

HKMA encourages giving and receiving lai-see through electronic channels

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

With the Chinese New Year (CNY) just around the corner and in view of the ongoing pandemic, the Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) encourages the public to use electronic channels for giving lai-see. The public may use the HKMA's Faster Payment System available via online or mobile banking, or other e-wallet services, instead of giving red packets of cash. Electronic payment is convenient and easy-to-use, and has been widely accepted in Hong Kong. During the CNY, major banks and electronic payment operators will introduce various programmes to promote electronic payment as a convenient and fun way of giving and receiving lai-see. This will also eliminate the hassle of exchanging new notes at bank branches, help safeguard public health and contribute to environmental protection.

Both the HKMA and the three note-issuing banks have carefully considered whether the notes exchange service should still continue amid the pandemic. Since cash deposit and withdrawal are services that banks are obliged to provide for their customers, even if the new notes exchange service were suspended this year, some people may still go to the note-issuing banks to withdraw money or directly request to exchange notes for lai-see uses. To meet the needs of these people and those without access to electronic payment channels (especially senior citizens), and at the same time safeguarding public health, banks will implement proactive measures to protect their customers and staff. Our current stock of new notes is twice the amount of new notes issued in the previous CNY, while the stock of good-as-new notes is three times as big. Furthermore, the duration of the notes exchange service will be extended from two weeks as in previous years to three weeks, i.e. from January 26 to February 11, the latter being the day before the CNY. As such, there is no need to rush to bank branches for new notes in the first few days.

Crowd control and risk management measures of the banks include:

- Ensuring the supply of new notes every day throughout the notes exchange service period, together with abundant good-as-new notes. Good-as-new notes are, as the description suggests, generally in good condition and suitable for lai-see uses;
- Allocating more counters to expedite the processing of notes exchange requests;
- Stepping up social distancing and other infection prevention measures and diverting / managing queues, such as distributing tickets when needed; and
- Individual major banks providing online booking for notes exchange

Those who want to use cash for their lai-see may wish to first check for any remaining stock of new notes or good-as-new notes at home before going to a bank.