

# Grading of beach water quality released

The Environmental Protection Department (EPD) today (December 21) released the latest grading of the water quality at four gazetted beaches which are open all year round for swimming.

Four beaches were rated as good (grade 1).

Grade 1 beaches are:

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Compared with the grading released last week, there was no change in the grading for these beaches.

Under the present grading system, beaches are classified into four grades according to the level of E. coli in the water. Grades are calculated on the basis of the geometric mean of the E. coli counts on the five most recent sampling occasions.

While the ratings represent the general water quality at the beaches, an EPD spokesman reminded members of the public that water quality could be temporarily affected during and after periods of heavy rain. Bathers should avoid swimming at beaches for up to three days after a storm or heavy rainfall.

A summary of beach grades is published weekly before the weekend. Latest beach grades based on the most current data may be obtained from the department's websites on Beach Water Quality ([www.epd.gov.hk/epd/beach](http://www.epd.gov.hk/epd/beach)) or the beach hotline, 2511 6666.

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# Hong Kong's Balance of Payments and International Investment Position statistics for third quarter of 2018

The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) released today (December 21) the preliminary Balance of Payments (BoP) and International Investment Position (IIP) statistics of Hong Kong for the third quarter of 2018. This release also included the preliminary External Debt (ED) statistics of Hong Kong for the same period.

## I. Balance of Payments

Hong Kong recorded a BoP deficit of \$41.7 billion (as a ratio of 5.7% to GDP) in the third quarter of 2018, compared with a deficit of \$48.5 billion (as a ratio of 7.2% to GDP) in the second quarter of 2018. Reserve assets correspondingly decreased by the same amount (\$41.7 billion) in the third quarter of 2018.

### Current account

The current account recorded a surplus of \$45.8 billion (as a ratio of 6.3% to GDP) in the third quarter of 2018. This implies that Hong Kong continues to save more than invest, enabling Hong Kong to accumulate external financial assets (such as equity securities or debt securities) as a buffer against global financial volatilities. Compared with the current account surplus of \$57.4 billion (as a ratio of 8.4% to GDP) in the third quarter of 2017, the decrease in surplus was mainly due to an increase in the goods deficit, partly offset by an increase in the net inflow of primary income and an increase in the services surplus.

The goods deficit increased to \$53.4 billion in the third quarter of 2018, compared with the \$16.6 billion in the same quarter of 2017. Over the same period, the services surplus increased to \$63.0 billion in the third quarter of 2018, compared with the \$53.3 billion in the same quarter of 2017. The primary income inflow and outflow amounted to \$432.8 billion and \$391.1 billion respectively, thus yielding a net inflow of \$41.7 billion in the third quarter of 2018, compared with a net inflow of \$25.9 billion in the same quarter of 2017.

### Financial account

An overall net outflow of financial non-reserve assets amounting to \$69.1 billion (as a ratio of 9.5% to GDP) was recorded in the third quarter of 2018, compared with an overall net outflow of \$93.5 billion (as a ratio of 13.8% to GDP) in the second quarter of 2018. The overall net outflow recorded in the third quarter of 2018 was the result of a net outflow of other

investment and a net outflow of portfolio investment, partly offset by a net inflow of direct investment and a net inflow due to the cash settlement of financial derivatives.

In the third quarter of 2018, reserve assets decreased by \$41.7 billion, compared with a decrease of \$48.5 billion in the second quarter of 2018.

## II. International Investment Position

At the end of the third quarter of 2018, both Hong Kong's external financial assets and liabilities stood at a very high level, amounting to \$43,210.1 billion (equivalent to 15.4 times of GDP) and \$33,015.1 billion (equivalent to 11.7 times of GDP) respectively, a typical feature of a prominent international financial centre.

After netting out the external financial liabilities from the external financial assets, Hong Kong's net external financial assets amounted to \$10,195.0 billion (equivalent to 3.6 times of GDP) at the end of the third quarter of 2018, compared with \$10,978.2 billion (equivalent to 4.0 times of GDP) at the end of the second quarter of 2018. Hong Kong's net external financial assets to GDP ratio is one of the largest in the world, which provides the economy with a strong cushion against sudden external shocks.

## III. External Debt

At the end of the third quarter of 2018, Hong Kong's gross ED amounted to \$12,972.3 billion (equivalent to 4.6 times of GDP). Compared with \$13,057.3 billion (equivalent to 4.7 times of GDP) at the end of the second quarter of 2018, gross ED decreased by \$85.1 billion. This was mainly attributable to the decreases in ED of the banking sector and debt liabilities in direct investment (intercompany lending), partly offset by the increase in ED of other sectors.

