

## Interest rate of sixth interest payment for iBond Series due 2019

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

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA), as representative of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government (HKSAR Government), announces today (June 5) the relevant per annum interest rate for the sixth interest payment of iBond Series due 2019 (Issue Number 03GB1906R; Stock Code: 4231) (the Bonds) issued under the Retail Bond Issuance Programme of the Government Bond Programme.

According to the Issue Circular dated May 19, 2016 for the Bonds, the sixth interest payment of the Bonds is scheduled to be made on June 20, 2019, and the relevant interest rate is scheduled to be determined and announced on June 5, 2019 as the higher of the prevailing Floating Rate and Fixed Rate.

On June 5, 2019, the Floating Rate and Fixed Rate are as follows:

Floating Rate: +2.43 per cent (Annex)

Fixed Rate: +1.00 per cent

Based on the Floating Rate and Fixed Rate set out above, the relevant interest rate for the sixth interest payment is determined and announced as 2.43 per cent per annum.

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## LCQ9: General Chinese Charities Fund and Emergency Relief Fund

Following is a question by the Hon Kwong Chun-yu and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Lau Kong-wah, in the Legislative Council today (June 5):

Question:

Persons who have been affected by natural disasters or accidents and have financial needs may apply to the General Chinese Charities Fund (GCCF) or the Emergency Relief Fund (ERF) for financial assistance. Some victims affected by last year's super typhoon Mangkhut have relayed to me that after the passage of the typhoon, the District Offices (DOs) of their respective districts did not deploy staff to publicise to them that they might apply to the two Funds for assistance, and the victims became aware of it only through

word of mouth. Moreover, although the victims' accommodation suffered damage to varying extent, the amount of relief granted to them under GCCF was \$3,000 across the board. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the locations and manner in which the Government carried out publicity activities on the two Funds at the district level in the past three years; the channels and procedures for application for the two Funds, and the documents which applicants are required to submit;

(2) in respect of each of the two Funds, of the respective numbers of applications from Mangkhut-affected victims, which were received, approved and rejected by the Government, the average time taken for the vetting and approval of such applications, and the total amount of relief grants approved; the reasons for some applications being rejected;

(3) of the considerations and criteria based on which DOs in the various districts assess, for determining the amount of relief grant, the financial hardship faced by the applicants applying for assistance under GCCF; whether those considerations and criteria include the extent of damage to the applicants' accommodation; if not, whether the home visit procedure can be dispensed with in order to expedite the payment of grants;

(4) of the date on which the Home Affairs Department last adjusted the ceiling of relief grant under GCCF and the criteria adopted for that; whether the Government will review and raise that ceiling; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(5) of (i) the total amount of donations received from members of the public and (ii) the total amount of grants approved, by the Government in respect of ERF in the past five years?

Reply:

President,

The reply (prepared in consultation with the Labour and Welfare Bureau and other relevant departments) to the Hon Kwong Chun-yu's question is as follows:

(1) General Chinese Charities Fund

The objective of the General Chinese Charities Fund (GCCF) is to provide emergency relief to Hong Kong residents who are affected by natural disasters or accidents and have financial needs. District Offices (DOs) of the Home Affairs Department (HAD) would disseminate information about the GCCF to people affected after the occurrence of natural disasters or accidents, including assisting residents in completing and submitting the GCCF application forms. Some DOs have posted notices or publicised the funds in collaboration with district organisations. People affected can submit the applications for relief grant under GCCF to respective DOs. DOs have to vet

each and every GCCF application. Depending on the circumstances of individual application, DOs may request relevant information, e.g. identification document, income proof, etc. for assessing the financial hardship of the applicants and determining the level of relief grant.

#### Emergency Relief Fund

The Emergency Relief Fund Ordinance, Chapter 1103 of the Laws of Hong Kong, provides for the establishment and administration of a trust fund known as the Emergency Relief Fund (ERF). The ERF is vested in the Director of Social Welfare Incorporated as Trustee. It aims to provide financial assistance for persons who are in need of urgent relief as a result of fire, flooding, tempest, landslide, typhoon or other natural disasters. Grants from the ERF are intended for relief rather than compensation. The responsibility for approving grants and making payments is, in most cases, vested in the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD), the Marine Department (MD), the Social Welfare Department (SWD) and the Lands Department (LandsD), while the HAD is responsible for overall co-ordination at the district level. There are five types of grants under the ERF:

