

HDB resale price up 0.1% in 2015 Q4

The Resale Price Index (RPI) for the fourth quarter of last year was 134.8, up by 0.1 per cent from the previous quarter, data released by the Housing Board (HDB) yesterday showed.

The RPI for the full year of 2015 registered a decline of 1.6 per cent. Resale transactions increased by

2 per cent, from 4,893 cases in the third quarter to 4,992 cases in the fourth quarter last year.

The number of resale transactions for the entire 2015 was 19,306, an increase of 11.5 per cent compared to 2014.

As of Dec 31 last year, 50,264 HDB flats were sublet, an increase

of 0.9 per cent over 49,796 units in the third quarter in 2015.

This year, HDB plans to offer about 18,000 Build-To-Order (BTO) flats across four exercises.

The first BTO exercise will be held next month, where about 4,150 flats in Bidadari, Bukit Batok and Sengkang will be offered.

43 arrested for credit-for-sex scams

Forty-three members of a fraud syndicate that tricked Singaporean men into paying for non-existent sexual services were arrested in China last month.

The syndicate was uncovered in a joint investigation by the Singapore Police Force (SPF) and the criminal investigation department of China's Ministry of Public Security.

Victims in Singapore were cheated of about \$1.6 million in 627 cases of credit-for-sex scams in the first half of last year, police said.

Police investigations revealed that the culprits behind the scams operated from call centres based in China.

Posing as girls in Singapore, the scammers would flirt with men on messaging apps such as Weixin, then promise sexual services for a price and ask for the man's address.

Then they would ask to be paid in advance. Instead of a money transfer, they asked for payment using Alipay, iTunes gift cards or other on-line payment modes, reported The Straits Times online.

The scammer would then concoct a variety of reasons to ask for money without showing up. If the victim stopped paying, they resorted to threats.

Several computers, telecommunication devices and modems were seized in simultaneous raids at various locations in China.

Mr David Chew, director of the SPF's Commercial Affairs Department, said: "We appreciate the support from our Chinese counterparts in this joint investigation."

"The close cooperation between the SPF and the Chinese police was instrumental in crippling this transnational criminal syndicate."

New role for Public Transport Council

PTC to advise Transport Minister

Singapore's public transport system is set to undergo a thorough assessment through research studies, surveys and focus groups.

This will include a study to compare the island's bus and train services with those of other Asian cities and examine issues facing commuters, such as their needs, experiences and expectations.

The assessment will be led by the Public Transport Council (PTC), which was conferred an additional role as an independent adviser to the Transport Minister yesterday, reported The Straits Times Online.

While the council, formed in 1987, will maintain its primary role of regulating fares, it will also be tasked with making recommendations on how to improve public transportation. In doing so, the PTC will look to promote public transport and lessen the reliance on cars.

PTC chairman Richard Magnus said it will be the first time an independent body has assessed Singapore's public transport system.

He told The Straits Times: "We've got a Government which is committed to improving transport – a lot of political will and desire. Then you've got the Land Transport Author-

ity (LTA), the operators – they also want to achieve a good outcome.

"Now you have an independent body – which is not involved in (any) operations whatsoever – looking at it from an arm's length, to give an overview (of) where the gaps and challenges are."

Mr Magnus said the report should be ready this year and is confident the council will take an unbiased position.

PUBLIC SATISFACTION SURVEYS

The council is in the process of signing memorandums of understanding with local universities to commission research projects.

It will also take over from the LTA its annual surveys on public satisfaction with buses, trains and taxis.

Under the PTC Act, which came into force yesterday, the PTC will become a body corporate, which will allow it to legally own the rights to publications it produces, and to engage consultants and researchers.

Mr Magnus said the current fare review mechanism and formula is valid until next year but a review will take place before then.

More career help for poly students

The polytechnics are ramping up efforts to give students more work exposure and career guidance.

Students at Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) can now go for internships starting from their first year in school, thanks to a new website that offers work opportunities.

The portal was developed by NP and Glints, a local talent recruitment and matching platform that matches students with jobs and internships that fit their interests.

The internships sourced via the platform, NP@Glints, will not be graded and will not contribute to students' module credits.

Yesterday, Republic Polytechnic signed an agreement with the Employment and Employability Institute to support students in gaining industry knowledge across different sectors.

These efforts include organising career talks and networking sessions.

\$1.4b stolen by Chinese officials

Chinese officials convicted in President Xi Jinping's sprawling anti-corruption drive have embezzled or misused nearly US\$1 billion (\$1.4 billion) in public funds, a new report has found.

Official graft causes widespread public anger in China, and since taking over as the ruling Communist Party's leader in 2012, Mr Xi has overseen a much-publicised campaign against the scourge.

ChinaFile, a publication of the Asia Society in New York, has tallied nearly 1,500 publicly announced targets of the campaign, and has released a searchable database.

It shows that 231 officials have been convicted and sentenced in Chinese courts – only a fraction of those put under investigation by the Communist Party, which operates its own discipline system outside judicial supervision.

The courts, which are controlled by the party and have a conviction rate of more than 99.9 per cent, found that they embezzled more than 6.3 billion yuan. – AFP



TNP PHOTO: GAVIN FOO

Festive goodies for elderly

Some 120 elderly people living in Toa Payoh received festive bags of household items yesterday to celebrate the Chinese New Year.

The event was organised by the Singapore Press Holdings Staff Volunteers

Club and the Toa Payoh Care Corner Seniors Activity Centre, who identified seniors living in one-room flats in the area to receive the bags.

Each bag, worth about \$50, included canned pacific clams, oranges, cream crackers and rice.



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