

Suspected case tests negative for MERS-CoV

The Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health today (January 14) reported that the suspected case of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) pending results earlier today, upon preliminary testing, tested negative for MERS Coronavirus.

Fatal traffic accident in Tin Sum

Police are investigating a fatal traffic accident in Tin Sum this morning (January 14) in which a 67-year-old man died.

At about 8.30am, a public light bus driven by a 67-year-old man was travelling along Shing Mun Tunnel Road towards Sha Tin, and it reportedly lost control and side-turned.

Sustaining serious head injury, the public light bus driver was trapped inside the compartment and was rescued by firemen. He was rushed to Yan Chai Hospital in unconscious state and was certified dead at 10.07am.

Ten male and six female public light bus passengers, aged between 18 to 56, were injured and were sent to Yan Chai Hospital and Princess Margaret Hospital respectively in conscious state.

Investigation by the Special Investigation Team of Traffic, New Territories South is underway.

Anyone who witnessed the accident or has any information to offer is urged to contact the investigating officers on 3661 1300 or 3661 1348.

Speech by FS at Asian Financial Forum 2019 keynote luncheon (English only)

Following is the speech by the Financial Secretary, Mr Paul Chan, at the Asian Financial Forum 2019 keynote luncheon at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre this afternoon (January 14).

The Honourable Robert Zoellick (former President of the World Bank Group), Vincent (Chairman of the Hong Kong Trade and Development Council, Mr Vincent Lo), Mr Bi (Chief Executive Officer and Chairman of Management Committee, China International Capital Corporation Limited, Mr Bi Mingjian), Mr Chu (Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, First Eastern Investment Group, Mr Victor Chu), distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon.

It's a pleasure to be here for today's luncheon, on the opening day of the Asian Financial Forum.

We are in the opening weeks of 2019. While saying "Happy New Year" to all of you, I think it's fair to say that many of us welcomed the new year in an anxious, unsettled state. Indeed, that prevailing mood has seized the attention of much of the world for some months now.

Given the uncertainties regarding the rules-based multilateral trading system and globalisation in general, this high-level Forum, which has attracted more than 3 000 leaders like you from all over the world, offers hope through considered discussion and lively debate.

Hong Kong is the natural setting for such discussion and debate. After all, Hong Kong is where East and West have long gathered to connect – to trade, to do business, to seek investment and, ultimately, to excel.

Our keynote luncheon speaker, the Honourable Robert Zoellick, knows a thing or two about excelling and surely about global adversity as well, having served as the World Bank Group President through the global financial crisis. Like you, I am looking forward to his address, to his thoughts and observations about these testing times.

For the next few minutes before handing over the stage to Robert, allow me to focus on what I know best, i.e. Hong Kong, about what we have done and what we are doing to prepare ourselves for the future.

The continuing trade disputes among major economies and the raise in protectionism present significant challenges. And given the complexity of the global supply chains, additional trade barriers will result in higher costs for doing business, which will be borne not only by exporters, but also by importers, as well as end consumers.

Trade friction creates uncertainty. That weighs heavily on global investment and business sentiment. It also adds downside risk to economic growth and increased volatility in financial markets.

But I can assure you, protectionism won't happen here in Hong Kong, the freest economy in the world.

We support free trade and the multilateral trading system, as well as the free flow of capital, people and information. Indeed, it is the

cornerstone of our economy.

While our small, open economy can hardly expect to remain untouched by global forces, our financial system has withstood countless challenges over the years and the decades.

The International Monetary Fund last month commended Hong Kong's prudent macroeconomic policies. The Fund noted that our long-standing buffers will help Hong Kong maintain stability despite the increasing risks confronting global growth.

And we are now enhancing our regulatory regime and the resilience of our markets.

We are equally committed to implementing international standards that improve our banking sector's buoyancy. Hong Kong is a staunch supporter of the regulatory reforms of Basel III. And we are working to implement the Basel Committee's latest capital and financial-exposure standards.

Over the past year or so, we have approved legislation to boost our anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing regime.

We are also preparing to establish a risk-based capital regime for the insurance industry. The goal is to align Hong Kong's regulatory regime with international standards and to make capital requirements more sensitive to the level of risk that insurance companies bear.

A new statutory corporate rescue proposal, together with insolvent trading provisions, will also be introduced. It will help those experiencing short-term financial difficulty revive their business by maximising the potential of a viable company and, in doing so, preserve jobs. If this is not possible, we hope to achieve a better return for a company's creditors than is the case in an immediate insolvent winding-up.