	Type of grants	Operating department
A	Grants in respect of death or personal injury	SWD
B	Domestic re-accommodation, re-equipment, site formation and repair grants and grant for severe damage to home appliances	LandsD In the case of dwelling vessels, investigation and verification by MD and payment by LandsD
C	Grants to repair or replace vessels and fishing gear	MD for working boats and dwelling vessels AFCD for fishing boats and gear
D	Primary producer grants 1. Stock houses and farm buildings destroyed or severely damaged 2. Rehabilitation grants for loss of crops, livestock or cultured fish	LandsD AFCD
E	Special grants	Operating department(s) concerned

On the ERF, the publicity means and efforts by respective operating departments in the districts in the past three years, as well as the means, procedures and documents required for application for the ERF are at Annex 1.

(2) The number of applications received, approved, rejected/withdrawn, reasons for rejected applications and the total amount of payments approved under the two funds after the onslaught of super typhoon Mangkhut in Hong Kong are at Annex 2.

DOs have to process each and every GCCF application. As the nature and circumstances vary from case to case of individual application, there is no standard processing time.

For ERF, the operating departments do not have statistics on the average time taken for processing such applications. In general, the processing time of applications for each type of grants under the ERF is set out at Annex 3. All operating departments had vetted applications within the designated timeframe.

(3) When processing GCCF applications, DOs will take into account the nature and circumstances of individual application, e.g. financial situation of the applicant, and whether the applicant has obtained another source of aid, etc., to assess the financial hardship of the people affected, and the urgency of their need for assistance, with a view to determining the level of relief grant. As the circumstances vary from case to case, DOs may need to conduct home visits when necessary.

(4) With reference to the Consumer Price Index (A) (CPI(A)), the HAD raised the ceiling of relief grant to \$8,000 in 2000. Having considered that the ceiling of relief grant has not been adjusted for many years, the HAD is now reviewing the ceiling of relief grant based on the changes in CPI(A).

(5) In the past five years, no donation to the ERF from the public was received, and the total amount of grants approved under the ERF during the period is at Annex 4.

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## Special traffic arrangements for Tuen Ng Festival

Police will implement special traffic arrangements in various districts on June 7 (Friday) to facilitate the public to watch dragon boat races and to ensure smooth vehicular traffic movement and pedestrian safety.

### Southern District

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#### A. Road closure

In Aberdeen, Kwun Hoi Path near Ocean Court will be closed between 7am and 6pm, except for vehicles of local residents.

In Stanley, Stanley Link Road and Hoi Fung Path will be closed between 6am and 7pm, except for vehicles of local residents.

Stanley New Street and Stanley Market Road will be closed between 7am and 6pm, except for vehicles of local residents and vehicles with permit.

Stanley Main Street will be closed between 7am and 11pm and designated as pedestrian precinct.

#### B. Suspension of parking spaces

The public car park near the refuse collection point on Stanley Beach Road and all parking spaces on Stanley Link Road will be suspended from 6am on June 6 to 7pm the following day.

All metered parking spaces and motorcycle parking spaces on Island Road, except for disabled parking spaces, will be suspended from 6am to 7pm.

#### Tuen Mun

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The following roads will be closed from 7am to 3pm, except for permitted vehicles:

- A section of the unnamed access road connecting Wu Shan Road (near Wu Hong Street) between its cul-de-sac and the entrance of the open-air car park; and
- The unnamed access road connecting Wu Shan Road (opposite to Wu Shan Bowling Green).

#### Tai Po

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##### A. Road closure

The following roads will be closed from 6pm on June 6 to 2pm the following day, except for taxis and permitted vehicles:

- Dai King Street;
- Dai Hei Street; and
- Dai Kwai Street between Dai Cheong Street and Tai Po Waterfront Park.

##### B. Closure of cycling track

The cycling track inside Tai Po Waterfront Park near Tai Po Industrial Estate will be closed from 7am to 2pm.

##### C. Suspension of parking spaces

The metered car park on Dai Shing Street and the metered parking spaces on Dai Hei Street and Dai King Street will be suspended from 6pm on June 6 to 2pm the following day, except for permitted vehicles.

