, and sustainable solutions. With the support of the Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation, two of these enterprises have successfully applied for funding support from the Mainland municipal governments, while another 10 are actively raising funds to

facilitate their business development, enabling them to expand into the GBA and Mainland markets.

LD to hold Chill Bazaar 2023 – Entrepreneurship Experience Day

The Youth Employment Start (Y.E.S.) of the Labour Department will hold the Chill Bazaar 2023 – Entrepreneurship Experience Day at the Atrium of Mira Place 1 from 1pm to 9pm on November 4 and 5. Members of the public are welcome to visit.

This event aims at allowing business members of Y.E.S. to have a taste of doing retail business for free in the bazaar and gain entrepreneurship experience. This year, Y.E.S. received over 90 applications for the Entrepreneurship Experience Day, and 20 teams were chosen to participate after a screening and selection process. The selected members are provided with comprehensive support services by Y.E.S and a professional consultant, including training, one-on-one consultation prior to the event, on-the-spot support services and post-event reviews.

This year's bazaar will feature 20 stalls, selling a diverse range of handcrafted and innovative products such as wooden decorations, handmade candles, board games, natural skincare products and handicrafts. Visitors can explore and shop for these unique products and vote for the retail stalls with the Most Attractive Product, Most Distinctive Stall Decoration, and Best Customer Service at the bazaar. Visitors who make purchases or cast their votes will receive souvenirs as a token of appreciation.

During the bazaar, Y.E.S. will also set up a counter to introduce its free one-stop comprehensive employment, training, and self-employment support services offered to members aged 15 to 29. Eligible young people who complete the on-site preliminary membership registration will receive exclusive welcome gifts. For more details, please visit the Y.E.S. website (www.e-start.gov.hk).