As one of the world's major financial centres, Hong Kong has a significant amount of ED held against the local banking sector arising through normal banking businesses. At the end of the third quarter of 2018, 61.3% of Hong Kong's ED was attributable to the banking sector. Other ED mainly consisted of ED of other sectors (22.5%) and debt liabilities in direct investment (intercompany lending) (16.0%).

## Further information

BoP is a statistical statement that systematically summarises, for a specific time period (typically a year or a quarter), the economic transactions of an economy with the rest of the world (i.e. between residents and non-residents).

IIP is a balance sheet showing the stock of external financial assets and liabilities of an economy at a particular time point. The difference between the external financial assets and liabilities is the net IIP of the economy, which represents either its net claim on or net liability to the rest of the world.

Gross ED, at a particular time point, is the outstanding amount of those actual current, and not contingent, liabilities that are owed to non-residents by residents of an economy and that require payment of principals and/or interests by the debtors at some time points in the future.

BoP and IIP statistics of Hong Kong are compiled in accordance with international standards as stipulated in the Sixth Edition of the Balance of Payments and International Investment Position Manual released by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 2009. ED statistics of Hong Kong are compiled according to the 2013 External Debt Statistics: Guide for Compilers and Users published by the Inter-agency Task Force on Finance Statistics chaired by the IMF. Concepts inherent in these two international guidelines are harmonised with each other.

Table 1 presents Hong Kong's BoP by standard component. Table 2 presents the detailed current account analysed by sub-account component, while Table 3 presents the detailed capital and financial account analysed by sub-account component. Table 4 shows Hong Kong's IIP by broad component, and Table 5 shows Hong Kong's ED by standard component.

With the incorporation of the latest data from surveys and other sources, the statistics on BoP, IIP and ED for 2017 have been revised. As regards the statistics on BoP, IIP and ED for the third quarter of 2018, they are only preliminary figures and are subject to revision upon the availability of more data.

More details of the statistics of BoP (including seasonally adjusted current account), IIP and ED, together with the conceptual and methodological details, are presented in the publication Balance of Payments, International Investment Position and External Debt Statistics of Hong Kong, Third Quarter 2018 published by the C&SD. Users can download this publication free of charge at the website of the C&SD ([www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp260.jsp?productCode=B1040001](http://www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp260.jsp?productCode=B1040001)).

For enquiries about the BoP, IIP and ED statistics, please contact the Balance of Payments Section of the C&SD (Tel: 3903 6979; fax: 2116 0278; email: [bop@censtatd.gov.hk](mailto:bop@censtatd.gov.hk)).

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## **[Update on number of dengue fever cases](#)**

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (December 21) reported the latest number of cases of dengue fever (DF), and again urged the public to maintain strict environmental hygiene, mosquito control and personal protective measures both locally and during travel.

From December 13 to 20, the CHP recorded two imported DF cases. The patients had been to the Philippines (one case) and India (one case) during

the incubation period.

As of yesterday (December 20), 159 cases had been confirmed this year, of which 29 were local cases and 130 were imported cases. The imported cases were mainly from Thailand (35), Mainland China (29) and the Philippines (22).

DF remains endemic in some areas in Asia and beyond. In Guangdong, there were 3 250 cases in the first 11 months of this year. The latest figures for 2018 revealed that 81 489 cases had been recorded in Thailand, 3 067 in Singapore (since December 31, 2017) and 191 in Japan.

The public should take heed of the following advice on mosquito control:

- Thoroughly check all gully traps, roof gutters, surface channels and drains to prevent blockage;
- Scrub and clean drains and surface channels with an alkaline detergent compound at least once a week to remove any deposited mosquito eggs;
- Properly dispose of refuse, such as soft drink cans, empty bottles and boxes, in covered litter containers;
- Completely change the water of flowers and plants at least once a week. The use of saucers should be avoided if possible;
- Level irregular ground surfaces before the rainy season;
- Avoid staying in shrubby areas; and
- Take personal protective measures such as wearing loose, light-coloured, long-sleeved tops and trousers and apply insect repellent containing DEET to clothing or exposed parts of the body when doing outdoor activities.

To reduce the risk of infections spread by mosquitoes, apart from [general measures](#), travellers returning from areas affected by DF and Zika virus infection should apply insect repellent for 14 days or at least 21 days respectively upon arrival in Hong Kong. If feeling unwell, seek medical advice promptly and provide travel details to the doctor. DEET-containing insect repellents are effective and the public should take heed of the tips below:

- Read the label instructions carefully first;
- Apply right before entering an area with risk of mosquito bites;
- Apply on exposed skin and clothing;
- Use DEET of up to 30 per cent for pregnant women and up to 10 per cent for children\*;
- Apply sunscreen first, then insect repellent; and
- Re-apply only when needed and follow the instructions.