#### Sha Tin

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#### A. Road closure

Sand Martin Bridge (Sha Tin Rural Committee Road between Yuen Wo Road and Tai Chung Kiu Road) will be closed from 7.30am to 2.30pm. Vehicles crossing Shing Mun River must travel via Lion Bridge (Lion Rock Tunnel Road) or Banyan Bridge (Fo Tan Road between Yuen Wo Road and Tai Chung Kiu Road).

#### B. Closure of cycling track

The cycling track along the northern riverside of Shing Mun River Channel between Sand Martin Bridge and Banyan Bridge will be closed from 7.30am to 2.30pm.

All vehicles parked illegally may be towed away without prior notice.

Actual implementation of the traffic arrangements will be made depending on traffic and crowd conditions in the areas. Motorists are advised to exercise tolerance and patience and take heed of instructions of the Police on site.

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## [LCQ21: Disposal of waste medicine from households](#)

Following is a question by the Hon Michael Tien and a written reply by the Secretary for the Environment, Mr Wong Kam-sing, in the Legislative Council today (June 5):

#### Question:

Under the existing legislation, the storage, collection, transport and disposal of chemical waste must comply with the relevant regulations. As only waste medicine and injections generated by healthcare institutions such as hospitals and clinics are classified as chemical waste, the disposal of waste medicine from households is not regulated. It is learnt that at present, members of the public generally throw their leftover medicine into toilet bowls or discard them together with domestic waste, which is then transported to landfills. It has been reported that according to the findings of a study conducted last year, the samples of leachate taken from three landfills generally contained human antibiotics, at levels exceeding the limits by five to 53 times. The researcher concerned has pointed out that leachate, after treatment, still contains antibiotic residues which, upon discharge into the sea, will affect the marine ecosystem and enter the human food chain, resulting in the development of antibiotics-resistant microorganisms. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will, in the light of the findings of the aforesaid study, review and tighten the existing regulation on the disposal of waste medicine from households; if it will tighten the regulation, of the specific measures; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether it will, by drawing reference from the experience of overseas countries, explore the implementation of a trial scheme on collection of waste medicine from households (e.g. setting up collection boxes for drugs); if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it will conduct an in-depth study on the amounts of pharmaceutical residues in the environment and their impacts; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Responses of the Environment Bureau to the various parts of the question raised by the Hon Michael Tien are as follows:

The landfills in operation in Hong Kong are installed with multi-layer composite liner system covering the entire base area. All leachate (i.e. the sources of wastewater samples taken for the study mentioned in the question) arising from decomposition of landfilled waste is collected, treated and discharged into public sewers according to statutory standards, and released via sewage treatment works managed by the Drainage Services Department (DSD). According to the research conducted by the DSD, the sewage treatment works in Hong Kong can effectively remove some of the pharmaceutical residues in the sewage, including antibiotics, as similarly concluded in related overseas research findings. Therefore, the amount of the pollutants, including antibiotics that may be present in the effluent will have been greatly reduced after the aforementioned treatment procedures.

Furthermore, the World Health Organization published a research report on the issue of residual pharmaceuticals in the environment in 2012, pointing out that the level of pharmaceuticals remaining in the environment is normally low, and the amounts in drinking water sources generally do not pose any risk to human health. According to the studies published by local academics in 2016 and 2018, the concentrations of antibiotics detected in river waters of Hong Kong were generally low, and were lower than that in various rivers of Europe, North America, Australia, and the Pearl River of China. It is believed that the trace amounts of antibiotics that have been discharged into the sea via Hong Kong's rivers present a very low impact on the marine environment and are unlikely to have any effect on public health.

Making reference to the current scientific findings on environmental waters, and the treatment, discharge arrangement and standards for landfill leachate in Hong Kong, as well as the fact that since antibiotics prescribed by doctors generally need to be finished in total by the patients and the actual amount of unconsumed pharmaceuticals containing antibiotics that are mixed with household waste or in domestic sewage is very small, the

associated environmental pollution or the impact on human health would be very mild. The Government therefore considers that currently there is no need to regulate the disposal of waste medicine from households or implement a trial scheme on its collection. Nevertheless, together with the Food and Health Bureau, the Environment Bureau will continue to keep in view international research and advancement in antibiotic issues, and the Environment Bureau will also review the need for a more in-depth study on residual pharmaceuticals in the environment according to the developments.