Other than regulatory enhancements, we are also stepping up efforts in market development.

Hong Kong is the world's leading IPO (initial public offering) centre, last year raising some US\$37 billion. In the past 10 years, we topped the world in IPOs on six occasions. And we're determined to keep that global financial crown.

Last April, our Stock Exchange implemented a new listing regime. It allows new economy companies with a weighted voting rights structure, as well as pre-revenue and pre-profit biotech companies, to list in Hong Kong. I am pleased to note that so far seven such companies have been listed under the new regime and there are many more in the pipeline.

Hong Kong is also a premier asset and wealth management centre, thanks to increasing wealth creation in the Mainland of China and other parts of Asia.

At the end of 2017, our asset and wealth management business stood at US\$3.1 trillion, with two-thirds of those assets coming from non-Hong Kong investors.

We have also introduced a new open-ended fund structure, providing an alternative choice to the unit trust structure in the setting up of funds.

It's the first time Hong Kong has put in place a dedicated legal regime for a fund vehicle. And we are now looking into the introduction of a limited partnership regime for private equity funds in Hong Kong.

To attract additional funds to Hong Kong, we have been rolling out attractive tax measures. We have tabled a bill at the Legislative Council to provide profits tax exemption for onshore funds operating in Hong Kong, in addition to offshore funds.

Our intention is to allow all funds to enjoy tax exemption regardless of their structure, their size or the purpose they serve.

We are, to be sure, looking to maximise our role in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. For those who are not familiar with this development plan, the Greater Bay Area is a region covering 11 cities with a combined population of close to 70 million people and a collective GDP of US\$1.5 trillion. The Greater Bay Area offers huge potential for the Hong Kong financial services industry.

So does the Belt and Road Initiative. We expect to contribute in a number of areas under this far-reaching Initiative: serving as the financing risk management and professional services hub for infrastructure projects, Asia's major asset management centre, as well as the global hub for offshore Renminbi business.

Financial technology is also high on our policy agenda. It will help us diversify our financial services development, while sustaining its growth.

Indeed, fintech is fast transforming the sector, while creating new business opportunities.

We expect to grant the first batch of virtual bank licences shortly, offering the public more choice and efficiency in their banking services.

The Open Application Programming Interface framework for the banking sector is also being implemented in phases. It will enable collaboration between banks and technology companies. And that can only create more innovative and integrated financial services.

Green finance is also a policy priority. We see Hong Kong serving as a premier financing centre for international and Mainland green companies and projects, raising funds by issuing bonds and IPOs.

The Hong Kong Quality Assurance Agency launched its Green Finance Certification Scheme last year, providing third-party conformity assessments for issuers on their green debt instruments.

Numerous local, Mainland and international organisations, including the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank and the European Investment Bank, have made use of Hong Kong to issue green bonds.

We will soon launch a Government Green Bond Programme with a borrowing ceiling of about US\$13 billion. That should encourage more issuers to arrange financing for their green projects through our capital markets.

There's much more, either in the works or the planning stage. The point, ladies and gentlemen, is that Hong Kong is prepared for whatever this new year – and well beyond – ultimately brings us.

Like you, of course, I'm hoping that the flag of free enterprise is soon proudly raised, and flying, in economies all over the world. Hoping that, in the Chinese New Year of the Pig, just around the corner, we can all continue to bring home the bacon.

I wish you all a rewarding Forum and the best of business in 2019.

Thank you very much.

[Transcript of remarks by SLW on eligible age for elderly CSSA](#)

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, on adjusting the eligible age for elderly Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) from 60 to 65 after attending a radio programme this morning (January 14):

Reporter: It seems that there is a very slim chance for any of the proposed changes to be delayed or withdrawn. Why are you putting out such a firm position?

Secretary for Labour and Welfare: The decision has been made for two years since the announcement of the change in policy back in the 2017 Policy Address. After that, it was just a matter of implementation. I would say we have been not too promptly in executing the decision that has been made two years ago. And now, we are going to implement the policy that was made two years ago. So, the decision has been made. So, to revise that policy or to revise that decision would take, I would say, a very long path. It is almost impossible for us to do anything before February 1.

Reporter: So how would the Government respond to the public outcry so far? Will there be any special measures to help them in the process?

Secretary for Labour and Welfare: We are considering what kind of measures, particularly administrative measures, that can be done before February 1 or be implemented by February 1 to help those who are needy and to provide more support for them, no matter in terms of welfare or in terms of employment support.

