

Brand-new Nissan NV200 vans at a carpark in Singapore. When tested here, the vans did not meet the requirements to be placed under the Commercial Vehicle Emissions Scheme Band B, which would accord them each a \$10,000 tax incentive. ST PHOTO: CHRISTOPHER TAN



Up to 700 new vans gathering dust here after failing to get tax incentive

They passed emission test in Japan but not here, thus falling into band for more pollutive vehicles

Christopher Tan
Senior Transport Correspondent

Up to 700 brand-new parallel-imported vans are stranded here because their importers failed to get a tax incentive they were betting on. The large consignment of Nissan NV200 petrol vans, worth at least \$70 million if they are registered, represents three to four months' worth of sales. The commercial vehicles – among the best-selling models here – are now gathering dust in various carparks across the island.

Mr Neo Nam Heng, chairman of diversified motor group Prime, said the vans did not manage to be placed under the Commercial Vehicle Emissions Scheme (CVES) Band B, which would accord them each a \$10,000 tax incentive.

Instead, the vans fell into Band C – which attracts a \$10,000 tax surcharge for each vehicle – because they are considered more pollutive.

Thus, each of these vans will cost \$20,000 more than a comparable van which has a CVES Band B rating.

"The vans were tested in a lab in Japan, and they met the requirements for Band B," Mr Neo said.

"But when they were tested here, they did not pass.

"This is often the case – some vehicles which pass the local tests fail the overseas tests; and some which pass the overseas tests fail the local tests. The practice so far has been to accept the better result between the two tests."

Mr Neo, who is also an adviser of the Automobile Importer and Exporter Association, said 600 to 700 vans are affected and have been stuck here since October 2021.

The Straits Times understands that the current model of the NV200 van brought in by authorised Nissan agent Tan Chong Motor Sales and priced at \$109,800 also falls into CVES Band C.

Unlike the previous variant which was equipped with a traditional automatic transmission and

which qualified for CVES Band B, the current model has a continuously variable transmission that results in better fuel efficiency, but has a higher particulate matter emission level that places it in a worse CVES banding.

When asked for comments, the National Environment Agency (NEA), which is in charge of the CVES, said that several attempts to register a Nissan NV200 model under CVES Band B were made.

"As there were disparities in the submitted test results, NEA informed the applicants to retest the vehicles locally for verification of their test results for Band B," a spokesman for the agency said.

Subsequent tests carried out by a local accredited laboratory showed that the model could not meet the Band B criteria, he said, adding that NEA has informed the

importers that they can register the vehicles under Band C.

The spokesman added that some importers have asked for the vans to be retested in Japan.

"NEA has been working with them to do so, with safeguards to minimise risk of tampering in the supply chain," he said. "To date, NEA has not received any emissions test results to demonstrate that the NV200 vans qualify for CVES Band B."

Like a similar stick-and-carrot scheme for passenger cars, the CVES measures five main pollutants – carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, hydrocarbons, nitrogen oxides and particulate matter.

The worst-performing of the five measurements decides a vehicle's banding.

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Transition to living with Covid-19 helped by Omicron

Lee Li Ying

The contagious nature of the Covid-19 Omicron variant helped highly vaccinated populations transition to living with the disease, a study by Duke-NUS Medical School and the National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID) found.

"Omicron's higher transmissibility has resulted in more people acquiring hybrid immunity, which better protects people against reinfection," said Professor David Lye, NCID's director of infectious disease research. He is among the team of scientists who conducted the study analysing people's immune responses to a group of viruses known as sarbecoviruses.

The Omicron variant was also found to confer "mucosal immunity" to people exposed to it. This refers to the immune response in the membrane lining of the nose and throat that can halt pathogens before they spread to the rest of the body.

"Omicron infections in vaccinated and boosted patients are also much milder, with much lower rates of lung infections and need for oxygen support," said Prof Lye.

The findings, published in the journal *Nature Microbiology*, suggest that Omicron evolved to escape immunity from past infection or vaccination.

Additionally, people who received the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine and were later infected with Sars-CoV-2 had broader immune responses compared with those who had received the vaccine but were not infected.

Professor Wang Linfa from Duke-NUS' Emerging Infectious Diseases programme, who was also involved in the study, said: "Our findings are highly important, as they will guide us in the future response to the pandemic, including the development of better and more broadly protective vaccines."

In a separate study by the Agency for Science, Technology and Research Infectious Diseases Labs (A*Star ID Labs), researchers found that Singaporeans aged 60 and above develop weaker vaccine-acquired immunity against Covid-19 after receiving two doses of the Pfizer jab, in comparison with their younger counterparts.

The study, which included 312 individuals, was published in the journal *Nature Communications*. It found that a booster jab alleviates the weak immune response observed in older people by increasing the levels of virus-specific antibodies and T-cell responses against the ancestral Sars-CoV-2 Wuhan strain, the Delta and Omicron variants.

Dr Fong Siew-Wai, research scientist at A*Star ID Labs, said: "It is crucial for those who have been vaccinated to get boosted, especially the elderly, to acquire protection against the Sars-CoV-2 variants that are still emerging and spreading among people."