\* For children who travel to countries or areas where mosquito-borne diseases are endemic or epidemic and where exposure is likely, those aged 2 months or above can use DEET-containing insect repellents with a DEET concentration of up to 30 per cent.

The public may refer to the CHP's [tips for using insect repellents](#) for

details.

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## **Progress of opening-up investigation in second stage of holistic assessment strategy for Hung Hom Station Extension under Shatin to Central Link Project**

According to the holistic assessment strategy of MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) regarding the platform slabs and diaphragm walls of the Hung Hom Station Extension under the Shatin to Central Link (SCL) Project accepted by the Government on December 5, 2018, the MTRCL proceeded to commence the relevant work on December 10. The first purpose of opening up the concrete is to carry out physical investigations at locations with gaps in the documentation, so as to verify the as-constructed conditions of the connections between the platform slabs and diaphragm walls. The second purpose is that, in view of the allegations on the cutting-short of steel bars, the MTRCL needs to open up certain connections between the platform slabs and diaphragm walls for detailed inspection, and to conduct non-destructive tests to verify the works quality of the coupler connections. The locations of opening-up were randomly selected based on a statistical approach.

According to the information from the couplers' supplier, proper installation requirements of a coupler are:

- (1) there shall be a maximum of two full threads exposed; and
- (2) the embedded length of the threaded steel bar inside the coupler shall be at least 40 millimetres.

The MTRCL uses the phased array ultrasonic examination to verify the embedded length of the threaded steel bar inside the coupler. As the allowable measurement tolerance of the test is 3 millimetres, equipment readings below 37 millimetres are regarded as failing to meet the requirement. The test is carried out by the professional technicians of A.E.S. Destructive and Non-Destructive Testing Limited.

As at yesterday (December 20), the preliminary coupler test results conducted by the MTRCL are given below:

Test results of couplers exposed for the first purpose (as at December 20, 2018)				
Coupler No.	Location of coupler tested	No. of exposed thread	Embedded length – preliminary results (millimetres) (Note 1)	Embedded length – formal test report (millimetres) (Note 2)
EWL-E44-TT-T1-01-C1	At the top of Area B of East West Line (EWL) slab near eastern diaphragm wall	1-2	31.61	To be provided by MTRCL
EWL-E44-TT-T1-02-C1	At the top of Area B of EWL slab near eastern diaphragm wall	8-9	6.22	To be provided by MTRCL

Test results of couplers exposed for the second purpose (as at December 20, 2018)				
Coupler No.	Location of coupler tested	No. of exposed thread	Embedded length – preliminary results (millimetres) (Note 1)	Embedded length – formal test report (millimetres) (Note 2)
EWL-E46-BB-B1-01-C1	At the bottom of Area B of EWL slab near eastern diaphragm wall	2-3	34.91	To be provided by MTRCL
EWL-E46-BB-B1-02-C1	At the bottom of Area B of EWL slab near eastern diaphragm wall	3-4	29.65	To be provided by MTRCL
EWL-E46-BB-B1-03-C1	At the bottom of Area B of EWL slab near eastern diaphragm wall	2-3	34.32	To be provided by MTRCL

According to the holistic assessment strategy of the MTRCL, upon the completion of the opening-up investigation under the second stage and in the third stage, the MTRCL will consolidate test results found in the first two stages, conduct a detailed structural analysis on the works for the Hung Hom Station Extension to ascertain if the overall structural integrity of the works is acceptable and determine if it is necessary to conduct strengthening works.

In anticipation of further test results to be received later today (December 21), the Government will make a separate announcement. From now on, upon receipt of new test results, the Government will release the results for reference by the public at the Highways Department's website for the SCL project ([www.hyd.gov.hk/en/road\\_and\\_railway/railway\\_projects/scl/index.html](http://www.hyd.gov.hk/en/road_and_railway/railway_projects/scl/index.html)).

Note 1: Preliminary results of the phased array ultrasonic examination refer to the readings taken on site, subject to verification.

Note 2: Allowable measurement tolerance of the phased array ultrasonic examination is 3 millimetres.

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## **Import of poultry meat and products from Puri District, Orissa State, India, suspended**

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department announced today (December 21) that in view of a notification from the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) about an outbreak of highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza in Puri District, Orissa State of India, the CFS has instructed the trade to suspend the import of poultry meat and products (including poultry eggs) from the district with immediate effect to protect public health in Hong Kong.

A CFS spokesman said Hong Kong currently has an established protocol with India for import of poultry eggs but not for poultry meat. In the first nine months of this year, no poultry eggs were imported into Hong Kong from India.

"The CFS has contacted the Indian authorities over the issue and will closely monitor information issued by the OIE on avian influenza outbreaks. Appropriate action will be taken in response to the development of the situation," the spokesman said.