Reporter: Can you give some examples?

Secretary for Labour and Welfare: Within our welfare system, there are always elements that the public have expressed their views on needy improvement. In fact, one of the measures that was actually mentioned in the past few days – it was related to the disregarded earnings (for CSSA recipients), which basically means that, for those who earn some money while they are receiving CSSA, they can preserve some of their money (monthly earnings from employment) in their own pocket. At the present moment, it is \$2,500 (total disregarded earnings per month) at the maximum. That was set back in 2003, which is almost 16 years ago. So, it is definitely time to review that particular amount. Because of the recent discussion, there may be a necessity to advance some of the changes that we had already been considering in the past.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the transcript.)

[Update on cases of Legionnaires' disease](#)

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (January 14) reported the latest number of cases of Legionnaires' disease (LD), and stressed the importance of using and maintaining properly designed man-made water systems, and that susceptible groups should strictly observe relevant precautions.

From January 6 to 12, one community-acquired LD case was reported. The male patient, aged 66 with underlying illnesses, lives in Siu Lung Court, 33 Tin King Road, Tuen Mun.

"Epidemiological investigations are ongoing to identify potential sources of infection, high-risk exposure and clusters, if any," a spokesman for the CHP said.

As of January 12, one LD case had been reported in 2019. In 2018 and 2017, there were 105 and 72 cases respectively.

"Men, people aged over 50, smokers, alcoholics and persons with weakened immunity are more susceptible to LD. Some situations may also increase the risk of infection, including poor maintenance of water systems leading to stagnant water; living in areas with old water systems, cooling towers or fountains; using electric water heaters, whirlpools and spas or hot water spring spas; and recent stays in hotels or vessels," the spokesman said.

Legionellae are found in various environmental settings and grow well in warm water (20 to 45 degrees Celsius). They can be found in aqueous environments such as water tanks, hot and cold water systems, cooling towers, whirlpools and spas, water fountains and home apparatus which support breathing. People may get infected when they breathe in contaminated droplets (aerosols) and mist generated by artificial water systems, or when handling garden soil, compost and potting mixes.

Immunocompromised persons should:

- Use sterile or boiled water for drinking, tooth brushing and mouth rinsing;
- Avoid using humidifiers, or other mist- or aerosol-generating devices. A shower may also generate small aerosols; and
- If using humidifiers, or other mist- or aerosol-generating devices, fill the water tank with only sterile or cooled freshly boiled water, and not water directly from the tap. Also, clean and maintain humidifiers/devices regularly according to manufacturers' instructions. Never leave stagnant water in a humidifier/device. Empty the water tank, wipe all surfaces dry, and change the water daily.

The public should observe the health advice below:

- Observe personal hygiene;
- Do not smoke and avoid alcohol consumption;
- Strainers in water taps and shower heads should be inspected, cleaned, descaled and disinfected regularly or at a frequency recommended by the manufacturer;
- If a fresh water plumbing system is properly maintained, it is not necessary to install domestic water filters. Use of water filters is not encouraged as clogging occurs easily, which can promote growth of micro-organisms. In case water filters are used, the pore size should be 0.2 micrometres (μm) and the filter needs to be changed periodically according to the manufacturer's recommendations;
- Drain and clean water tanks of buildings at least quarterly;
- Drain or purge for at least one minute the infrequently used water outlets (e.g. water taps, shower heads and hot water outlets) and stagnant points of the pipework weekly or before use;
- Seek and follow doctors' professional advice regarding the use and maintenance of home respiratory devices and use only sterile water (not distilled or tap water) to clean and fill the reservoir. Clean and maintain the device regularly according to the manufacturer's

instructions. After cleaning/disinfection, rinse the device with sterile water, cooled freshly boiled water or water filtered with 0.2 µm filters. Never leave stagnant water in the device. Empty the water tank, keep all surfaces dry, and change the water daily; and

- When handling garden soil, compost and potting mixes:

1. Wear gloves and a face mask;
2. Water gardens and compost gently using low pressure;
3. Open composted potting mixes slowly and make sure the opening is directed away from the face;
4. Wet the soil to reduce dust when potting plants; and
5. Avoid working in poorly ventilated places such as enclosed greenhouses.

The public may visit the CHP's [LD page](#), the [Code of Practice for Prevention of LD](#) and the [Housekeeping Guidelines for Cold and Hot Water Systems for Building Management](#) of the Prevention of LD Committee, and the CHP's [risk-based strategy](#) for prevention and control of LD.