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Weather

SINGAPORE

23/32°C

THUNDERY SHOWERS



over many areas in the pre-dawn hours and early morning.

OUTLOOK

Friday & Saturday:

Pre-dawn hours and early morning thundery showers.

AIR QUALITY

PSI 20-40 (Good)
24-hour reading as at 6pm yesterday



Rise

6.49am

Set

6.54pm



Rise

9.43pm

Set

9.22am

TIDES

Today: 1.07am (3m), 7.16am (1m), 12.39pm (2.9m), 7.15pm (0.4m).

Tomorrow: 1.52am (2.8m), 7.45am (1.2m), 1.07pm (2.9m), 7.48pm (0.4m).

Proposed changes to Healthcare Services Act to boost patient care

Zhaki Abdullah

Unregistered healthcare professionals who use the title "doctor" in their promotional materials may in the future need to make clear what their credentials are, so as to avoid misleading the public.

This is part of a series of proposed amendments to the Healthcare Services Act (HCSA), aimed at better regulating such services and providing greater transparency in their advertising, the Ministry of Health (MOH) said on Wednesday.

The HCSA – which was passed in 2020 to replace the Private Hospitals and Medical Clinics Act – aims

to strengthen regulations across various healthcare services to ensure continued delivery of safe care to patients.

The Act is being implemented in three phases and is set to be completed by end-2023.

MOH said it had noted several areas for enhancement following extensive discussions with stakeholders over the past two years.

Under the proposed amendments, businesses not licensed under the HCSA cannot claim to treat medical conditions or diseases when advertising healthcare services.

In addition, companies licensed under the Act will not be allowed to use terms associated with medical specialities in their names if they do

not employ such specialists.

For example, a clinic that does not have a neurologist cannot be called a "neurology clinic", the ministry said.

Other amendments include the introduction of an approval regime for the delivery of specified services, as well as the appointment of clinical governance officers.

The scope of employee background screening will also be refined according to "the degree of risk to patients' safety and welfare", said MOH.

As part of this move, the Institute of Mental Health will have to do background screening on prospective employees who provide direct patient care, while nursing homes and hospices will have to screen all

prospective employees.

Another amendment will allow MOH to remove the two-week notice prior to modification of licence conditions in special circumstances where there is imminent harm to patient safety.

The ministry noted this would include situations such as requiring licensees to implement screening requirements for patients and caregivers to stem the spread of Covid-19, for example.

"Under the proposed amendments, patients will benefit from the delivery of healthcare services by licensees under a robust regulatory regime, and from greater clarity and transparency in healthcare services advertising and modes of service delivery," MOH said.

The ministry is seeking feedback regarding these prospective amendments, which are expected to kick in from June 2023. The public can visit www.moh.gov.sg/hcsa/home till Nov 11 to give their views on the proposed changes.

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Fresh chicken from Malaysia likely to hit shelves here from today

Anjali Raguraman

Consumer Correspondent

Fresh broiler chicken from Malaysia is expected to hit retailers' shelves in limited quantities from Thursday afternoon.

Mr James Sim, head of business development at local chicken importer Kee Song Food, which supplies major brick-and-mortar retailers with chicken, as well as online ones, said the live fowls will reach its abattoir on Thursday morning.

"Our premium fresh chicken will be available at major retailers on the same day from 2pm onwards." Fresh chicken is also available

for sale on its website. A fresh normal whole chicken weighing in at 1.4kg is now retailing at \$14.80. Mr Sim said prices have increased by about 10 per cent to 16 per cent.

Other chicken importers here such as Lee Say Poultry Industrial and Hup Heng Poultry Industries said they are expecting chicken to be delivered to retailers only on Friday morning.

Supermarkets like Sheng Siong also confirmed fresh broiler chicken – larger chickens that make up the bulk of what Singapore typically imports from Malaysia – will be available from Friday morning.

The Straits Times has contacted other supermarkets and retailers. Chicken exports were banned by



The Malaysian authorities confirmed on Sunday that the chicken export ban would be lifted on Tuesday. ST PHOTO: GAVIN FOO

Malaysia from June 1, after a local supply shortage. The Malaysian authorities confirmed on Sunday that the chicken export ban would be lifted on Tuesday.

On Monday, Malaysia's Agriculture and Food Industries Minister Ronald Kiandee said that while the pre-ban limit was 3.6 million chickens a month, only half, or 1.8 million chickens, will be allowed for export upon the easing of restrictions. He added that restrictions will be further eased periodically.

Mr Ma Chin Chew, chief executive of Hup Heng Poultry Industries, which mainly supplies wet markets with chickens, said it is expecting a fraction of the usual volume of chickens to come in this week, and for the

foreseeable future.

"Compared with pre-ban, we're getting only 30 per cent of the volume... some of the other companies are getting more," he said.

"Although we're happy that chickens are coming back, I am half-half about it because the volume is too small... I can't fulfil everyone's orders.

As for when chicken imports from Malaysia will return to pre-ban levels, he said there is no certainty, especially since Malaysia's Parliament was dissolved on Monday.

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• Additional reporting by Wallace Woon