

## **LegCo Finance Committee meeting**

The following is issued on behalf of the Legislative Council Secretariat:

The meeting of the Legislative Council (LegCo) Finance Committee (FC) originally scheduled at 3pm tomorrow (January 17) in Conference Room 1 of the LegCo Complex will be held at 2.30pm, whereas the FC meeting at 8.45am tomorrow will be held as scheduled.

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## **Effective Exchange Rate Index**

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Thursday, January 16, 2020 is 105.6 (same as yesterday's index).

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## **Number of Voluntary Health Insurance Scheme policies exceeds 300 000 in first six months**

The Food and Health Bureau today (January 16) encouraged citizens to purchase Certified Plans under the Voluntary Health Insurance Scheme (VHIS) early. Relevant premiums are eligible for tax deduction.

A spokesman for the Food and Health Bureau said, "The VHIS was fully implemented in April 2019 to strengthen the benefit level for hospital insurance products. As at the end of last September, the number of policies exceeded 300 000. The response was encouraging. For both the newly insured and migrants to VHIS Certified Plans, the relevant number of policies increased from the second quarter to the third quarter last year.

"According to the estimate by an independent consultant before the launch of the VHIS, about 1 million people would purchase Certified Plans in the first two years of implementation of the VHIS. With reference to the latest statistics, we are cautiously optimistic on achieving this estimate."

Currently, 57 Certified Plans (including 29 Standard Plans and 28 Flexi Plans) have been certified by the Food and Health Bureau and are available in the market, offering 207 products for consumers' choice. These products are

offered by 29 insurance companies, which account for about 90 per cent of the health insurance market under rough estimation.

Among those insured by the 300 000 policies, about 96 per cent purchased Flexi Plans, which provide higher benefits. The others purchased Standard Plans.

In addition, about one-third of the insured are aged below 30 and about half are aged below 40. The above figures reflect that the VHIS is also attractive to the younger generation.

"A large number of VHIS Certified Plans are offered in a wide variety. We welcome the feature article on the VHIS by the Consumer Council in the latest issue of Choice magazine which provides useful information for consumers," the spokesman added.

"The relevant article mentions that the VHIS Standard Plans provided by different insurance companies have the same basic coverage and benefit limits, but with different premiums. Apart from premium consideration, consumers are also suggested to pay attention to factors including the reputations and services of relevant companies. As regards Flexi Plans, the product design can be more flexible than Standard Plans to meet the diverse needs of consumers. We are delighted that insurance companies provide a wide range of Flexi Plans with different designs, offering choices for consumers with different needs."

To facilitate product comparison by consumers, a "Plan Search" function in the consumer corner of the VHIS website ([www.vhis.gov.hk](http://www.vhis.gov.hk)) has been added. The function not only enhances market transparency but also enables consumers to compare the benefit coverage and features of different products provided by various insurance companies, and make informed choices according to their needs and budget.

The VHIS is part of the Food and Health Bureau's effort in maintaining the public-private balance among other important policy initiatives. The VHIS seeks to regulate the individual indemnity hospital insurance products and improve market transparency, providing consumers with greater confidence in purchasing health insurance and using private healthcare services when in need, thereby alleviating pressure on the public hospital services in the long run.

Payments of relevant qualifying premiums made for the purchase of VHIS Certified Plans before March 31 this year, up to a maximum of \$8,000 per insured person per annum, are eligible for tax deduction for the year of assessment 2019-20. If the highest marginal tax rate of 17 per cent is applied, the tax saving would be \$1,360 for each insured person. There is no limit on the number of policies and insured persons to claim tax deduction. Please refer to the VHIS website ([www.vhis.gov.hk](http://www.vhis.gov.hk)) for details.

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## Twenty-one building plans approved in November

The Buildings Department approved 21 building plans in November, with six on Hong Kong Island, nine in Kowloon and six in the New Territories.

Of the approved plans, five were for apartment and apartment/commercial developments, five were for commercial developments, three were for factory and industrial developments, and eight were for community services developments.

In the same month, consent was given for works to start on 10 building projects which, when completed, will provide 149 713 square metres of gross floor area for domestic use involving 1 725 units, and 123 585 sq m of gross floor area for non-domestic use. The department has received notification of commencement of superstructure works for 11 building projects.

The department also issued 18 occupation permits, with eight on Hong Kong Island, two in Kowloon and eight in the New Territories.

Of the buildings certified for occupation, the gross floor area for domestic use was 50 643 sq m involving 749 units, and 83 512 sq m was for non-domestic use.

The declared cost of new buildings completed in November totalled about \$6.7 billion.

In addition, eight demolition consents involving eight building structures were issued.

The department received 2 734 reports about unauthorised building works (UBWs) in November and issued 537 removal orders on UBWs.

The full version of the Monthly Digest for November can be viewed on the Buildings Department's homepage ([www.bd.gov.hk](http://www.bd.gov.hk)).

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## Hong Kong and Macao Customs strengthen co-operation to step up enforcement

## action against cross-boundary drug trafficking activities between two places (with photos)

Hong Kong Customs and Macao Customs conducted a joint operation codenamed "Turbine II" to step up enforcement action against cross-boundary drug trafficking activities between Hong Kong and Macao from December 1 last year to yesterday (January 15). During the operation, Hong Kong Customs detected 15 outbound dangerous drug cases from Hong Kong to Macao and arrested 17 persons. A total of about 3.1 kilograms of different kinds of suspected dangerous drugs with an estimated market value of about \$3.1 million were seized.

Fifteen men and two women, aged between 16 and 47, were arrested in the cases. The seized suspected dangerous drugs included cocaine, ketamine and cannabis.

Of the 15 cases, three were effected at Hong Kong International Airport. Three transiting male passengers who arrived in Hong Kong, one from the United Arab Emirates and two from Ethiopia, and planned to go to Macao via the SkyPier were arrested.

One of the passengers was found to have two check-in suitcases with about 1kg of suspected cocaine concealed inside the trolley frames. The other two cases are internal concealment cases in which two passengers have discharged a total of about 1.69kg of suspected cocaine in hospital.

The remaining 12 cases were detected at locations including the Hong Kong-Macau Ferry Terminal, the China Ferry Terminal and the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge and involved a small quantity of suspected dangerous drugs. The arrested persons were passengers travelling to Macao from Hong Kong.

Hong Kong Customs has all along been intercepting drug trafficking activities at all outgoing and incoming channels. Members of the public are reminded that criminals may post recruitment advertisements on unknown websites and social media platforms to lure citizens into carrying dangerous drugs or various controlled items. They should stay alert and not carry unknown items for other people.

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.

Hong Kong Customs believes that the joint operation has effectively combated cross-boundary drug trafficking between Hong Kong and Macao. The department will continue to conduct joint operations with Macao Customs in order to deter drug trafficking activities between the two places.

Hong Kong Customs will continue stringent law enforcement at every boundary control point to combat cross-boundary trafficking activities involving dangerous drugs.

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

