

# Hong Kong Customs mounts special operation against unfair trade practices by fitness centres

Hong Kong Customs has mounted a special operation codenamed "Tornado" since the end of last year against unfair trade practices by fitness centres. Customs officers conducted enforcement actions in the past week and smashed three fitness centres in Mong Kok and Yau Ma Tei. Eight persons were arrested after being suspected of having engaged in aggressive commercial practices in the course of selling fitness services in contravention of the Trade Descriptions Ordinance (TDO). Around \$670,000 is involved in the service contracts.

Customs officers earlier received information alleging that staff members of three fitness centres in Mong Kok and Yau Ma Tei imposed undue influence and used aggressive commercial practices when selling fitness services to customers, forcing them to procure fitness club membership.

Subsequent to an in-depth investigation, Customs officers took enforcement actions and arrested eight persons. Aged between 21 and 26, they comprise one director and seven salespersons of the fitness centres.

The operation is ongoing.

Until yesterday (August 26), 19 persons were arrested during the "Tornado" operation after being suspected of having engaged in aggressive commercial practices in the course of selling fitness services in contravention of the TDO. The arrested persons, aged between 21 and 43, comprise four directors and 15 salespersons of the fitness centres. A total of about \$1.8 million is involved in the service contracts.

The Group Head (Unfair Trade Practice Investigation), Ms Suzette Ip, said at a press conference today (August 27) that Hong Kong Customs will continue to step up enforcement to combat unfair trade practices by fitness centres.

She reminded traders that they must comply with the requirements of the TDO. Consumers are also reminded to procure services from reputable shops. Before making a purchase decision, consumers must not give their identity cards, credit cards or automated teller machine cards to salespersons. They must also refuse firmly to sign any paper if they do not fully understand the service and price details, or if they do not intend to make a purchase.

Under the TDO, any trader commits an offence of engaging in aggressive commercial practices if harassment, coercion or undue influence is used to impair a consumer's freedom of choice or conduct, causing the consumer to make a transactional decision. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$500,000 and imprisonment for five years.

Stressing its priority given to consumer rights protection and zero tolerance for unfair trade practices, Hong Kong Customs pledges that it will continue its stringent enforcement actions against such practices by fitness centres.

Members of the public may report any suspected violations of the TD0 to Customs' 24-hour hotline 2545 6182 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account ([crimereport@customs.gov.hk](mailto:crimereport@customs.gov.hk)).

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## **Update on latest MERS situation in Saudi Arabia**

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health is today (August 27) closely monitoring nine additional cases of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) by Saudi Arabia from July 1 to 31. The CHP again urged the public to pay special attention to safety during travel, taking due consideration of the health risks in the places they visit.

According to the WHO, of the additional cases, eight were male patients and one was a female patient, with ages from 30 to 79. Among them, one had exposure to camels and consumed camel milk, seven had underlying illnesses and four have passed away.

According to the latest information, 2 458 cases have been reported to the WHO (with 849 deaths), including 2 239 in 10 Middle East countries comprising 2 067 in Saudi Arabia, 87 in the United Arab Emirates, 28 in Jordan, 24 in Oman, 19 in Qatar, six in Iran, four in Kuwait, two in Lebanon, and one each in Yemen and Bahrain.

"We will maintain close communication with the WHO and relevant health authorities," a spokesman for the CHP said.

"As countries in the Middle East, particularly Saudi Arabia, continue to report MERS cases from time to time, travellers should refrain from going to farms, barns or markets with camels and avoid contact with sick persons and animals, especially camels, birds or poultry. Most of the cases reported in the Middle East had a history of exposure to camels, consumption of camel milk or contact with other MERS patients," the spokesman said.

"Scientific evidence showed that camels are reservoirs for MERS Coronavirus (MERS-CoV). Camels infected with MERS-CoV may not show any signs of infection. Infected animals may shed MERS-CoV through nasal and eye discharge and faeces, and potentially in their milk and urine. The virus may also be found in the raw organs and meat of infected animals. Therefore, the best protection is to practise good hygiene and avoid direct contact with all

of these," the spokesman added.

From time to time, suspected MERS cases reported to the CHP for investigation involve patients with a history of contact with camels in the Middle East. The CHP strongly advises travel agents organising tours to the Middle East to abstain from arranging camel rides and activities involving direct contact with camels, which are known risk factors for acquiring MERS-CoV.

Travellers to affected areas should maintain vigilance, adopt appropriate health precautions and take heed of personal, food and environmental hygiene. The public may visit the MERS page of the [CHP](#) and its [Travel Health Service](#), MERS statistics in [affected areas](#), the CHP's [Facebook Page](#) and [YouTube Channel](#), and the WHO's [latest news](#) for more information and health advice. Tour leaders and tour guides operating overseas tours are advised to refer to the CHP's [health advice on MERS](#).

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## Exchange Fund Bills tender results

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority:

Exchange Fund Bills tender results:

Tender date	: August 27, 2019
Paper on offer	: EF Bills
Issue number	: Q1935
Issue date	: August 28, 2019
Maturity date	: November 27, 2019
Amount applied	: HK\$120,550 MN
Amount allotted	: HK\$45,183 MN
Average yield accepted	: 2.18 PCT
Highest yield accepted	: 2.20 PCT
Pro rata ratio	: About 74 PCT
Average tender yield	: 2.25 PCT

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Tender date	: August 27, 2019
Paper on offer	: EF Bills
Issue number	: H1964
Issue date	: August 28, 2019
Maturity date	: February 26, 2020
Amount applied	: HK\$43,800 MN

Amount allotted	: HK\$13,000 MN
Average yield accepted	: 2.08 PCT
Highest yield accepted	: 2.08 PCT
Pro rata ratio	: About 91 PCT
Average tender yield	: 2.16 PCT

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Hong Kong Monetary Authority tenders to be held in the week beginning September 2, 2019:

Tender date	: September 3, 2019
Paper on offer	: EF Bills
Issue number	: Q1936
Issue date	: September 4, 2019
Maturity date	: December 4, 2019
Tenor	: 91 Days
Amount on offer	: HK\$50,367 MN

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Tender date	: September 3, 2019
Paper on offer	: EF Bills
Issue number	: H1965
Issue date	: September 4, 2019
Maturity date	: March 4, 2020
Tenor	: 182 Days
Amount on offer	: HK\$12,000 MN

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Tender date	: September 3, 2019
Paper on offer	: EF Bills
Issue number	: Y1994
Issue date	: September 4, 2019
Maturity date	: September 2, 2020
Tenor	: 364 Days
Amount on offer	: HK\$5,000 MN

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**[Phishing email related to The Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation](#)**

## Limited

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority:

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) wishes to alert members of the public to a press release issued by The Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation Limited on phishing email, which has been reported to the HKMA. Hyperlink to the press release is available on [the HKMA website](#) for ease of reference by members of the public.

Anyone who has provided his or her personal information to the email concerned or has conducted any financial transactions through the email should contact the bank concerned using the contact information provided in the press release, and report to the Police or contact the Cyber Security and Technology Crime Bureau of the Hong Kong Police Force at 2860 5012.

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## Effective Exchange Rate Index

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Tuesday, August 27, 2019 is 107.4 (up 0.1 against yesterday's index).