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## LCQ14: Policies and measures concerning foreign domestic helpers

Following is a question by the Dr Hon Elizabeth Quat and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (June 5):

Question :

Last year, the Secretary for Labour and Welfare pointed out that there were nearly 380 000 foreign domestic helpers (FDHs) working in Hong Kong, that such number represented a growth by more than one-fold as compared to that of 20 years ago and accounted for nearly 10 per cent of the labour force, and that the number of FDHs might increase to 600 000 within the coming 30 years, accounting for more than 15 per cent of the labour force. On the policies and measures concerning FDHs, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) given that FDHs must leave Hong Kong within two weeks after the termination of their employment contracts, unless they have been granted exceptional approvals for extension of their stay, of the circumstances under which FDHs will be granted exceptional approvals;
- (2) as some FDH employer groups have pointed out that some FDHs resign shortly after arriving in Hong Kong, how the Government ensures that FDHs will leave Hong Kong within two weeks after the termination of their employment contracts;
- (3) whether it has sufficient manpower to investigate if there are cases of FDHs extending their stay without exceptional approvals; if it has, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (4) as it has been reported that the Government is considering the importation of carers from other places for subvented residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs),
  - (i) whether measures are in place to ensure that the employment opportunities



of local workers will not be affected; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(ii) whether it has assessed if the situation that the remuneration for RCHE carers is more attractive than that for FDHs will affect the supply of FDHs; if it has assessed and the outcome is in the affirmative, whether the Government will introduce measures to encourage more people to come to Hong Kong to work as FDHs; if the assessment outcome is in the negative, of the reasons for that;

(5) given that people who intend to hire a FDH must have a monthly household income of no less than \$15,000, but households whose income barely reaches this level can hardly afford the expenses associated with hiring FDHs (including salary and employees' compensation insurance policies), whether the Government will consider reviewing such income threshold; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(6) notwithstanding that it has been stated in the Standard Employment Contract (SEC) that a FDH must reside in the residence of his/her employer as named on his/her visa and perform domestic duties, of the measures put in place to ensure that FDHs will not engage in other work during holidays or outside working hours, which will affect the employment opportunities of local workers; and

(7) given that according to the requirements in SEC, FDHs are required, before they come to Hong Kong, to undergo medical examinations and to produce the reports to the employers for inspection, but some FDH employer groups have pointed out that ordinary employers (especially the elderly) do not have sufficient knowledge to comprehend such reports, and some employers have even been persuaded by the intermediaries into signing the employment contracts before receiving such reports, whether the Government will consider stepping up the monitoring of medical check-ups for FDHs so as to prevent FDHs with severe health problems from coming to work in Hong Kong; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

A consolidated reply in consultation with the bureaux and departments concerned to the sub-questions raised by the Member is set out as follows:

(1) & (2) Under the prevailing arrangement, foreign domestic helpers (FDHs) have to undertake in the visa application form for employment in Hong Kong that he/she will depart Hong Kong upon the completion of employment contract or within two weeks after the termination of employment contract, whichever is the earlier. This is one of the conditions of stay imposed on the FDHs by the Immigration Department (ImmD). An FDH who has overstayed is in breach of his/her condition of stay. According to the Immigration Ordinance, offenders are liable on conviction to a fine of \$50,000 and to imprisonment for two years.

ImmD has all along been processing employment visa applications of FDHs in a rigorous manner. If an applicant has any adverse records or breaches, ImmD may refuse his/her application.

If an FDH has been criminally intimidated or abused and is required to remain in Hong Kong for assisting in investigation or acting as a witness etc. after the termination or expiry of his/her contract; or he/she is awaiting the hearing of the Labour Tribunal or Minor Employment Claims Adjudication Board owing to a labour dispute; or if there are other compassionate grounds, ImmD may, based on individual merits, exercise discretion to allow him/her to extend his/her stay in Hong Kong as a visitor.

(3) In investigating cases on FDH overstayers, ImmD follows established procedures, including gathering intelligence and taking referrals from different channels, and flexibly deploying manpower for follow up and investigation. After investigation, apart from prosecuting FDHs who have overstayed and contravened the conditions of stay, ImmD will also carry out enforcement operations against intermediaries or agents which aid and abet them. ImmD has also been enhancing publicity, to promulgate the messages that hiring illegal workers is a criminal offence and that employers must inspect travel documents of non-Hong Kong permanent resident job-seekers before hiring them; and to encourage the public to report suspected cases of illegal employment.

(4) As regards the manpower supply for elderly service sector, as stated in "The Chief Executive's 2018 Policy Address", individual sectors have long been encountering human resources shortage and recruitment difficulties. With the tight labour force and ageing population, the elderly care service sector experiences a particularly acute situation. In this connection, the Government has, through a number of measures, been helping the subsidised elderly care service sector in employing additional manpower. For instance, to assist the sector in employing and retaining frontline care staff, the Government has since 2018 allocated additional resources to subsidised welfare service units, including elderly service units, to enhance the remuneration of frontline care staff. Meanwhile, the Government has also indicated that, on the premise that local workers' priority for employment should be safeguarded, consideration may be given to allowing greater flexibility for subsidised elderly service and rehabilitation service units to import carers.

Under the prevailing policy of importing FDHs, an FDH shall only perform domestic duties for the employer specified in the contract, and shall not take up any other employment with any other person, including not taking up employment with residential care home for the elderly.

(5) Under the prevailing policy, employers who wish to employ FDHs must be financially capable of employing an FDH after his/her household expenditure has been deducted. In general, for every FDH to be employed, the employer must have a household income of no less than \$15,000 per month or assets of comparable amount to support the employment of an FDH for the whole contract period. This requirement is intended to protect FDHs by ensuring that

employers are financially capable of paying the wages of FDHs during the contract period.

The Government would review the aforementioned income and asset thresholds as appropriate. In considering the necessity of adjusting the income and asset thresholds, the Government would carefully consider the relevant socio-economic factors, including whether there is an actual need for adjustment, protection for FDHs, the financial capability of employers, and the impact on families in need of FDHs' services, etc. At present, the Government has no plan to adjust the prevailing income and asset thresholds.

(6) According to clause 4(a) of the Standard Employment Contract (SEC) for employing FDHs, an FDH shall only perform domestic duties for the employer as per the Schedule of Accommodation and Domestic Duties annexed to the contract. Clause 4(b) states that the FDH shall not take up, and shall not be required by the employer to take up, any other employment with any other person. Clause 4(c) of SEC makes it clear that clause 4(a) and (b) will form part of the conditions of stay to be imposed on an FDH by the ImmD upon the FDH's admission to work in Hong Kong under the contract. It is also clearly stipulated that a breach of the said conditions of stay will render the FDH and/or any aider and abettor liable to criminal persecution. In addition, FDHs and their employers are required to give an undertaking to the Government on the said conditions of stay. If employers or FDHs breach the undertaking, such conduct will be taken into consideration in the FDHs' future applications for employment visa or extension of stay, or the employers' future applications for employing FDHs. The applications may be refused.

ImmD is also committed to combatting the employment of illegal workers, including FDHs who are involved in illegal employment in Hong Kong, in order to protect the employment opportunities of local workers. To further tackle the problem of illegal employment, ImmD conducts inspections in black spots of illegal employment from time to time and launches frequent inter-departmental joint operations with departments such as the Hong Kong Police Force and Labour Department (LD). Actions are taken against illegal workers as well as their employers who have contravened the Immigration Ordinance. At the same time, more efforts will be spent on collecting intelligence to enhance the effectiveness of the operations combatting illegal employment.

(7) Generally speaking, there is no stipulation by the Government on pre-employment medical examination of employees (whether local workers or overseas workers coming to Hong Kong for employment). Nevertheless, according to clause 17 of SEC, employers and FDHs shall declare that the FDH has been medically examined as to his/her fitness for employment as a domestic helper and his/her medical certificate has been produced for inspection by the employer. We recommend prospective employers to, before signing the contract, know about the physical conditions of the FDHs by inspecting the medical certificates in determining whether they are able to fulfill the relevant work requirements.

According to the Code of Practice for Employment Agencies (EAs) (the

Code), EAs (including those providing FDH placement services) should ensure that the information provided to employers (including the aforementioned medical certificate) is consistent with the facts made known to them. If there are reasonable grounds to suspect that the information provided by the job-seeker is inaccurate or the information is incomplete, the EA should seek clarification and further information from the party concerned (e.g. the local or overseas business partners who referred the job-seeker). If an EA has contravened the requirements of the Code, LD may consider revoking or refusing to renew its licence.

If an EA has deployed unfair trade practices, such as false trade descriptions or misleading omissions, it may have breached the Trade Descriptions Ordinance. If an employer suspects that an EA has deployed unfair trade practices, he/she may complain to the Customs and Excise Department or seek assistance from the Consumer Council.